



## THE LONG WEEKEND

### HÔTEL CASTLEBRAC DINARD, BRITTANY

**Simon Thomson** heads to France in search of salvation and seafood

**THE WEEKEND:** Hop the Channel to north-western France, and summon up the old world romance of a seaside getaway on Brittany's Côte d'Émeraude, at the quirky but luxurious Castlebrac hotel.

**WHERE?** The "Cannes of the North", Dinard is a traditional resort, first popularised by British tourists in the 19th century. There are grandiose Belle Époque mansions, boutique stores, recherché eateries, a salt-water spa, and a casino which takes pride of place on the beachfront esplanade. Even today it feels like a place where Hercule Poirot might investigate a society murder. Unmistakably French, but unapologetically anglophile, it hosts an annual British film festival. Indeed, Alfred Hitchcock – who is honoured with a statue on the waterfront – was a former visitor, and it is rumoured that the Bates house from *Psycho* was inspired by a local mansion. Best of all, it is just minutes from the regional airport, so holiday-makers can be collected in the hotel's Tesla, checked in and sipping cocktails on the balcony within half an hour of landing.

**THE STAY:** Built into a cliff, overlooking the mouth of the river Rance, Castlebrac is a unique agglomeration of buildings, among them an old British aristocratic holiday home, and a former national marine research centre which included a public aquarium; a distinctive round structure with portal windows, which has now been converted into an elegant bar with just a hint of the life aquatic. There are a range of suites, in different shapes and sizes, reflecting the eclectic architecture, and retaining many unusual vestiges of the buildings' previous lives; a fire-surround featuring tiles inspired by Jean de la



**TOP TIP**  
**Fou de Bassan, Castlebrac's handmade, 12-metre, wooden motor-launch, can be hired by the day or half-day and comes with an experienced captain.**

Fontaine's retelling of Aesop's fables is particularly delightful, and the monkey gleefully thrusting a horrified cat's paw into a fire is a ghoulish highlight. The hotel is decorated with irreverent panache, as well as statues of penguins that evoke the memory of the aquarium's founder Jean-Baptiste Charcot (an Antarctic explorer, rugby champion, and Olympic sailing silver medalist). Castlebrac styles itself a "soul haven", and has the unconsecrated chapel, eastern-influenced spa, and bedside collections of positive aphorisms to back up the claim. But the surroundings are so pleasant that even the bitterest sceptic will find themselves refreshed and rejuvenated.

**THE FOOD:** Castlebrac's restaurant, *Pourquoi Pas*, offers refined, sustainably produced, regional cuisine. The braised asparagus spears served with a wine, bone marrow and black truffle reduction, and a golden egg yolk raviole, was stupendous. In Dinard itself, locally caught lobster is prominent on many menus. Wander the market on a Saturday morning for all kinds of cheese, seafood, pastries, deli meats, and glorious Breton cider. Buy a galette – a buckwheat crêpe, best enjoyed wrapped around a grilled garlic sausage with mustard – then retire to the nearby bar, *La Marché des Anges*, for bonhomie and several glasses of chilled rosé. Head back to the hotel via *Maison Moreau*, for a box of delicious macarons, in more than a dozen flavours.

**NEED TO KNOW:**  
To find out more about **Hôtel Castlebrac** or to book a room, visit their website [castelbrac.com](http://castelbrac.com). **Ryanair** flies daily from Stansted to Dinard, with tickets available for around £20.