



Francesca Syz



shade of the ancient garden wall and - a real boon - a heated outdoor pool.

Villa Clarisse excels itself with its breakfast, which can be taken inside or out. There's a buffet of freshly baked croissants, local jams, honey and goat's cheese, and an à la carte menu with cooked options. A delicious light lunch menu, including dishes like Madagascar shrimp salad with yogurt, can also be ordered from, with notice. But with great restaurants like rustic harbour-front Le Bistrot du Marin a short stroll away, eating out is a treat.

HOTEL CRILLON LE BRAVE

ANOTHER EXCELLENT option for French summer sun is Crillon le Brave in the Vaucluse region of Provence. Inhabiting much of a small hillside village, impossibly stylish, rustic-chic bedrooms are shared between eight houses, connected by bridges, alleys and courtyards. Food is integral to the experience and overseen by wunderkind Jérôme Blanchet. Start the day with the most exquisite buffet breakfast on the expansive terraces. Later, head to relaxed Bistrot 40E, where everything is sourced within 40km, or the outstanding La Table du Ventoux. There's also an outdoor pool (heated between March and November), a boule court and bikes you can borrow to explore the surrounding countryside.

Rustic charms

Head to one of these French boltholes where you can relax and recharge

VILLA CLARISSE

HARBOUR-FRONT L'Hôtel de Toiras in Saint-Martin-de-Ré may be the most famous place to stay on the French island of Ile de Ré, with its fantastic gourmet restaurant and richly upholstered armchairs, but personally, in summer, I would much rather stay at its low-key sister hotel, Villa Clarisse. Hidden away in a quiet residential area, a five-minute walk up pretty cobbled streets from the harbour, the white-washed hotel feels far more appropriate in this beachy seaside setting. Designed by Pierre-Yves Rochon in a simple, contemporary style mixed up with the

odd antique armoire, Villa Clarisse is housed in an 18th-century mansion, where the 19th-century general Ferdinand-Auguste Lapasset was born. Its nine elegant bedrooms - including two suites with separate living rooms - are spread around the house and several open out on to a leafy courtyard. Carry on past the comfy drawing and dining rooms and you get to a pretty lawned garden, the perfect spot for afternoon tea (Mariage Frères all the way) or an early evening glass of wine from the family vineyard in Saint-Emilion-Puisseguin. There's also a toy-filled sandpit thoughtfully positioned in the

1. Doubles at **VILLA CLARISSE**, Ile de Ré, from £187 per night, excluding breakfast (villa-clarisse.com).
2. Doubles at **HOTEL CRILLON LE BRAVE**, Provence, from £300 (crillonlebrave.com)

