

And so to Châteauneuf-Villevieille, 30 minutes, and a whole world, away from Nice. There are 15 hairpin bends up to what was a mountain farming village. This is 13 more than I usually appreciate, for I have the head for heights of a halibut.



Châteauneuf-Villevieille CREDIT: CREDIT: NICEARTPHOTO / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO/NICEARTPHOTO / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

A relief, then, to get to La Parare chambres-d'hôtes slotted in on the edge of the village – and not merely because my internal organs unfroze.

La Parare is an exceptional spot, emerging almost organically from rocks and mountainscape. It's a 17th-century sheepfold of vaulted rooms, stairs, arches, nooks, crannies and a terraced garden which edges into the garrigue by way of olive trees and much else which is grey-green.



You could hide out there with a book and a sunhat for a week, especially given that there's a garden honesty bar to hand – and views to the southern Alps so dramatic that it's surprising they're free. Swedish Karin and Franco-Dutch Sydney have invested the place with life, taste, a pool, exotica from Asian travels and a sense that, though they're in the hospitality business, they're not screwing up 1,000 years of history.





"Here was the warmest possible welcome - and good conversation"

"You want to go to visit Peille and Peillon? They're beautiful villages perched even higher than we are," asked Sydney. "No, thank you," I said, with a certain firmness. "I have run through my monthly allocation of hairpins."

Instead, we took a beer at a garden table. Later, we were joined for dinner by guests from France, Germany and Switzerland. The fellow from Switzerland worked for the World Health Organisation. He had recently returned from North Korea where, as he told it brilliantly, he'd had terrible trouble finding Pyongyang's only advertised pizzeria.