

Provençal Hideaway

Luxury travel specialists Scott Dunn offers a stylish summer escapade to the South of France. Jessica Hudson experiences the region's pristine beauty and hospitality while bonding with family



Situated high up in the hills above Nice, near the serene and picture perfect villages of St. Paul de Vence and Tourettes sur Loup, Bastide de Virettes is a luxurious villa owned by luxury travel specialists Scott Dunn. A fantastic holiday hideaway for families or a group of friends, we were fortunate enough to experience it ourselves this summer with our extended family and children.

The villa itself is a stone house in traditional Provençal style with Tiffany-green shutters, and the most breathtaking views across the hills to the Mediterranean. With their hand painted murals and beautiful collection of French antiques, the interiors boast a French Baroque ambiance. Vast and sumptuous beds with ensuite bathrooms are found in each bedroom, while master bedroom opens out onto a huge balcony with endless views.

Our private lagoon-shaped swimming pool cut into the rocks was the highlight of the holiday. It was here that the children spent hours splashing around, playing in the cleverly designed shallow end and jumping off the rocks. Scott Dunn gifted them Suneva Sunvests—a thoughtful touch and great souvenir to bring home with us to Dubai. The boules court was also very popular and quickly became the place where we enjoyed many family tournaments of the traditional French game of Petanque.

The secret to a Scott Dunn family holiday is their highly trained childcare specialists, and the fantastic choice of toys that they provide. Our villa had a playroom stocked

with every game imaginable, from fancy dresses to train sets and doll houses. The villa also came equipped with cots, stair gates, baby monitors and black-out blinds, and even nappies so we did not have to travel laden with everything. The nannies are all UK trained and were brilliant at following our baby's routine. Our toddler, on the other hand, loved the chef's wholemeal crepes.

The food is another incredible element of a Scott Dunn holiday, deliciously prepared by your own private resident Chef, who can cook and cater for your every taste as well as when and where you would like to eat. Imagine melted Camembert cheese infused with lavender and rosemary, fresh oysters and crabs claws on ice decorated with flowers and herbs from the garden, salt crusted sea bass slow cooked on the barbeque, mouthwatering prawns, to the tastiest tomato salads. The list goes on and on.

As hard as it was to leave the comfort and ease of life at the villa, we felt we had to explore the vicinity. For art aficionados, there is the nearby Musée Renoir or the Chapelle du Rosaire de Vence, a church designed by Henri Matisse. For modern and contemporary art lovers, there are the many eclectic art galleries and boutiques of St. Paul de Vence to explore.

A day of culture and site-seeing wouldn't be complete anywhere without a good meal. Be sure to ask your Scott Dunn host to book you a table for lunch at the legendary La Colombe d'Or, housing a collection of priceless works of art. St. Paul de Vence once attracted artists looking to escape the coastal heat of the summer, and many of the



paintings adorning the walls of this magnificent eatery were once exchanged for a stay or for a few meals. Family-run, La Colombe d'Or is now world-renowned and has attracted guests from Pablo Picasso and Sophia Loren to Sir Elton John and Hollywood A-listers over the years.

Monaco is just under an hour's drive away, teeming with designer shops and fast cars. We loved exploring the Jardin Exotique in Monaco's old city and visiting Princess Grace's tombstone in the Monaco Cathedral. Tea in the Hotel du Paris is also a must. We even caught a glimpse of Prince Albert as he drove out of the Palace gates and waved to us as he went by! The Oceanographic Museum is also a fascinating visit, with the Shark Lagoon and Turtle Island, and the Touch Tank where the children could stroke a star fish.

But our favorite find on the island was La Guerite Beach Club. Hidden away on a deserted beach on the Isle Sainte Marguerite off Cannes and only accessed by boat, it had a relaxed feel with sandy floors and comfortable swinging chairs, while a sophisticated set enjoyed the terrace and beach club. Nestled below an ancient monastery and fort, which hosted the famous 'Iron Mask', La Guerite's food was superb. Imagine Crudités vegetables from the market, Barigoules artichokes, freshly made gnocchi or Moules Frites followed by refreshing sorbets. The restaurant's Chef Yiannis Kioroglou is considered one of the most promising Greek chefs of his generation. He did not disappoint.

The buzz of the Croisette in Cannes is another must see. The choreographed firework shows set to music

illuminate the bay at night. They take place throughout the summer months all along the Cote d'Azur, with Bastille Day on 14 July the biggest bash of them all and. We watched the mesmerizing performance with friends over dinner from the Pier of the Hotel Majestic.

And to top off this wonderful Provençal retreat, we headed to the luxurious Hotel du Cap Antibes. In the form of a magnificent chateau, the hotel is set on the water's edge and is surrounded by beautiful gardens brimming with agapanthas and the signature Mediterranean pine trees. A fabulous spot in which to spend the day people-watching and superyacht spotting, make sure you head for lunch at the Eden Roc and then pass the afternoon swimming in the stunning infinity rock pool. With the hotel's fascinating history dating back to 1870, this is the place to be seen. If you are thinking of staying, be quick as the hotel gets booked up a year in advance.

The phrase "something for everyone" goes a long way with Scott Dunn. As we discovered on our trip, you truly can combine family time with a luxurious getaway, especially when it is organized in a bespoke fashion as Scott Dunn do so well. All the refined details that we love— art galleries, stunning hotels, top restaurants and fun places for our children—were graciously brought together to create cherished memories of our summer in Provence.

For more information about Bastide de Virettes, please contact scottdunn.com or call 800 035 703 722 (toll free)

Facing page: An aerial view of the Hotel Eden Roc.

Above: The charming villa where the Hudson family stayed.