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TRAVEL

In Brittany, a Stylish Boutique Hotel Blends Past Lives

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By SARA LIEBERMAN SEPT. 16, 2016

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CreditGilles Trillard

Rates

From 320 euros (about \$360).

Basics

In its former life, Castelbrac, a 25-room boutique hotel that opened last summer, was a private mansion owned by an English lord in the late 1800s, then a marine research center and aquarium in the 1930s. After three years of renovation, this sea-facing stone-walled “soul heaven,” as the hotel promotes itself, melds the best of both its past incarnations. Mismatched buildings feature personal touches like artwork from the French caricaturist François de Givré and a wacky foyer with a black lacquered spiral staircase and walls covered in green palm-tree paper. The former aquarium space is now the Aquarium Bar, in hues of blue, with shimmery mosaic columns and portholes.

Location

About an hour's drive from [Brittany](#)'s capital city of Rennes in western France, the hotel is easy to miss from the road since its stone walls blend in with the sea walls of Dinard, a longtime vacation spot for Bretons and an old-time international elite such as Lawrence of Arabia, Jules Verne, Pablo Picasso and more. Private parking is available for a fee.

Photo



Credit Gilles Trillard

The Room

Our basic room had personality, and space, to spare. Striped curtains in orange, olive and eggplant set the color scheme, while the king bed had two night tables — one with an alarm clock/iPod dock, the other with a cordless phone. There were lamps aplenty, including one on the wooden desk that looked like a stapler and proved difficult to turn on and off. Additional contemporary touches like woven bowls from the brand Asiatides added to the quirky modern décor. The room had a flat-screen TV, ample hangers and drawers in the huge closet, a handful of outlets and a full-length mirror by the door. Some higher-level rooms have a balcony or a terrace. The minibar provided free Nespresso coffee and beverages, including local Breizh tea and cola.

The Bathroom

In typical European style, the toilet was separate — and on the opposite end of the room — from the sink and shower, which overlooked the port and hence provided the “sea view.” The mirror was subtly shaped like a fish, and the doorless shower with frosted glass walls had both hand-held and rain shower heads. Toiletries were by the French tea-based brand Thémaé, and bathrobes, slippers and exfoliation gloves were provided.

Photo



CreditGilles Trillard

Amenities

There’s a small fitness and treatment center with spa services such as an Ayurvedic massage and hydration facial, along with an indoor hammam that opened in July and a long, narrow dipping pool that overlooks the sea. Guests who prefer being on the water, rather than in it, might want to take advantage of the wooden vaporetto-style motorboat that brings guests to St.-Malo, a walled naval city and tourist destination, 10 minutes across Prieuré Bay (free).

Dining

Room service is available 24/7, but because meals are otherwise served in a bright white, windowed space open to the bay, we opted to eat breakfast there. Convenient yet pricey at €18, the continental buffet offered fresh-

squeezed juice, a selection of French pastries, yogurts and cereals, fruit and standard American drip coffee. Dinner and lunch at Le Pourquoi Pas restaurant, in the same space, featured first-rate seafood, while snacks and fancy Champagne cocktails are served all day in the indoor lounge and bar or on the terrace.

Bottom Line

A stylish, seaside establishment that is not a resort, with both historical and contemporary flair and top-notch service.

Castelbrac Hotel, 17, avenue George V, Dinard; 33-2-99-80-3000; castelbrac.com.