



HOTEL BELLE EPOQUE

Historic boutique hotel evokes Baden-Baden's golden age

It was the golden age of Baden-Baden, the "summer capital of Europe." Queen Victoria, Victor Hugo and Brahms would stroll its leafy Lichtentaler Allee park, and the rich and famous would watch horse races and gamble in the casino, once described by Marlene Dietrich as the most beautiful in the world. Against this backdrop, a duke-cum-entrepreneur built a neo-renaissance villa in 1874. It's now the exquisite Hotel Belle Epoque, located in the center of today's fashionable spa town.

A member of Small Luxury Hotels of the World, the hotel has two buildings. The 22 rooms and suites are individually decorated

by the owner's wife, an interior designer. Stay in the historic older building, it's more atmospheric than the newer addition. Its rooms are themed according to Louis XV, Victorian and so on. If the hotel isn't busy, you may look inside and choose which one to stay in. We picked the luxuriously furnished Louis IV suite. It features high ornamental ceilings, oak floors, burgundy silk lampshades, an enormous ornate gilt-framed picture of Louis IV over the carved king-bed headboard, a little sitting room with floral-upholstered antique furniture and brocade drapes over lace curtains.

In some respects, it's a little quirky – we had a keyed armoire instead of cupboards and could only use the hand-held shower sitting down in the open Jacuzzi tub. But we also had modern essentials like individual air-conditioning, hair dryer and complimentary in-room Internet. And the charm of the place is such that we were happy to forgive the minor quirks. In fact, practically everything was a joy to discover, right down to the daintily etched French crystal glasses in the bathroom.



A full buffet breakfast and afternoon tea are included in the rates. After ambling along Baden-Baden's cobblestone streets one afternoon, browsing bookshops and ogling Prada shoe stores, we sat on the hotel's outdoor stone terrace for tea. Young gents in pinstriped pants and tails served us cappuccinos. And we nibbled fresh cakes and scones from black-and-gold, Royal Doulton bone china. Just as we imagine the duke did over a century ago, before his villa became the Hotel Belle Epoque. — JANICE AND GEORGE MUCALOV

