



## ISLAND LIFE

Hip hotels with Debrah Dhugga  
Ile de Ré is where the Parisians head for the summer. Tres chic.



I just love to have an escape to France and wow, is this a gem. Villa Clarisse is a pretty perfect smidgen of paradise located in the heart of Ile de Ré. My fleeting weekend visit lived up to all my expectations, and then some. Just let yourself inhabit a chic French film set... and, action!

### THE VILLA >>

Gorgeous classical design with a contemporary vibe that's all about that breezy style of lime-washed walls, paintings and exposed wooden beams and bricks. You can't help but be wrapped up in the calm atmosphere of the villa and then the lovely town - with locals riding bikes, fresh bread being baked, fresh oysters and wine stalls. And, marvellously, not a car honk to be heard!

### ROOMS >>

Home to five suites and four rooms, Villa Clarisse is an elegant and exclusive luxury retreat within easy reach of the beautiful



harbour and the island's many attractions, and is well-suited to couples, friends and families. All rooms are light and airy with whitewashed walls with modern designs and fabrics.

The Premier room was my home away from home for the weekend and boy was it dreamy! Plush pillows, air conditioning, a heavenly king-sized bed and stunning views overlooking the grounds' patio, a former convent, with a perfectly landscaped garden. You are at the heart of nature - and not in a Chelsea Flower Show way! This setting was so harmonious within the landscape, especially being safely overlooked by the local church bell tower.

The image of the green of the garden really stood out to me against the villa's sand coloured façade and calm neutrals of the villa. Suites can be rented individually which gives the hotel a real homely B&B feel and restaurant facilities can be used in the neighbouring five-star sister property, Hotel de Toiras.

### RELAX >>

Villa Clarisse doesn't have a spa, it has something better! Guests can choose from a treatment list, and then your very own private masseuse will help you to relax and unwind in your room. Of course, I treated myself to an all body massage and with the terrace window open and the cool French breeze sweeping in, I even found myself drifting off!

Aside from this, a quiet read on the sun lounger by the pool left me totally switched off - which is a difficult task I can tell you.

### OUT & ABOUT >>

For the more active travellers, there is plenty to do when visiting Villa Clarisse. Explore the nearby fortress, Vauban, endless bicycle trails around the island, shopping in local markets, sailing excursions, picnics arranged by the Villa Clarisse team, and donkey and horse riding.

For wine lovers, like myself, a visit to the Bordeaux region has to involve some grape action. Château Clarisse, Villa Clarisse's vineyard is two hours away in Saint-Emilion, and it truly is a must-see.

Established in 2010 in one of Bordeaux's most illustrious wine growing areas, Château Clarisse produces some world class wines. Wine tasting, lunch and menu chauffeur drives (wise move) transfers are included in the package. Other attractions nearby include two beautiful golf courses, including the nine-hole course at Les Portes de Ré and an 18-hole course at La Rochelle. For families with younger children, nearby activities on the mainland include La Rochelle Aquarium, Palmyre Zoo and Le Puy du Fou, a wildly popular amusement park where the whole family can discover European history in rides, shows and re-enactments (this place was the inspiration for the Kyriotes spectacular).

### FOOD >>

In the evening I headed over to La Table d'Olivia, the restaurant at Hotel de Toiras, which is a charming and intimate dining room. The menu is simple and authentic and adapts to seasonal fresh regional produce which I love. Inspired by the



local market, the hotel staff lent me a wicker basket so that I could choose the ingredients for my tailor-made meal. The options are endless and you can enjoy your meals as you see fit whether that is in the dining room, garden, terraces or bedrooms. Alternatively, there is a fully functioning kitchen in the villa where you can order light meals or hit the market and cook up supper with fabulous produce. Plates can be made up to enjoy on the property's grounds or by the seashore. Menus range from simple but classic charcuterie, fresh breads and goat's cheese to more luxurious seafood platters and oysters.

## Factbox

I flew to La Rochelle which is about 20 minutes from the property. From there I booked transfers which cost €40.

Room rates at Villa Clarisse start from €250 / £177 per night for a superior room. Breakfast, lunch and dinner is purchased separately.

[www.villa-clarisse.com](http://www.villa-clarisse.com)

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