



Sleeping Around: Chateau Challain Castle

By Marlyn D. Hill and Michelle Winner

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You've heard it many times before. Two girlfriends decide to chuck it all for a few weeks and fulfill their own dreams. So where to go? Well certainly, France. We made plans to soak up all of the culture, history, art, music, fine cuisine and wines that we could savor.

And in addition, we should spend some time in Paris. Of course, we also wanted to indulge a childhood fantasy and sleep in a castle.

There are about 3,000 castles in France, and we visited several in the Loire and Burgundy regions. Still, we wanted to stay in one, which was more of a challenge. Asking around, a friend suggested Chateau Challain Castle, located in Challain la Potherie. From Paris, we went by Rail Europe to the ancient town of Angers. The van from Chateau Challain picked us up at the train station and transported us to the chateau. Driving through the countryside, we soon motored under the chateau's gate, tires on crunching white rock drive, and were spirited up to the front of an enchanting fairy-tale castle. This was truly our dream world come to life. At only an hour and a half from the city of light, and no less grand than her older counterparts in the Loire, this relatively young chateau in neo-Gothic style, sometimes dubbed the "petit Chambord," invites visitors for a few nights or longer stay.

Chateau Challain in Challain la Potherie exists for dreamers. It began as the dream of Albert de la Rochefoucauld and his beloved wife, the Countess Ida. In 1847, they started with a design created for them by the Parisian architect Louis Visconti. The castle is thus not medieval, but stems from 1848, during the reign of Napoleon III. It is easy to see why this is also a favorite spot for weddings and corporate events. The American couple who now own this castle purchased it

for about \$2 million in 2001 and have done a fabulous job with the expensive task of renovation and finding appropriate furnishings. They've at least doubled or tripled their investment in it, working alongside crews and employing 70 local residents full time. In addition to fulfilling a couple's dream to share their "home" with the world, the chateau has brought life and endearment back to a small village.

We toured the chateau's beautiful formal rooms, library, chapel, and climbed further up the circular staircase to our floors (no elevator). There were several exquisite bedrooms and suites to select from and all were completely different with respect to size, views and décor. One favorite of ours was swathed in deep shades of purple and maroon, truly befitting an empress. It was elegantly decorated with paintings, parquet floors, carved wooden wall panels, and a high poster bed layered in linens that complemented lavish silk curtains pooling on the floor. Another exceptional room faced the castle gardens. Its sitting room and bedroom walls glowed with painted toile silk and fine polished furniture. The en suite bathroom with claw foot tub and shower was enrobed in marble-- truly a space fit for a queen.

That evening, owner's assistant Jean Marie and chef Fabian joined us for dinner, taking us to dine in the next town, Candé, at Les Tonnelles. We all enjoyed our own meals and oh'd and ah'd at each others' selections. Getting to know Jean Marie and Fabian made the entire evening more delightful.

Staying in the castle's Empress Suite and Toile de Joile was as elegant as it sounds. We can say we were each missing our own Prince Charming, as this is such a romantic place, but slept well.

In the morning, after some time in the library upstairs on the Internet to make our travel arrangements back to Paris, we wandered down the staircase and through halls and took more stairs to

the kitchen. In the warm cozy kitchen, Fabian had prepared fresh croissants, orange juice, homemade jam, and all the right accompaniments set out on an immense wooden table in front of the fireplace. We sat down to a steaming pot of hot chocolate and some tea, thinking about how wonderful this entire experience had been. The best part is that you can come here yourself.

Maybe you'd like to climb out of your sports car, amble up the stairs into your private chateau, and be greeted with a glass of Champagne? Or perhaps you envision floating down the glowing marble staircase in your wedding gown to dance the night away with your prince? For corporate incentives, you

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may want to recognize the knights of your organization. Chateau Challain can be your answer. They can rent out the entire chateau to you and supply preferred vendors and the chateau owners' assistants.

After a few days in busy Paris, tripping over lines at the Louvre, most visitors will long for a quiet place in the country. For a retreat to the French countryside, we recommend this private chateau where your dreams can be indulged. Here at Chateau Challain, your dreams can come true. ■