



# CAVE HAVENS

Some of the best hotels in the world are built into the rocks. Take a room in a

From sheltering smugglers to hiding portals into other worlds, caves have long held associations with myth, romance and adventure. Now you can write your own story and bed down like an (extremely chic) caveman thanks to a wave of luxury cave hotel openings. Located high up on cliff tops where warm breezes blow or deep in the shade of rocky outcrops, they provide the perfect escape from July's big burn. Think Michelin-starred restaurants

and stylish interiors rather than camping around stalagmites, although thanks to their millennia-old vantage points they have views over some of the most ancient landscapes in the world. Their epic locations lend themselves to adventure and all of our picks offer unique experiences, from hot-air ballooning over the 'fairy chimneys' to fine dining in an abandoned cave church. Natural caverns lend themselves to generous-sized bedrooms, some big enough to house private pools. Communal areas are a highlight too, like a Jamaican grotto bar or African leopard's lair dining room. Allow us to introduce you to the very best on the planet.

Photos by Christos Drazos Photography



LES HAUTES ROCHES, FRANCE

**‘The region is peppered with caves, and their consistently cool temperatures make for ideal wine cellars. Enjoy a subterranean wine-tasting class before emerging into the sunshine for an afternoon spent drifting downstream on a river cruise’**

#### Les Hautes Roches, FRANCE

For centuries, the Loire Valley was a playground for French Kings and their decadent courts, a realm of pleasure gardens and fairytale castles. The royal palace, Château de Chambord, survived the French Revolution and is staggering in its scale and grace, with elaborate towers and a staircase thought to have been designed by Leonardo Da Vinci. Les Hautes Roches is rather more intimate. Part 18th-century manor house, part medieval monastery, 12 of its 14 rooms are carved into velvety tufa rock. Right on the banks of the Loire river, all have views over the lush valley and famous Vouvray vineyards. The region is peppered with caves and their consistently cool temperatures make for ideal wine cellars. Enjoy a subterranean tasting class before emerging into the sunshine for an afternoon spent drifting downstream on a river cruise. If boating isn't your thing, pack a basket of charcuterie and wander the idyllic countryside on foot. Orchids and a rare species of buttercup grow in the shade of willow trees, while thin-legged herons wade the sandy shallows of the riverbank. The hotel's garden restaurant serves classic French cuisine by Michelin-starred chef Didier Edon. Order lobster with local wine and celery for a delectable taste of the region. **THE DETAIL** Doubles from £160; nearest airport: Tours Val de Loire (6km); flights from £56. [leshautesroches.com](http://leshautesroches.com)

#### Sextantio Le Grotte della Civita, Matera, ITALY

Once synonymous with extreme poverty, the Abruzzo region is enjoying a renaissance and the cave town of Matera is leading the charge. Built on a plateau above a jagged gorge it has dramatic views over the limestone-studded Murgia National Park, as well as cave dwellings dating back to Paleolithic times. Not-for-profit collective Sextantio Project have bought 17,000 villages in the area with the aim of preserving the heritage of these ancient mountain communities. Sextantio le Grotte has been painstakingly restored and offers a strain of luxury that is truly unique. The walls and floors of its 18 rooms are bare stone and the furniture consists of beautifully chosen relics found in abandoned caves; the bed linen is an ancient wedding trousseau, the dressing table a milking stool. Electricity is minimal and in the evenings each room is filled with candles and scented with aromatic herbs. Many locals still live off the land and the food scene is unpretentious yet flavoursome, with figs, chicory and ricotta all playing their part. Spend the day sketching at local farms or exploring the area's abandoned villages by mountain bike. When dusk falls, dine in a rock church (organised by the hotel) before delving into the labyrinthine town by candlelight. **THE DETAIL** Doubles from £197; nearest airport: Bari (64km); flights from £81. [sextantio.it/grotte-civita](http://sextantio.it/grotte-civita)



COOL HOTELS



SEXTANTIO LE GROTTI DELLA CIVITA, MATERA, ITALY

