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The Legend Suite, Chateau Mcely

FAIRYTALE HONEYMOONS

Hideaways with noble lineage offer the ultimate romantic escape

FOR ALL OF OUR PROUD DEMOCRATIC TRADITIONS in this country, there remains an undeniable appeal here for all things royal. Case in point: the keen interest in the pending nuptials of Prince William and Kate Middleton. Maybe you weren't born a blueblood, but there's certainly no reason why you can't honeymoon like one, especially with an increasing number of opportunities as historic palaces, villas and other regal properties being renovated and turned into swank and secluded hotels. Europe, no surprise, is where many of the best are found, and we've selected three that boast the type of princely appeal that will have you feeling as if you and your betrothed are beginning life together as the lord and lady of the realm.

HÔTEL DU PALAIS

Biarritz, France

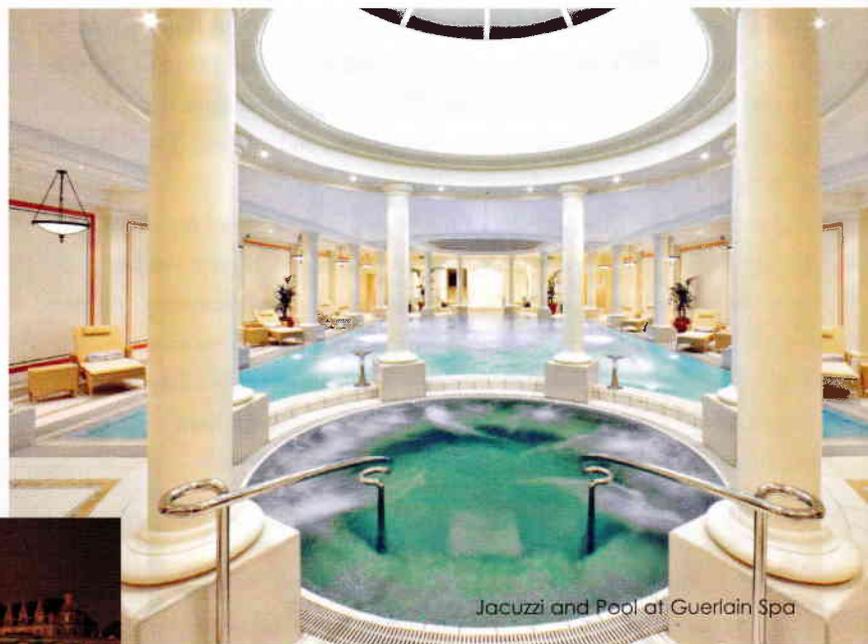
Built in 1855 by Napoleon III as a summer mansion for his empress, Eugenia, Hôtel du Palais is not only considered among the most beautiful hotels in the world, it also boasts a privileged perch overlooking Biarritz, the “Queen of beaches, and beaches of kings.” Now restored to its former glory, the 154-room Hôtel du Palais at every turn offers a sumptuous way for you to experience this coveted corner of Basque country in southwestern France. The grand villa’s public spaces are decorated with opulent 19th-century antiques, while rooms and suites come embellished not only with furnishings and decorations dating from the Second Empire, but offer sweeping views of the Atlantic from their balconies.

Dining here is also a regal experience, with superlative seafood and other regional specialties served by Chef Jean-Marie Gautier in the Michelin one-star restaurant, Villa Eugénie. Top-flight cuisine and carefully-crafted cocktails are also offered at the hotel’s two other restaurants, La Rotonde and Hippocampe, and at Le Bar Impérial. The hotel’s idyllic seaside location also means it’s ideal for active types, as Biarritz offers world-class surfing, golf, tennis and other outdoor activities. One of the most sought-after experiences here, however, takes place indoors at the resort’s award-winning Guerlain Spa. The five-story retreat offers an extensive menu featuring treatments such as the Guerlain Imperial Massage with Body Polish, while other areas of the spa tempt with an indoor 15-meter pool, Jacuzzi, steam room, sauna, state-of-the-art fitness center and beachfront terraces, perfect for enjoying a post-treatment herbal tea.

