

Escape: Report

by NICOLE TRILIVAS

DOES the Airelles Collection mean anything to you? Unless you're a well-connected (and deep-pocketed) traveller or a diehard travel industry insider, like me... probably not.

The bijou French boutique hotel group is not on most people's radars. All this, however, is about to change.

Set in the sun-splashed Riviera and with movie star good looks, the 86-room Airelles Saint-Tropez, Chateau de la Messardiere is reported to be the next high-profile hotel to be used for TV hit *The White Lotus* (Brit Aimee Lou Wood appeared in the last series), according to film magazine *Variety*.

While the seasonal property is not officially confirming or denying this, it will – I can confirm – make a brilliant choice after the first three series which featured Hawaii, Siouly and Thailand.

It is a wonderful spot and I have the most deliciously opulent memories of my recent summer stay.

The chateau dates back to 1904 and joined the Airelles Collection in 2021.

From the cypress-lined cobbled drive, the chateau takes my breath away when I first lay eyes on it from the back of the Airelles-branded Tiffany-blue electric Mini Moke. My driver is a dapper gent from the hotel, and as we pull up to the entrance glittering views of Pampelonne Bay and the Bay of Saint-Tropez spread out below. What a great first impression – and it only gets better from there.

My intimate, Provençal room is stocked with a complimentary minibar and salon-grade bespoke toiletries, and comes with an oversized soaking tub. Some suites even have private pools (which makes me think of the *risque ménage à trois* scene in *The White Lotus*'s Siouly season).

The restaurants, which will also make for a gorgeous filming backdrop, serve dishes that live up to every French stereotype of culinary superiority. The Marie Antoinette-worthy breakfast spread of viennoiseries and fluffy eggs at La Table de La Messardiere is simply superb.

MEANWHILE, the sea-fresh sushi and frosty sake cocktails served at sunset at the parasol-studded Matsuhisa by Chef Nobu are absolutely dreamy. And, since my stay, word has reached me that one of the world's hottest patissiers, Cedric Grolet, has set up shop at La Messardiere.

Things are getting even better still. Grolet is famed for his trompe-l'œil fruit – treats that look like one thing but taste like another.

But what is the real pleasure of a stay at this sumptuous chateau? For me, it's relaxing in the opulent surroundings and doing very little – which any *White Lotus* aficionado will tell you is when much of the subtle character-building subtext of the moreish HBO series happens.

I while away hot afternoons by the baguette-shaped lap pool surrounded by well manicured gardens. I venture to the cool and cocooning Valmont spa. And I take a highly pleasurable jaunt down to the hotel's beach club, Jardin Tropezina.

You can ask for a lift in the hotel's Rolls-Royce Cullinan if you're in the mood to be extra

Inside the new White Lotus hotel



Ready for its close-up:
Airelles Saint-Tropez,
Chateau de la Messardiere

fanoy. It is at this moment, on the drive down, that I realise I'd have made a fantastic extra as a lady of leisure in the forthcoming series (producers, do feel free to call).

While floating between the pool, spa and beach club is a fine way to exist, this is not all there is to La Messardiere.

The hotel also has shaded tennis courts (a rarity in Saint-Tropez), e-bikes and plenty to keep children occupied.

Of the latter, a contact of mine, Kevin Triboulet, a luxury travel consultant at BOUND, says the kids' club is 'one of the best in the world', with a pair of pools, a private cinema and 'even a mini farm'.

Of the chateau overall, Triboulet says: 'What I love most about La Messardiere is its unbeatable location – perfectly positioned between the town and the beach clubs. You're close to the energy yet far enough to enjoy total tranquillity.'

You do indeed get that feeling of being one step removed from the expensive boutiques, superyachts and crowds of central Saint-Tropez – and that's all part of its charm. There's a perfect mix of Bardot-era fantasy, nouveau riche glamour and plenty of Mediterranean sunshine, of course.

Hotels featured in *The White Lotus* are never going to be cheap, and rates at La Messardiere start at around the £1,400 a night mark (£1,213).

'It comes at a premium,' says Triboulet. 'But once you're there, you're fully immersed, with a wealth of complimentary services and experience.'

These include the highly personalised attention (which I certainly enjoyed), high-end welcome gifts and a rich and generous food and beverage offering. Think homemade ice-cream passed out freely by the pool – plus the complimentary well-stocked minibars.

Part of me wants

Lotus position:
Aimee Lou Wood
in the hit show

