



VIVE LA VILLA

For luxury living with the ultimate wow factor, where better to head than St Tropez? Zoë Levey checks into Villa La Tourelle for a touch of the high life

With its beautiful beaches, luxury yachts, exclusive boutiques, and glittering nightlife, it's no surprise that St Tropez remains one of the most bewitching destinations on the French Riviera. But the secret to St Tropez's enduring allure is that it still looks and feels like a quaint Provençal town. Somehow, this tiny fishing village, thrown onto the international stage in the 1950s by glamorous film stars and moviemakers, has retained its inherent charm and character despite the many tourists and millionaires who flock here each summer. The Gulf of Saint-Tropez is a gateway to Provence, with its medieval villages, plentiful vineyards and fragrant lavender fields, and a coastline blessed with white sandy beaches and hidden coves. The region's timeless appeal is obvious.

But St Tropez remains the main draw. It's easy to quickly familiarise yourself with this pretty little town. The simplest way is best – on foot. Meander through its tangle of narrow cobbled streets, filled with quaint shops and family-run traditional restaurants. Place des Lices, St Tropez's famous central square, is a continually buzzing hub at the heart of the town, where you can see old men playing pétanque or locals enjoying a gossip over an espresso or *pastis*. It's also the venue for a thriving twice-weekly farmer's market. High up on the hill, you'll find the Citadelle de Saint-Tropez, an ancient

defence built in 1602 – it's worth the steep walk for the views alone. The historic fishing quarter La Ponche is the sleepier side of town, and the most picturesque. You can access it via the under-arch fish market located on Place aux Herbes, its ocean-inspired murals and mosaics having recently been treated to a much-needed restoration. La Ponche is home to Église Notre-Dame-de-l'Assomption, with its beautiful Italian baroque bell tower and the historic Statue du Bailli de Suffren, and offers a glimpse of St Tropez's past, before the moviemakers and film stars arrived. As the sun goes down, the unmissable spectacle of the yachts moored in Vieux Port provides much entertainment for partygoers and voyeurs alike. Without question, St Tropez feels like a happy place.

We stayed at Villa La Tourelle, a 14th-century former vicarage located on a quiet street within easy reach of Place des Lices and Vieux Port. Inside the grounds, the villa's signature tower overlooks tranquil gardens, complete with palm trees and cacti, brightly coloured hibiscus and hot-pink bougainvillea. The villa's original well has been transformed into a beautiful fountain in the central courtyard of the walled garden, splashing quietly as guests relax. The stone-lined, mirror-edged pool is the perfect place for a sundowner and to meet fellow guests to catch up on stories of the day.

Inside, artworks dominate the walls, and quirky design features include a winding staircase to the top of the tower, and a wall of water which forms a striking backdrop to the dining room. The four en suite bedrooms sleep up to eight adults in supreme comfort; two have independent access from the garden and are perfect for those who relish their own space, while the master bedroom in the main building has its own hammam and dressing room. The final bedroom sits at the top of the turret offering views of St Tropez. Renovated by the renowned Tropezian architect François Vieillecroze, Villa La Tourelle is an exceptional oasis in which to retreat.

Aside from beautiful surroundings and easy access to town, Villa La Tourelle boasts private chef Gregur Baksic, one of Purple Summer's finest cooks, who dishes up a five-star daily menu focusing on local and seasonal ingredients, including fresh fish: mounds of delicately flavoured fine de claire oysters, *gambas* to poach in orange and garlic, sea bass fillets for carpaccio and fat scallops for pan-frying. Other highlights include monkfish saltimbocca, courgette pappardelle in baked tomato cream, and saffron polenta with wild morel mushrooms. Wines are handpicked by Gregur from sun-drenched vineyards just down the road. After a long day of sightseeing and people-watching, there's nothing better than returning to Villa La Tourelle's beautiful surroundings to sample this welcoming feast.



OPPOSITE: BEAUTIFUL PALM-FILLED GARDENS SURROUNDING VILLA LA TOURELLE. **CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:** CALMING NEUTRAL TONES OF THE VILLA'S LIVING ROOM; COCKTAIL O'CLOCK; AL FRESCO DINING ON THE TERRACE; ONE OF CHEF GREGUR BAKSIC'S COLOURFUL CREATIONS; THE OUTDOOR POOL AND SHADED LOUNGE AREA



DON'T MISS:

- Dinner at Au Caprice des Deux, a charming authentic family-run restaurant serving French classics with an international twist, and an unbeatable wine list. Tucked away on a narrow, cobbled street, this gastronomic gem is well worth seeking out.
- Experience a guided wine tour of local vineyards, with Provençal wine experts Beyond the Wine (beyondthewine.fr). Taste elegant wines from Château Saint-Maur (chateausaintmaur.com), one of the region's leading producers. Or visit the delightful organic vineyard at Domaine Val D'Astier (domainevaldastier.com), run by the unstoppable Bruno, who follows biodynamic principles to produce a modest collection of light wines, perfect for sun-drenched Riviera drinking.

- Take a trip to the mediaeval village of Grimaud. Known as the 'Venice of Provence' it has historical links to the Grimaldi family. High in the hills, with unrivalled views of the valleys and lake below, explore the steep and narrow streets of this sleepy ancient village, with its churches, historic squares, art galleries and chic boutiques. Take respite with a homemade citron pressé or glass of Provençal rosé and a slice of the famous *tarte tropézienne* in one of the many pretty bars and cafes.
- Relax with a yoga session by Villa La Tourelle's pool - expert Elodie Huertas, a St Tropez local, trained at the School of Sacred Arts in Ubud, Bali. Or indulge in a massage in the beautiful walled garden courtesy of the spa team from Les Cinq Arbres.

A seven-night stay at Villa La Tourelle in St Tropez starts from €23,680 based on eight people sharing the flexible service option. Purple Summer is a luxury villa specialist and sister company to the highly regarded and longstanding winter specialist Purple Ski. Offering an exclusive portfolio of sensational properties across France's Côte d'Azur and Mallorca, Purple Summer ensures each villa within the bespoke seven-property portfolio - sleeping from eight to 12 people - has been carefully handpicked and offers first-class facilities and a distinctive personality. purplesummer.com