



VILLA LA COSTE NEW

PROVENCE, FRANCE

UNPARALLELED ART AND TURBO-SMART RETREAT WEEKS

Meditation sessions here are quite unlike anything you may have tried before. Descending through the hole in an ancient stone wall feels like Alice in Wonderland disappearing into an unknown realm. Inside, it's akin to an Egyptian tomb: the sudden slap of darkness, the cool freshness, the peaty smell. The ceiling is a vast upturned bird's nest; 1,200 pieces of oak intricately woven together. This is Andy Goldsworthy's *Oak Room*. Initially it seems subversive to plonk a yoga mat down in this hallowed atmosphere. But perhaps there are few places better to tune into yourself than within an architectural creation whose very ethos encourages a rediscovery of the senses. Artwork is pivotal to the whole experience at Château La Coste, the 600-acre Provence estate of Irish property developer Paddy McKillen. Louise Bourgeois' giant bronze *Crouching Spider* is suspended over a sheet of water by the restaurant, a Le Corbusier tapestry hangs in Le Café de Tadao Ando, and the grounds are littered with pieces by Tracey Emin, Ai

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Weiwei, Liam Gillick and Matisse's grandson, Paul. And while the access to these installations is quite a mind-expanding privilege, the real luxury is space; the expansive views, the profound stillness and the gift of peace and quiet. Each spring and autumn, meditation supremo Cornelius O'Shaughnessy runs his Bodhimaya retreats here, guiding guests on a powerful inner odyssey. Structural-integration master Eyal Chehanowski holds yoga weeks, too. And if your stay doesn't align with one of these, the spa, with its soaring ceilings and pale Japanese wood, is open year-round. Everything feels gentle, unhurried. The treatment menu is pared-down; spa staff encourage you to soften to their calm rhythm. Ex-Aman alchemist Greg Payne has devised the offering: scrubs using local herbs, clay massages, salt treatments in the thermal area. There is no pre-booking of certain treatments, which is deeply disconcerting for inner control freaks. Just arrive, let your body unfold on the massage table, and the therapist will decide what your shoulders and soul call out for. All therapists are trained in cranio-sacral healing by Russian expert Leonid Soboleff, so it's almost irrelevant what therapy you receive as each one leaves you rag-doll floppy and in a trance. You feel truly held and safe to release emotions that they skillfully and inevitably unearth. There is more meditation and yoga practice on offer, those stellar grounds to explore, concerts in the music pavilion and exhibitions in the gallery. Whether you book a week-long immersion, or just a weekend break, Villa La Coste punches well above the weight of other spas in the South of France. It is elevating, sober and thought-provoking – yet somehow liberating, too. A den of zen.

INSIDER TIP The hammam is amazingly realigning, involving a mud massage and salt exfoliation on the warm stones – you'll still feel the glow long after the 90-minute treatment has finished.

BOOK IT Healing Holidays (+44 20 7843 3592; healingholidays.co.uk/condenast) offers a four-night retreat from £4,580 per person, full board, including flights and transfers.