Hôtel du Palais, hotel-du-palais.com;
001.33.(0) 5.59.41.6400



Le Bar Impérial



Jacuzzi and Pool at Guerlain Spa



“HOTEL DU PALAIS IS NOT ONLY CONSIDERED AMONG THE MOST BEAUTIFUL HOTELS IN THE WORLD, IT ALSO BOASTS A PRIVILEGED PERCH OVERLOOKING BIARRITZ, THE “QUEEN OF BEACHES, AND BEACHES OF KINGS.”



CHATEAU MCELY SPA HOTEL

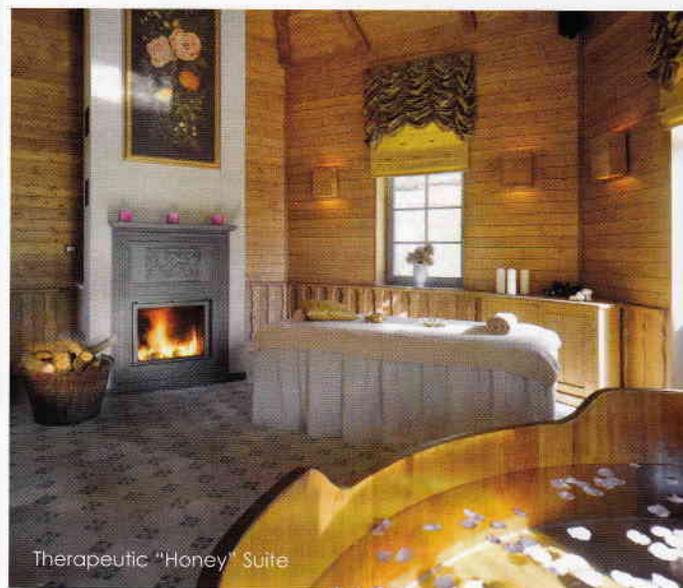
Mcely, Czech Republic

Set among the verdant forests, waving fields of wheat and the small medieval-era village of Mcely, the baronial Chateau Mcely has a long and noble history that preceded its five-star hotel status. Located just an hour outside of Prague, since the 17th century the gracious baroque estate served as the country home for several European noble families and home-away-from-home for guests such as Mark Twain and Rainer Maria Rilke. Left in shambles after World War II, the Chateau, now a member of Small Luxury Hotels of the World, was lovingly restored in 2006 and has been gaining rave reviews ever since. Recent accolades include being named the only five-star “green” hotel in the Czech Republic, and a World Travel Award nod as the world’s leading green hotel in 2008.

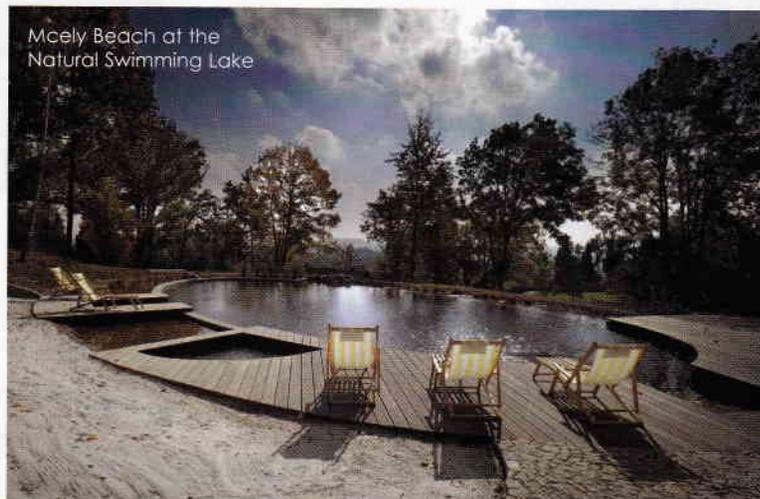
A major draw here is the serenity of the estate, fronted by an expansive lawn and bordered by the St. George forest and a tree-studded 12-acre English park. The 23 rooms and suites are as eclectic as they are elegant, each featuring a distinct name to suit its theme such as Legend, the hotel’s most luxurious suite: a white-on-white splendor with period-style furniture and balcony overlooking the park, and Orient, which is filled with rare finds and fabrics from the East.

