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A Foraged Feast at Hotel Benvengudo.

May 6, 2016 by Fiona Maclean — 9 Comments

Building Tradition with Terroir – Hotel Benvengudo:

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One of the highlights of my last visit to Provence was a trip to Brantes to go foraging with [Les Aventurières du Goût](#). So, I am well aware of the wealth of edible plants and flowers growing in the region. Hotel Benvengudo, though, is a fabulous four-star hotel in the heart of Les Baux de Provence, somewhere with a reputation for fine dining in addition to some stunning and comfortable rooms, a pretty garden complete with swimming pool and boules court and a small olive grove. Hardly somewhere you'd expect to find such a focus on the wild produce of the area.

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It is a very different kind of place to Brantes, which has its own unique style of informal cooking and dining, but it's no less successful. Here, the addition of foraged ingredients added to a fine dining experience in a way that made the food truly memorable and linked to the stunning landscapes and terroir of Les Baux de Provence.





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Joined by Angie from [Silverspoon London](#) and Neil, a journalist from Manchester, it was warm enough for us to sit outside on the terrace sampling some of the local wines on our first night. We were delighted by the canapés served by chef Stéphane Gautier. He's part of a new team at Hotel Benvengudo and has only been in place for a few months. Throughout our stay we were treated to some exquisite dishes he created, inspired by local produce and enhanced by foraged plants and flowers. It wasn't until towards the end of our trip that we caught up with him to learn more about his ethos.

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“La cuisine, c'est un moment de partage et d'émotions.

J'aspire à vous proposer ma vision personnelle des produits exceptionnels de nos petits producteurs et maraîchers, en essayant d'être le plus juste possible.

Toute l'équipe de la maison vous souhaite une bonne table.

Stéphane Gautier



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Stephane arrived in the comfy lounge with a large platter heaped with ingredients for evening service. He told us that he goes foraging every day, picking new ingredients and tailoring the menu to take advantage of what he finds. And that the main ingredients are also sourced locally where ever possible, from farmers markets. The result is both delicious and at times quite thrilling.

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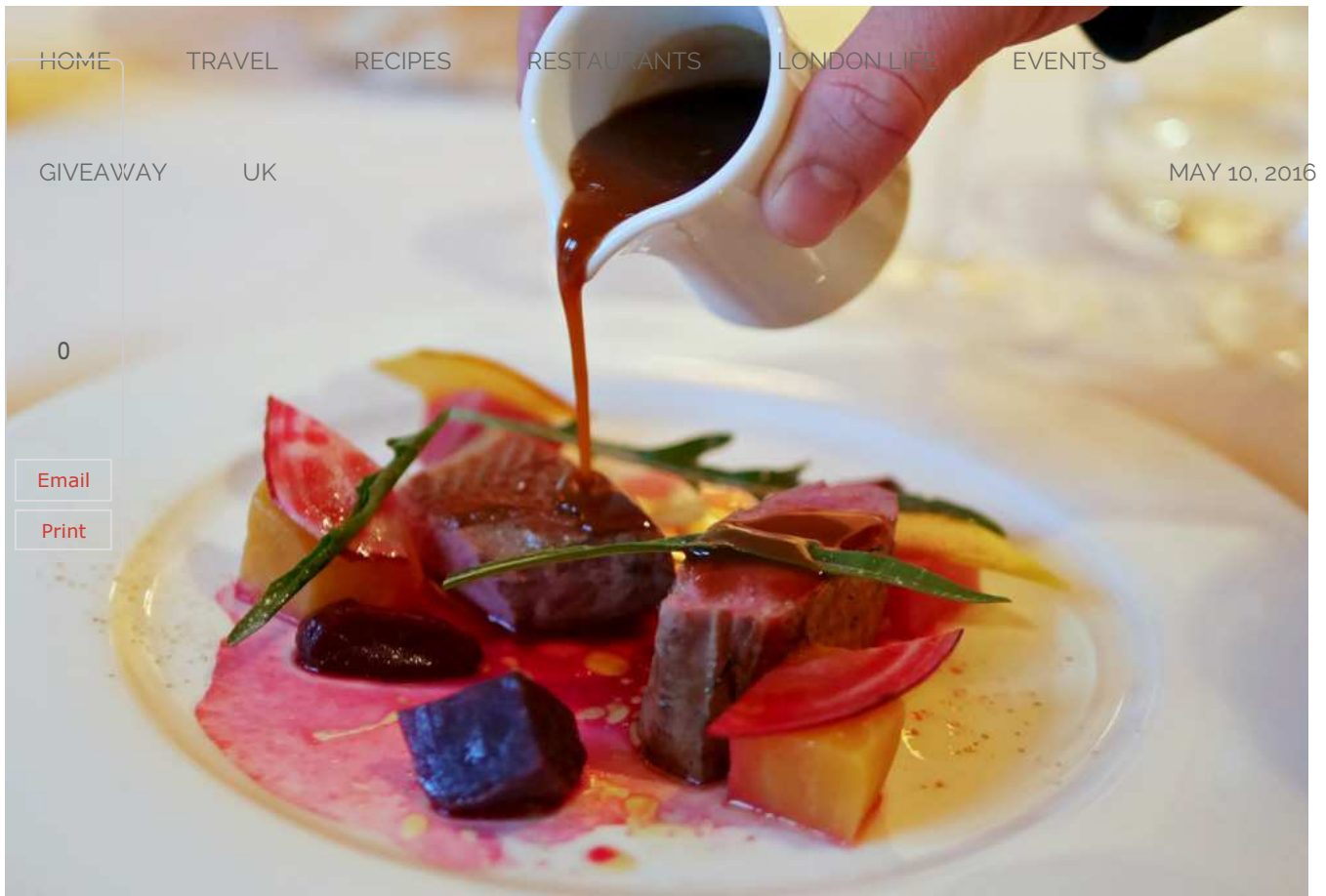


