

# COUNTRY LIFE

## Le Relais de Chambord: The hotel in the shadow of a masterpiece



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**A new hotel opens on the grounds of the Châteaux de Chambord, allowing visitors to bask in the glory of the French Renaissance castle. John Goodall reports.**



It would be invidious to claim one particular building as the greatest of the Loire chateaux, but Chambord must be in the running for the title. This year a new hotel has opened in the shadow of this extraordinary building: Le Relais de Chambord. It's part of a collaboration between the French government, the hotel group Marugal and the entrepreneur Frédéric Jousset. The intention has been to create something comfortable and attractive at a reasonable price in an historically important setting, a French equivalent to Spain's Paradors.



The new hotel has been designed by the architect Jean-Michel Wilmotte and incorporates the remains of what were once the kennels of the adjacent palace. The building had previously been the home of a two-star hotel that closed in 2015. The bedrooms are small but comfortable and stylishly designed with large-scale photographs of the chateau incorporated in the bed-heads. The bathrooms have black and white tile patterns that evoke the remarkable slate decoration laid within the stonework of the building. There is a spa and a restaurant but the hotel also enjoys the amenities of the chateau. During my visit this included a market and a huge antiques fair.

## Food and Drink

The restaurant in the hotel faces towards the castle across a terrace (where a marquee, which takes advantage of the view, has been erected). My visit fell the day before a public holiday and all the tables were full until 9.30pm, which suggests interest and enthusiasm for the new restaurant. There was a good selection of French cooking with a la carte and set menus. The food was good and without pretension and there was a selection of wines to match, including, of course, those from the Loire region.



## Things to do

The chief attraction of Chambord must be the chateau. Built by Francis I as a hunting lodge, it's a vast creation that derives architectural drama from an extraordinary roofscape of turrets, chimneys and a central spire. Internally, the floors are connected by a centrally placed double-helix stair of huge proportions that is (wishfully) attributed to Leonardo da Vinci. It carries visitors to the roof with superb views over the gardens and the demesne. There are displays and exhibitions in the chateau itself.