



SPRING IN FRANCE CHATEAU DES VIGIERS

Having been a frequent visitor to France for many many years, one of the first discussions is the method of travel, and then the route. Experience has taught that it is far better to travel by car, particularly when it is for an extended stay, and further that for us based in the south of England, the ports of Portsmouth or Poole become the obvious choice.

The first destination across the Channel, dictates the final selection, and Caen has become favoured option, though the Brittany Ferries overnight service to St Malo is a very close second. The buffet in the restaurant on board is worth the longer sea crossing, with the advantage of a shorter drive to the South. The weather is not the deciding factor for an early Spring trip, but 2009 was a spectacular exception, a long period of high pressure gave most unseasonal sunshine, with temperatures consistently in the high twenties centigrade.

The area from the Dordogne to the Mediterranean has long been a popular destination for the British visitor and also for the emigrant settlers escaping from the UK, a situation that has been damaged by the fall in the value of the pound against the euro. However there is still a very strong community, and a favourite destination for golfers is the beautiful complex at Chateau des Vigiers, just a few miles from Bergerac.

The approach to the chateau is memorable, from the brow of the hill, past neat rows of



vines, it appears on the skyline, set back behind the ornamental lakes, with the huge pigeonaire standing like a sentry guarding the front. It is always impressive sight, and the return visit is to see the new Relais, part of a major eight million euro investment by the owners, that included the new nine hole course La Vallee.

The new four star hotel was built to provide additional accommodation for golfers, built in an eco conscious manner, from traditional and local materials. It mimics a tobacco warehouse, a utility that used to be a major crop in the region.

The forty rooms all have a balcony or a terrace with direct views over the golf course, and are a short walk from the pro shop and the first tees of both courses. The spa, swimming pool and fitness centre are all housed in the building, which offers the complete package for golfers.

The extra accommodation now means that visitors have a choice of staying in the very

traditional chateau, the self contained apartments, or the new and modern relais. There are two restaurants, tennis courts, a luxury spa and firmness centre, and an extensive practice facility at the chateau, truly something for everyone.

The new nine hole golf course was opened last year, and it has already matured well, the perfect compliment to the old course. Both courses were designed by Donald Steel, who made full use of the natural contours of the land to provide a challenging course in 1991. The development, which included the refurbishment of the chateau, which was built in 1597, the building of the course, and the re-establishment of the vineyards was the brainchild of Lars Petersson and his wife Elizabeth.

His appointment of Bernard Petine was the real success story, very experienced in the hotel and leisure industry, he brought all his skills to bear in making the new venture a complete success story. Sadly Lars passed away in 2004, but his dream is kept alive

by the remaining investors and the dedicated staff. The main course is set in two loops of nine, the ninth and eighteenth greens set in front of the chateau, defended by the two lakes and ornamental ponds, that make the view so delightful.

There is much to do in the region for the days when golf is not on the agenda. It is a few short miles to the wine regions of Bordeaux and St Emilion in particular.

A delightful town steeped in the traditions of great wine. Bergerac and the Dordogne are nearer still, with the medieval towns of Sarlat and Issigeac convenient for a day out.

The prehistoric caves at Padirac and Cognac, and the heritage sites at La Roque St Christophe and Rocamadour attract visitors from the world over.

For the more energetic there is canoeing and horse riding, and even hang gliding for the real enthusiasts.

Chateau des Vigiers has everything to offer, luxury accommodation, gourmet food and wine, and plenty to exercise the mind and body on course and in the surrounding region.



The ideal place to stay and be pampered. **Michael Rees**