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I particularly enjoyed a duck breast smoked with pine cones and pine needles and served with beetroots. Perfectly cooked pink flesh that was wonderfully tender and had just a hint of pine smoke to complement the earthy beet.



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The entire menu that night, our last evening, was stunning and perfectly composed. We started with violet artichoke served with a parmesan crumble, onion compôte and a little foie gras. Lovely earthy yet fresh flavours and a great way to introduce the duck.





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That meal finished with perhaps my favourite dessert, though that might just be something to do with chocolate...lots of it. Le Chocolat Noir was a deconstructed dish with a mousse, a chocolate crumb and a biscuit. And with a hay ice-cream to offset the richness of the dark chocolate.

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It was an intense journey enhanced by the flavours of the local terroir and appropriately paired with local wines (red, rose, and white) from Mas de la Dame.

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The balance of dishes on the set menus was outstanding. The previous night we'd enjoyed seasonal white asparagus served with sauce meunière, an almond croûte and a little wild rocket, followed by line caught hake cooked with carrot and wild rosemary and then a baba with lavender ice and honey glaze. Each dish immaculate, but with careful menu planning meaning that the sum effect was greater than the individual components.





The kitchen at Benvengudo is tiny. Stéphane prepares the food with the support of a pastry chef and one other chef de cuisine. And, the fine dining restaurant serves 40 covers. It is quite some task for a small team to offer both a la carte and a range of set menus every night with such creativity. But, the heart of Benvengudo is in its food offering.



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The current owners are the daughter and son in law of the Beaupieds, who founded the restaurant with rooms in 1967. Daniel Beaupied trained with Paul Bocuse and was Head Chef at the Tavern Riboto in Les Baux de Provence where he earned a Michelin star.

