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Room at the inn: Chateau de la Chevre d'Or, south of France



The spectacular view from the Chateau de La Chevre d'Or, Eze.

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There's a reason you're offered a welcome cocktail (prosecco, mandarin liqueur and tonic water) on arrival at Chateau de la Chevre d'Or. It's a nerve-steadying necessity after you have driven up from Nice on bends that aren't so much hairpin as paperclip, doubling around on themselves as they heave up the cliff.

Cap Ferrat tilts far beneath. Squint and you can spot Corsica, although a moment's inattention might plunge you into the Mediterranean, which shimmers below like a blue portal to an upside-down heaven.

When your car reaches the edge of a walled precipice in Eze you can abandon your keys to a valet. Your nerves will be battered, but your rental car will reappear on departure, miraculously unscratched and still sporting its wing mirrors.

A totter along a vertigo-inducing path towards reception immediately reveals this hotel's trump card. Eze has an ambitious location attractive to beleaguered medieval folk. The hotel occupies half the village and eyeballs *le grand bleu* from almost every window. Suspended between sea and sky, it feels as if you're afloat. The panorama is dizzying and exhilarating. You'll be in the middle of forking up fish or applying sunscreen and suddenly get sidetracked into the grand audacity of that view.

Chateau de la Chevre d'Or is misleadingly named. It isn't a chateau but a jumble of village buildings, what Italians call an *albergho diffuso* (scattered hotel). The village is mainly 14th century, though some startlingly ramshackle walls below its Cafe du Jardin were built by the Phoenicians in 500BC. Greeks, Romans, Moors and Savoyards followed.

The well-preserved medieval streets are low-key and almost free of kitschy cafes and souvenir shops, preferring ateliers and art galleries. This is an old-world retreat, high above the glitz of the French Riviera and the excesses of nearby Nice and Monaco.



One of the hotel's guest rooms.

The hotel has 37 guestrooms and suites spread through the lower village in which corridors have become cobbled alleyways. Each room is different, but most feature sturdy medieval stone walls, beamed ceilings and generous dollops of contemporary luxury.

Service is well-nigh flawless from the moment impeccably dressed staff appear, after check-in, with bottled water, nougat and your suitcases.



The hotel's private gardens plunge down a series of terraces to the sea.

Few hotels have such atmospheric public areas, especially in the evening after day-trippers depart; wander its private gardens, which plunge downhill in a series of terraces towards the sea that glitters 400m below. Chateau de la Chevre d'Or lurches unexpectedly into kitschy whimsy here with a collection of shrubbery-lurking Chinese warriors, dancing-dolphin fountains and gilded lions. The golden goat of the hotel's name is an eyesore prancing on a rooftop.

Alberghi diffusi are newly trendy in Italy, but this hotel is a mid-1950s founding member of the prestigious Relais & Chateaux brand, which is especially noted for quality dining. Its gastronomic restaurant is an institution on the Riviera and has two Michelin stars.

The atmosphere is reverent and formal, its multi-course meals a bedazzlement of French culinary technique. Expect the likes of foie gras with peach cream, smoked lobster with melon, and deconstructed “vision of lemon tart”. For the ultimate in gluttony, plunder the cheese trolley for filetta ewe’s milk cheese or creamy Bleu de Brebis Cire.



The restaurant has panoramic views towards the twinkling lights of Cannes.

The restaurant also has staggering views towards the twinkling lights of Cannes and makes you imagine that, if the gods had a dining room, this would be it.

Brian Johnston was a guest of Relais & Chateaux.