



BALTIC BEAUTY
The medieval town of Visby. Below, glamping at Surflogiet farm stay Sibbjäns

well-placed barbecues, it's a perfect sunset spot, too. If you fancy something close to a boozy night out, a flight of craft pours at Snausarve microbrewery, fresh, fruity rosé from Långmyre vineyard or a trip to Lindgårdens dedicated "gin garden" should do the trick.

WHERE TO GET YOUR WELLNESS HIT To experience "Viking wellness", a dip among the water lilies in Sibbjäns' cold, natural pool is to be interrupted only by stints in the adjacent sauna, complete with adorable woollen sauna hats. The team will also hook you up with a massage. Surflogiet has yoga, meditation classes and saunas, except the latter has you rushing into the sea for your cool-down dip. There's a community-run sauna on the Burgsviks marina, and one operated just outside Visby's storied walls, Havsspa's floating sauna — all self-regulated slices of local culture.

HOW TO GET THERE Gotland is reached via a 45-minute flight from Stockholm or a three-hour ferry. Scandinavian Airlines (flysas.com) and Norwegian (norwegian.com) operate domestic flights from Stockholm to Visby, while Destination Gotland (destinationgotland.se) operates the high-speed passenger ferries from Nynäshamn (an hour south of Stockholm via commuter train) directly into Visby harbour. Scandinavian Airlines operates frequent flights from London Heathrow to Stockholm Arlanda. Alternatively, lower-cost options to Stockholm include Ryanair (ryanair.com) out of London Stansted or Norwegian from London Gatwick.



UP ON THE ROOF
Soukana has a contemporary wellness feel

A RIVIERA RETREAT

Zannier Île de Bendor

One of the many things I like about private island hotels (don't hate me, but I've stayed at a few) is how quickly they force you to switch off, cocooned in their self-contained worlds. My wife and I are normally guilty of tearing around trying to check out every restaurant and bar in a 100-mile radius, but send us off to an island and we relax in minutes, free from the pressures of travel list-ticking.

We don't want every trip to be a fly and flop of course, but after a hectic work week in London, a trip to the new Zannier Île de Bendor hotel felt like just the ticket. This rocky island off the coast of Bandol between Marseille and Saint-Tropez was bought by pastis king Paul Ricard in the 1950s and became a magnet for artists, celebrities and Riviera hedonists in its mid-century heyday. Now, following an extensive five-year restoration by the Ricard family and Zannier Hotels, it has reopened as a luxurious 93-room retreat. Our weekend began with a 7am flight from City Airport to Toulon

(British Airways has recently launched a direct flight), followed by an hour's drive to Bandol Port where the Zannier speedboat whisked us over to Bendor. The island is so close to the mainland that the journey is almost comically short — locals simply used to swim over — and soon we're stepping ashore in the pretty little harbour lined with old fishermen's houses, so picture-perfect it could be a film set.

Other than those ex-fishermen's houses, which are now luxe guest rooms, the bulk of the accommodation is split between two areas at opposite ends of the island: Delos, which leans into Riviera retro glamour, and Soukana, which has a more contemporary wellness feel. We stayed in the latter, in a smart corner suite with textured terracotta-coloured walls, natural woods, soft tones, and glorious sea views on all sides. The island itself is tiny, making everything a short stroll away, and apart from a private residence retained by the Ricard family, guests are free to roam wherever they please.

The early flight carried the bonus of an early lunch at one of the island's four restaurants, which include the Mediterranean-spanning Nonna Bazaar, Vietnamese-inspired dishes at Soukana, and fine dining at Le Grand Large. We settled into a shady poolside table at Delos, with lovely views out to sea. A rosé from Bandol is offered almost immediately. It's just gone midday. Oh, why not? The waiter brings us two large pours, sees the bottle is nearly empty and drains the rest into our glasses. Top marks for service, then.

After a lobster salad and a club sandwich with fries, we take up a sunbed by the rocks and spend the afternoon jumping into the

Mediterranean Sea. A coastal path around the island is dotted with several little nooks to sit in, some with steps into the water, so it's easy to find a peaceful spot of your own. Staff will even set up deckchairs and umbrellas for you on the rocks, undoubtedly the best seats on the island.

Our weekend continued in this blissfully peaceful rhythm of swimming, reading and eating our way across the island — we found Nonna Bazaar to be the best, though food throughout is solid rather than revelatory. We fully leant into the lazy days, but those with a more active disposition will find plenty to do, including watersports, daily fitness activities like yoga, boutique stores, an art gallery and games including pétanque, pickleball and tennis. There are also four swimming pools, including a lap-worthy rooftop number at Soukana and outdoor and indoor pools at the Resonance spa, which also has a steam room, sauna and an array of treatments.

On our final afternoon, waiting for the boat back, we sat at the Café Paul Ricard with vintage Ricard posters, sipping pastis in the hot sun. Pastis is not a taste I have entirely acquired, but it felt like a fitting end to the weekend, to raise a glass to the man who created this private island paradise.

Bendor already succeeds brilliantly as a place to slow down, and the setting is spectacular. Although the hotel itself still feels like it's growing into its setting, it has every chance of becoming one of the Côte d'Azur's standout luxury hotels. **Joel Porter**

Rooms from £540 per night including breakfast, zannierhotels.com

ESCAPE THE CITY

Folkestone, Kent

STAY On the boardwalk, with views of Folkestone's burnt-orange sunsets and sparkling English Channel, it has to be one of Shoreline's beach houses. Minutes from Sea Scrub Sauna, where a beachside cold plunge will cleanse you of your London sins. From £413, shorelinefolkestone.co.uk



EAT Stroll along to the harbour for a cracking dinner at Rocksalt. You'll find clever menus leaning heavily on Kentish produce and more of those pinch-me views.

SHOP The Old High Street is where it's at. Nab one-of-a-kind preloved fashion at Bounce Vintage, support local artists at East Cliff Creatives and lose hours antique-hunting at Rennies Seaside Modern.

DRINK You'll need a password to get into the Potting Shed's speakeasy, but it's worth it for owner David Holden's concoctions. The Pilot on the beach cannot be bettered for location and vibes.

Suzannah Ramsdale

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