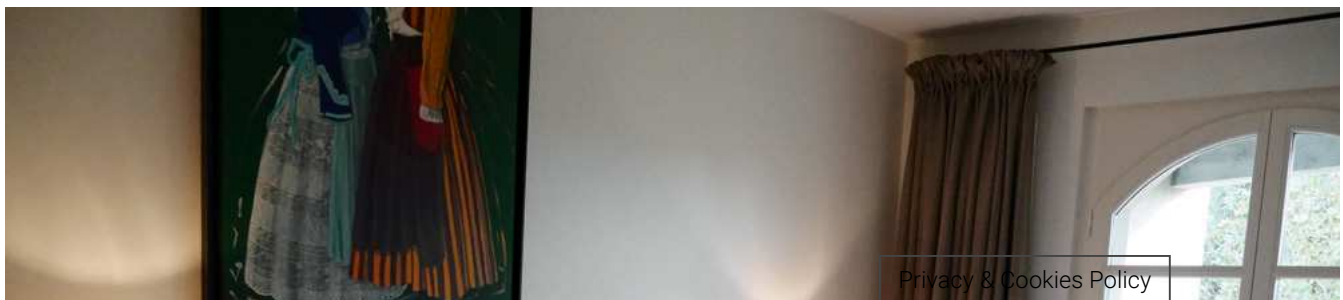
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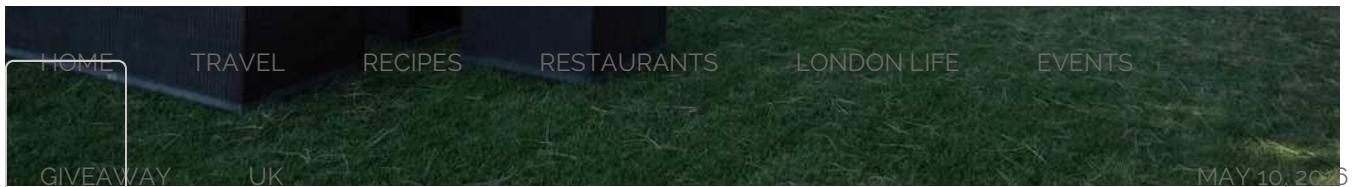
Food was at the heart of the original enterprise. Family tragedy struck when their son, who also trained with Bocuse and was in the process of taking up the reins at Benvengudo died in an unforeseen accident. It was left to daughter Carole and her husband Victor to take over – as she told me, the place had too many memories for her to let it close.





Now the hotel is managed by Céline Marneur Both Stéphane and Celine run the place as if it was their own family enterprise, with Carole and Viktor on hand to support at weekends and with the Beaupieds themselves still keeping a watchful eye and helping out where necessary. It's a chic and yet comfortable place to stay, with large rooms each with their own private balcony or terrace and with tasteful simple decor that marries contemporary fittings with local antiques.





There's a charming garden, a swimming pool and boules for visitors who just want to stay at the hotel. More of what else you can do in the area will follow – as you may imagine, I'd suggest planning at least some time in your itinerary to relax at the hotel itself and enjoy the food.

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Hotel Benvengudo

Quartier de l'Arcoule (D78F)
13520 Les Baux de Provence
FRANCE

+33 (0)4 90 54 32 54

reservations@benvengudo.com

Disclaimer: We were guests of Hotel Benvengudo. All content is editorially given

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Jess says

May 6, 2016 at 11:21 pm

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It looks like a beautiful location and all the food looks stunning! I love the idea of the chef going foraging each day and being inspired by what he finds 😊

Jess xo

Reply



Leigh at Fashion Du Jour LDN says

May 6, 2016 at 11:37 pm

This was delight to read and transported ne away with you. The hotel is utterly gorgeous and the food sounds out of this world! I love duck, so that dish sounds right up my alley.

Thanks for sharing,

Reply



Carly says

May 7, 2016 at 10:14 am

Sorry, can't leave a long comment, too busy trying to ravage the kitchen now for food – because this post made me hungry!! 😊 Seriously those dishes look unreal. You lucky bugger! x

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LeAnna says
May 7, 2016 at 10:45 am

It always amazes me what people can do with food! Pine cones!? How cool! This all sounds (and looks) delicious!!!

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Toni | 2 Aussie Travellers says
May 7, 2016 at 11:38 am

That food looks amazing! I love to cook and try new things in the kitchen but I am so inspired by someone who can come up with the idea of smoking a duck breast (to perfection no less) over pine cones and pine needles. It all looks incredibly delicious.

Reply



Mar says
May 8, 2016 at 5:20 am

Super nice and I love food that comes from the land. Heading to France soon for a food feast in sure. These dishes looked so beautiful and the place so peaceful

Reply



Angie Silver (@SilverSpoonLDN) says
May 8, 2016 at 6:10 pm

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What a fantastic time we had!!

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Brenda Tolentino says
May 8, 2016 at 8:48 pm

The food looks so delicious and fresh! I long to go back to Provence very soon and Hotel Benvengudo sure makes it very enticing to visit. I love their food ethos and the duck looks divine. The duck and the asparagus is just the kind of food I love. The hotel looks like a perfect luxurious stay.

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Fiona Maclean says
May 8, 2016 at 8:52 pm

It's a lovely base – the hotel is good enough to just stay there, but there are also some fabulous things to see in the region

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