

Survival of the Fittest

When examined through a present-day lens, Le Mans reveals lessons for life as well as the track.



Motley Menagerie
Nature, wildlife, and humanity combine for a transcendent moment in Portugal's Douro Valley.

**Outside the Ordinary**

An ancient island location and restored 13th-century villa aren't the only things that make Ultima Le Grand Jardin unique.

STAYS

Outside the Ordinary

Khira Jordan



On a very stormy Wednesday, I touched down in Nice, France. I had read somewhere that, in the Côte d'Azur, the sun shines nearly 330 days a year; of course, I decided to pop up on one of the cloud-covered 35. Luckily, I was headed somewhere with a mythic stature immune to the elements — that, perhaps, stood even taller because of them.

Ultima Le Grand Jardin, a 13th-century marvel, nestled inside a forest of oak, pine, olive, and eucalyptus, resides half a mile off the coast of Cannes, on the ancient island of Île Sainte-Marguerite. Meticulously restored according to archival sketches, and reopened in 2022, the secluded estate (I arrived by speedboat) stood in perfect medieval relief against a stone gray sky. Its remarkable garden — bounding across a hectare and a half and housing nearly 200 plant species — was lapping up the day's rain, and in return, generously scenting the air.

The hotel's beaming head chef, Alessandro Bergamo, was a big fan of the garden too, handpicking vegetables, fruits, and herbs right from its beds before each meal. The Italian born, Daniel Boulud-trained prodigy was palpably attuned to his surroundings, sharing tableside that his process was methodical but also impressionistic, drawing on myriad cultural, creative, and serendipitous associations. The result is virtuosic dishes, such as a slyly eloquent carrot soup essenced with local orange and vanilla.

The next day, after a deep sleep in my cozy corner of this oasis, I was shown a new, luminous side to Le Grand Jardin, when the sun made a surprise, all-day appearance. Despite being won over by the merits of unruly weather, I had to agree with Edith Wharton's statement about the region: "The light here is not of the ordinary world." Every inch of my vantage came alive anew. I took a long, luxurious walk around the property, peering out from the balcony at that cyan sea, peeking around and inside the villa's seven buildings — the Governor's House, Fortress Tower, pool suites, cottages, and guest house — each with its own smoldering Gallic character. And at the perimeter, I walked the tree-lined path along the warm water.

Buoyantly revived by Île Sainte-Marguerite's magic — and especially by a next-level, orange-blossom massage from the incredible Angeliki — I had no difficulty imagining why the likes of Louis XIV, Man Ray, and Lee Miller had traipsed around this hidden French gem.

Word to the Wise. For a good time outside this private paradise, visit the resplendent and raucous Restaurant La Guérite, whose story stretches back to 1902; the Musée du Masque de fer et du Fort Royal, where the actual "Man in the Iron Mask" was held for over a decade; the neighboring island of Saint Honorat, for its hallowed wine and olive oil, made exclusively by resident monks; and mainland Cannes for lunch and a lounge at the historic, sun-soaked Carlton Beach Club.