

## Finding a hidden France at Château Les Carrasses

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Once one has travelled a little and lived abroad, one gets a fair picture of what France should look like; this beautiful, idyllic country, where time goes by slowly, as you sip a nice glass of wine in a romantic, hilly and green countryside, possibly surrounded by vineyards and a few well preserved chateaux. To me, a French woman coming straight out of the second biggest city in France, Lyon, this image is not a daily reality, and until my stay at Château Les Carrasses, I was not even sure it did exist.

On a sunny Thursday morning, I got in my car in Lyon, very ready to finally leave work and the city madness for a great escape in Languedoc-Roussillon and its promises of sun, wine and tranquillity, before peak season. The French roads are not busy at this time of the year, thus I arrived in the area early, and since my check-in time was not planned until later in the afternoon, I took a chance to stop in Narbonne for a late lunch and a tour of the medieval city, with ruins of the Via Romana.



I then hit the road again, for delightful drive to Quarantes and Le Chateau. How can I describe my arrival at Château Les Carrasses? After finding the small countryside road giving access to the property while driving in the middle of this very typical green and brown southern welcoming landscape, I finally saw the white XIXth century castle in the distance, proudly sitting on a hill, with its infinity pool and an inviting access lane lined with trees to the right.

After parking my car, I found my way to what I identified as the central social area, which houses the reception, the restaurant and a sitting area, and where I would come back later for a wine tasting. After an efficient

and friendly check-in with a fully bilingual team, I was guided to my private house, belonging to Les Maisons de la Cave (houses of the cellar) category. This three-bedroom house with a private pool and a private terrace facing south was to be my own Château for the stay, in the charming Cathare country.

I took a discovery tour of the perfectly decorated house, finding somewhat of a country style, yet chic, completely comfortable, and the perfect definition of "relaxed luxury". The entryway opens onto a hallway giving access to the master with its gigantic en-suite and a living area with two desks, a sofa bed and a TV, and access to the two en-suite bedrooms of the mezzanine, all overlooking the private pool, infinity hotel pool and the spectacular view of the valley, through ceiling to floor cathedral windows. The living area with the kitchen and the main living room can be accessed on the ground floor, via a beautiful staircase. Since Château Les Carrasses offers self-catering facilities, I found a full kitchen, with everything I needed from the kettle to the oven, not to mention the laundry room and the glass door cellar in the floor, reminding one of the original purpose of this place. And then... I turned around, and faced a majestic glass wall and doors, giving access to the private terrace and pool, with a dining area seating eight, a BBQ, sun loungers and two beautiful chairs amongst lavender bushes.



When I arrived at Château Les Carrasses, I desperately needed a rest from life's craziness and my first thought when I sat by the pool, my feet dangling in the water (because the pools are heated, thus allowing one to enjoy them even in May), was that I was just in the right place. All I could see was lavender bushes, pine trees and more native species, and all I could hear was the giggles of my neighbours' children learning how to swim. What a delightful moment, completely outside of time. I forgot about life's daily troubles to the point that I almost forgot that I had an appointment that night to taste some local wines before having dinner with my host. I met my tasting partners, two young couples from the United Kingdom, in the main social area, by the bar. A small grower was waiting for us, with his production, and he enthusiastically shared his passion and love for the French heritage.

Afterwards, Kerry, the general manager of the Château, met me at the bar and took me through the wonders of the castle. I had the chance to see several accommodation options, belonging from different categories, each and everyone of them answering to the same high standard and shabby chic style. While I was enjoying the unique, quiet atmosphere of the park, with its beach volleyball court, tennis court, petanque courts, children playground, we came across a few residents, enjoying their evening, in this "casual luxe" place. My personal favourite of the tour was the main Château terrace on top of the main living area, from which you can enjoy a beautiful glass of wine with the most gorgeous view.

Dining at Les Carrasses is an experience that any guest should enjoy. It means dining in a friendly atmosphere, where each guest is valued and served simple, French-inspired dishes, made out of the most beautiful, fresh ingredients. In the candlelit, beautifully renovated restaurant, where locals enjoy sharing a meal with their friends, I was served a tasty scallop risotto with seasonal, perfectly cooked vegetables. The dessert, café gourmand, came with an amazing variety of small bites, including the unforgettable homemade pain perdu with mango ice cream. To end the perfect evening, I went back to my Maison and enjoyed a warm cup of tea on my candle lit terrace with my favourite playlist in the background and nothing but silence beyond.



On Friday morning, I enjoyed an "early" buffet breakfast in the restaurant room, once more welcomed by a smiling, friendly staff, and went back to my Maison for a morning swim and work session under the sun on a chaise longue, while the rest of the inhabitants were waking up and getting ready for a beautiful vacation day.

I left the Château heartbroken, but most certain about one thing. I had just found the perfect place to stay for a laid back, yet luxurious getaway from time, work and daily life, and moreover, I had found the perfect time of the year to do so, when the castle is still very quiet and yet the weather is already absolutely beautiful. My new black book destination? Château Les Carrasses during the shoulder season.

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