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## Escape to the FRENCH ALPS

From delicious food and homegrown wine to stunning scenery and impressive the Château de Candie makes for a fabulous break

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PHOTOS: Art Prism/Damien Blanchard

Our first glimpse of the Château de Candie, a historic small luxury hotel near Chambéry in the heart of Savoy, France, was picture-postcard perfect. A winding road skirted a field of young vines to our right with the ivy-covered castle walls of the 14th-century castle emerging from a lush forest backdrop. Across the valley the Chartreuse Alps sparkled under an azure sky.

We were in France for a three-day sisters' getaway, which, is ideal for some rest, relaxation and fun. The scenery is spectacular, plus there's plenty of culture, good walking and delicious food and wine.

The Château de Candie, which is just over an hour from both Geneva and Lyon, sits nicely in the middle.

Over the centuries the *château* has been home to noble Savoy families from France and Italy, and it retains the feel of a private country house. The Candie coat of arms features an escutcheon decorated with *fleur de lis*, a motif that appears in various shades and designs on wallpaper in many of the bedrooms and common areas. It first opened as a hotel in 1994 and is now under the management of Purple Summer.

There are 25 rooms, each with their own character, antiques and style, including

smaller doubles and a range of 'prestige rooms' and family suites. There is also a triplex in an ancient romantic round tower – set at a distance from the main building, which used to be a dovecote in days gone by.

The Château de Candie is a prize location for weddings, so as we wandered around the grounds it was easy to imagine a bride and groom tying the knot by the fountain below the castle terrace; the trellises and pergolas all decorated with spring flowers. The tower is also a favourite of newlyweds, with its winding staircase that links a living room to the bedroom and the bathroom above.

### PRESTIGE LIVING

We stayed in a spacious prestige room looking out onto the forest behind the hotel. With two *faux* Corinthian pillars framing the sofa it had quite a regal air. We also had a separate dressing area leading to a large bathroom with a double sink, an impressive bathtub and a superb shower.

Besides the breakfast buffet, the *château* offers lunch and dinner either inside or on the terrace, weather permitting. The menu is devised and prepared by Senegalese head chef Badara Gueye. His dishes feature a mixture of traditional French and Savoy recipes, often with a twist. The vines we saw



## TRAVEL

as we drove into the grounds are not there just for show.

The *château* makes 3,000 bottles annually of its delicious dry white Candie 1891 made from viognier grapes. It's on the menu along with an extensive selection of fine wines from the region and beyond.

On our final night we experienced the wine-tasting package that the hotel offers, put together by the *château's* resident sommelier, Raphael Diatta. He talked us

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through six wines that used the chardonnay grape. Eileen is vegetarian and her favourite dish on the menu was a ceviche of local fish, which went well with Bourgogne Chardonnay from Philippe Gavignet. Deborah thoroughly enjoyed the Chardonnay Bugey Peillot, paired with the Omble Chevalier de Cévennes, which was a beautifully moist river char (an Alpine relative of the salmon and lake trout) served with fennel and potatoes.

### OUT AND ABOUT

The *château* is a 15-minute drive from France's biggest lake, the Lac de Bourget, that sits in the shadow of the distinctive Dent du Chat – cat's tooth – peak. Here there's an opportunity for swimming and other water sports, plus fishing. We opted for a leisurely lunch at the Lido Restaurant on the lakeshore, also owned and run by Purple Summer. It's just outside the town of Aix-les-Bains, which was once known as the Alpine Riviera during the *Belle Epoque*, and there's still a casino for those inclined to a flutter. On the other



The Terrace is a perfect place to dine

side of the lake sits Chanaz, a picturesque village built on the canal that links the lake to the River Rhone.

Chanaz is famous for walnut and hazelnut oil, both made using a press dating from 1868. We watched as the nuts were crushed by a millstone, then transferred into a wood-burning oven before ending up in the press. Less than five minutes later, the oil started to drip out.

On our final day we went to Chambéry, a medieval town with its impressive Castle of the Dukes of Savoy, dating from the 13th century, and the 18th-century St Francois de Sales Cathedral with an interior almost

completely covered with 6,000 square metres of *trompe l'oeils* paintings of carved walls and vaults.

The French Alps are enticing after the snow melts and for those of us who prefer to feel the earth under our feet perhaps even more so. The *Château de Candie* provided us with a great base to enjoy the sights, sounds and especially the tastes of Savoy. ●

To find out more or to book a stay at the *Château de Candie*, visit [chateaucandie.com/en](https://chateaucandie.com/en)

To make a reservation at The Lido Restaurant visit: [lido-lacdubourget.com/reservations](https://lido-lacdubourget.com/reservations)



The bar is stylish and light-filled



The pool is a perfect place to relax in the sunshine