Pampering at the Chateau is an intimate affair that cleverly turns the entire hotel into a spa experience. The three treatment rooms--Honey, Silk, and Pearls--are tucked into various parts of the property including the main house, a secluded tower, and a freestanding couples’ hideaway with generous bath and fireplace located adjacent to the hotel’s natural swimming pond. Dining experiences in the hotel’s Piano Nobile restaurant are exquisite affairs, with seasonal, locally-sourced fare served either under the chandeliers of the main dining room or on the inviting patio with its wide vistas of the Bohemian countryside.

Chateau Mcely Spa Hotel, chateaumcely.com;
011.420.325.600.000



“LOCATED JUST AN HOUR OUTSIDE OF PRAGUE, SINCE THE 17TH CENTURY THE GRACIOUS BAROQUE ESTATE SERVED AS THE COUNTRY HOME FOR SEVERAL EUROPEAN NOBLE FAMILIES”





CASA DE CARMONA

Carmona, Spain

The princely city of Seville, celebrated in operas and plays through the centuries, is the setting for one of Spain's most alluring properties, Casa de Carmona. A 16th-century palace once belonging to a noble family, Casa de Carmona is located just 30 minutes outside the famed city in an ancient village swirling with the history and romance of its Roman, Moorish, Gothic and Renaissance past. Transformed by owner Felipe Guardiola Medina into a hotel in 1991, the exclusive villa-style property now seduces guests not only with its storied history, but inviting contemporary style and amenities.

Entering the hotel, one passes rows of mature olive trees, catches the strong scent of blooming orange blossoms and jasmine, and steps through massive doors into another world. An exacting restoration, completed when the hotel was opened, preserved the palace's original features including sheltered courtyards accented with bubbling fountains and lush potted plants, Moorish arches and an heirloom collection of art and antiques that emanate Old World opulence. Rooms and suites continue the sense of refinement pervading the property, and boast an eclectic mix of furnishings that include rich fabrics, antique furniture, hand-painted ceiling designs and period prints. Amenities to suit the modern soul are not forgotten either, and include satellite television, music systems and a film and CD library. The hotel's Gracia Real restaurant prides itself on using only locally-sourced produce and ingredients to complement specialties such as ocean-fresh sea bass and scallops.

Outside the property, guests can access an enviable menu of opportunities to explore the region, thanks to Mr. Medina's extensive contacts. He is happy to design a concierge service so guests can enjoy experiences normally off limits to visitors, including a private tour of the 17th-century Casa-Palacio de Rueda, a remarkable estate not usually open to the public, and the opportunity to ride Spanish pure-bred horses at the Finca La Viña—another activity not open to the general public. Befitting the hotel, it's just one more example of how guests are given the royal treatment.

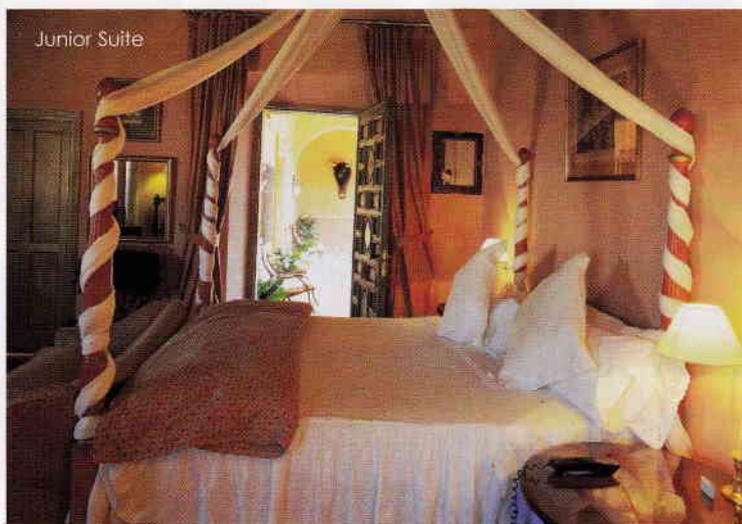
Casa de Carmona, casadecarmona.com;
011.34.954.144.151

—ERIC HISS

"ENTERING THE HOTEL,
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Suite Bathroom



Junior Suite