

EUROPE ■ FAMILY TRAVEL

Classic elegance at IHG's Le Grand Hotel in Bordeaux

By Heidi Sarna | Sep 27, 2018



A richly decorated Superior Double Room at the InterContinental Bordeaux – Le Grand Hotel.

It's the wine that entices travelers to Bordeaux, France, an important producer since the heyday of the Roman Empire. Set on a bend of the muddy Garonne River less than 100 miles from the Atlantic Ocean, many explore the region's vineyards on roundtrip river cruises from the city.

That's what I did with my family last summer, enjoying five nights aboard CroisiEurope's 174-passenger *Cyrano De Bergerac*. Like many cruise passengers, we stayed on in the beautiful city, spending two nights at the InterContinental Bordeaux – Le Grand Hotel.

Set in the heart of the Old City in the Place de la Comedie, the luxury heritage property faces the 18th-century, neoclassical Grand-Theatre, a colonnaded masterpiece built by architect Victor Louis.

Much of Bordeaux is preserved as a Unesco World Heritage Site, and after Paris, the city boasts France's second-largest number of protected 18th-century limestone buildings, a melange of ornate architectural styles.

As compelling as exploring Bordeaux is, you'll also want to spend time inside the elegant Le Grand Hotel, itself a historical treasure that became a part of the InterContinental Hotels Group in 2015. Its origins go back to 1789, when it was built as a mansion by Louis. Original elements include the gorgeous limestone facade and several meetings rooms with ornate ceiling murals, wall treatments and chandeliers.

There are also newer spaces as the result of a major renovation in 2007, including the hotel's panoramic rooftop bar and its expansive spa and fitness center. World-renowned interior designer Jacques Garcia decorated 130 new rooms and suites, including 21 with views of the Grand-Theatre, in an opulent baroque style, using dark woods, burgundy velvets and brocade drapes with tasseled cords.

Our Executive Junior Suite was the perfect abode for our family of four, with a queen bed, large pullout sofa bed and two bathrooms with heated floors.

As you would expect, the concierge is an important person in a hotel like this. All Clefs d'Or (Golden Key) members, they spend much of their time arranging private excursions to the region's famous chateaux and vineyards, from Saint-Emilion to Margaux, Medoc and Sauternes.

Others ask for restaurant recommendations, and there are many choices around the city, including the hotel's two Gordon Ramsay-run establishments: the Michelin-starred Le Pressoir d'Argent and the more casual (and less expensive) Le Bordeaux brasserie, where we dined one evening on fish and chips and risotto.

Other times we strolled around town and tried our luck, finding charming French bistros for delicious croque-monsieurs, goat cheese salads, snails, pizza and inexpensive regional wines. The hotel's concierge arranged a guided bicycle tour with Bruno, a tall, handsome thespian with a handlebar mustache, black beret and a vintage bicycle from 1941. We followed him around the city and pedaled across the beautiful, arched stone Pont de Pierre bridge that was commissioned by Napoleon Bonaparte. We ended our lovely, two-wheeled outing at Le Boulanger de l'Hotel de Ville, a little bakery where I greedily enjoyed a huge pink praline brioche as an animated Bruno shared his insider knowledge of beautiful Bordeaux.

Rates start at \$338 per night for a Superior Double Room in low season and \$467 in high season (May, June, September and early October).