

PEOPLE ARE TALKING ABOUT

TRAVEL

THERE'S A SMALL HOTEL

RICHARD ALLEMAN TAKES A GRAND TOUR—WITHOUT BREAKING THE BANK.

UP TO THE MOUNTAIN

A VIEW OF THE SWISS ALPS FROM JUST BEYOND THE HOTEL-RESTAURANT BELLEVUE.

A new crop of boutique hotels in the countryside, from Portugal's Algarve region to the South of France, offer all the pleasures of autumn—hiking and biking under deep-blue skies, seasonal dishes in top-notch restaurants, and the chance for a few last dips in the pool—at a surprisingly affordable cost.

PORTUGAL

On the Ria Formosa coastline, with its protected lagoons, beaches, and barrier islands, you'll find the 200-year-old, 24-acre country estate of **Fazenda Nova**, in the Algarve's Santo Estêvão. Owners Hallie and Tim Robinson have turned out ten smartly modern suites and apartments with teak beds, leather-and-wood chairs, and polished-concrete bathrooms. A sleek bar and an excellent restaurant, which mainly serves fish, are also part of the picture, as is a saltwater pool set within an olive grove. Beyond the property, guests can go beach-hopping or wander the town of Tavira, complete with shops, cafés, and an amphitheater, the scene of frequent festivals. High-season rates (from

€255, double, with breakfast) are in effect through September 30, dropping down to €170 in October; www.fazendanova.eu.

An hour's drive from Lisbon, in Portugal's pristine Alentejo region, lies the **Imani Country House**, near Nossa Senhora da Guadalupe. Its seven loftlike rooms and suites are filled with eclectic art and mid-century-modern furniture. There are two pools on-site, plus ample opportunities for biking, fishing, and bird-watching on and off the property. And for afternoons of exploring, the World Heritage city of Evora, filled with ancient Roman, Moorish, and medieval monuments, is not far. Just be prepared for the sounds of donkeys and sheep on your way back, as the 32-acre property still constitutes a working farm. Rates from €135, including breakfast; chicretreats.com.

FRANCE

Once an eighteenth-century manor house, **Vintage Vert**, in Lahitte-Toupière, stands on the edge of the majestic Pyrénées in southwestern France. Owner Christine Crowder has decorated the four suites with a mix of Cole & Son wallpapers, antique

wedding linens, and burlap grain sacks, the latter used as upholstery for classic French beds. The result is an enchanting site from which to explore the nearby *bastides* of Gascony by car, foot, or bicycle, though the hotel's pretty courtyard has a pool, if you prefer to stay close. A light breakfast is included in the low room rate (starting at €85 a night); the inn also frequently offers a €30 table d'hôte dinner of organic produce from the garden, and locally sourced duck, chicken, and house-made foie gras; vintagevert.com.

Formerly the home of French painter Roger Bezombes (1913–1994), **Mas de l'Amarine**, a handsome stone farmhouse with a pool in St.-Rémy-de-Provence, is now a bold little hotel with five light-filled rooms tastefully decorated with contemporary art and furniture. Complimentary bicycles are available for tooling around the historic market town of St.-Rémy—where Van Gogh famously painted *The Starry Night*. Horseback riding and wine tastings at local vineyards can also be arranged. For dining, St.-Rémy abounds in fine



THE SIMPLE LIFE

VINTAGE VERT'S 18TH-CENTURY MANOR HOUSE SITS ON A HILLTOP IN FRANCE'S LAHITTE-TOUPIÈRE.

restaurants, such as the Mas de l'Amarine's own, where chef-owner Bernard Coloma is known for his sea bass in salt crust, followed by homemade ice creams and sorbets. Room rates start at €180; chicretreats.com.

SWITZERLAND

A landmark in this picture-perfect Alpine ski-and-spa town, the **Hotel-Restaurant Bellevue**, in Davos Wiesen, dates back to 1873. After a complete redo, it is now one of the area's prettiest boutique hotels. With 21 rooms attractively decorated with bespoke furniture, it's an ideal base for travelers who want to take full advantage of great hiking, windsurfing, mountain biking, and golf. In winter, Davos Wiesen offers 192 miles of top-tier skiing, and any time of year, glamorous St. Moritz, where you can splurge with funds saved by staying at the Bellevue (\$105 for a double, with breakfast), is just over an hour away by train; chicretreats.com. *travel* >734