

Leah Travels France November

By Leah Walker

Visit this Museum

Not many people visit Musée Nissim de Camondo. I should know, because I live across the street from this mansion-turned-museum on the edge of Parc Monceau. Count Moïse de Camondo designed his home after the Petit Trianon at Versailles specifically to hold his bulging collection of antiques — and filled it with exquisite and rare 18th century paintings, furniture, and objets d'art. Moïse was from a wealthy Turkish banking family and had two children: Nissim and Béatrice. A French aviator, Nissim died during World War I. Devastated, Moïse spent the rest of his life creating the museum in memory of his son, which was then bequeathed to France. The mansion is just as Moïse

left it, giving visitors a look into aristocratic life in the early 20th century. Pick up an audio guide and don't miss the massive collection of Sèvres china. The museum is closed on Monday and Tuesday. Musée Nissim de Camondo, 63 rue de Monceau, 75008 Paris

Sample this Service

Moving from Texas to Paris, I had far more luggage than my airline allowed. Rather than pay for additional and likely overweight bags, I looked to First Luggage. This door-to-door international delivery service picked up my two massive bags in Houston, and within two days, they arrived at my hotel in Paris. Meanwhile, I flew with two small bags, making changing planes



As the owner of Paris by the Glass, Preston aims to give visitors a glimpse of French culture through the lens of wine and food.

Preston offers classes and tastings through Cook'n with Class in Montmartre. This is where I took his 'Wine & Cheese' class. During the two hours, I discovered new cheeses (and how to cut each shape), as well as the basics of French wine. Through Context Travel, Preston leads his gourmet food and walking tours. From market visits to a chocolate-themed walk, his small group tours lead lovers of food and wine through some of the best food addresses in Paris. For those looking to escape the city, he offers day trips to Champagne and the Loire Valley, as well as customized private tours throughout the wine regions in France. www.parisbythelass.com

Meander this Market

In the sunny city of Nice, there's a bustling market known as Cours Saleya. Located in Old Nice, just behind the Promenade des Anglais, are rows of brightly-colored striped tents covering tables overflowing with locally grown fruits and vegetables, as well as flowers. Specialty items such as jams, sweets and soaps from Marseilles, are also on display. Vendors start selling as early as 6 a.m. from Tuesday to Sunday.

On Monday, a flea market takes over. But this is France, so it's not your average flea market. Roam the various stalls to find vintage flatware, crystal and china. The old prints, postcards and books make unique gifts, and glimpses of real Chanel and Louis Vuitton items aren't unusual. Be sure to take a break at one of the many cafes surrounding Cours Saleya. I particularly like Le Marché for its fresh Mediterranean menu and rosé wine, a must when in Nice. www.nicetourisme.com

Book this Spa

The designation of 'Palace Hotel' by Atout France, the country's tourism office, is a lofty one. This award is meant to recognize the finest of the five-star hotels throughout France. Currently, there are eight such hotels in Paris. As a connoisseur of spas, I've made it my mission to slip into the fluffy, white robes and drink the fruit-infused waters at each of the Palace Hotel spas. To date, I've managed to visit six out of the eight, one of which is The Spa at Mandarin Oriental.



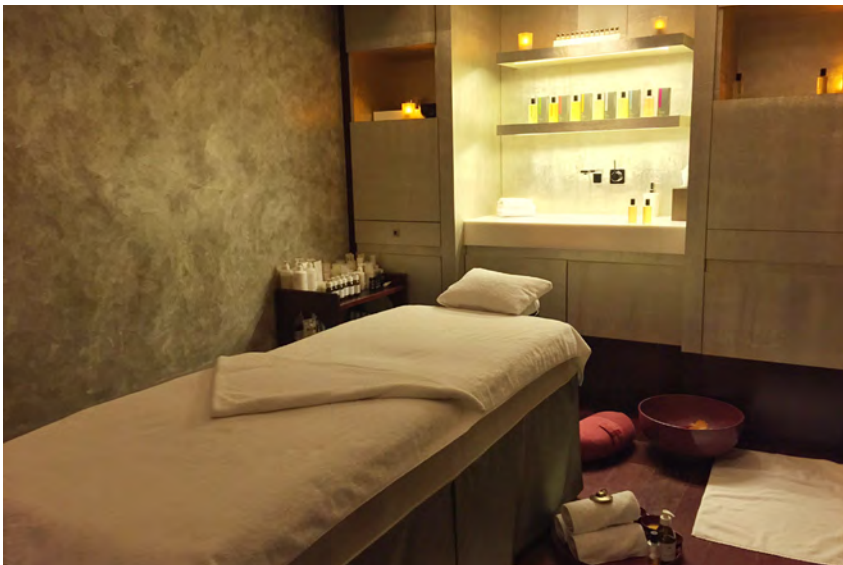
East meets West in this massive temple to relaxation. Leave your shoes and your worries at the door because it's all about pampering. Seven private suites, four designed for couples, feature private changing areas, showers that transform to steam rooms with the turn of a knob, toilets and treatment rooms. Mood lighting, modern design and Guerlain products set the tone for what's to come.

Look to one of the spa's signature offerings, especially the Time Rituals Treatment. Rather than booking a specific treatment, guests are evaluated and the time is tailor-made to meet their needs. A steam shower with Aromatherapy Associates body scrub is followed by a traditional foot ritual and tension-melting massage. Every appointment ends with tea and a special treat from Thierry Marx, Mandarin

and taxi transfers a breeze. And, no time was wasted at baggage claim. Imagine arriving at your hotel and your luggage, golf clubs or ski equipment waiting for you. In cooperation with Eurostar, First Luggage even offers same-day delivery between London and Paris, making it perfect for the business or leisure traveler. I am smitten with this service. www.firstluggage.com

Class is in Session

What's a trip to France without plenty of wine? I say it's about as sad as an empty glass. I think Preston Mohr would agree. A native of Minnesota, Preston has been eating and drinking his way through Paris and France since he was an undergraduate student in 2003.



Oriental's Michelin-starred chef.
Mandarin Oriental, 251 Rue Saint
Honoré, 75001 Paris

Take this Tour

Pierre Taittinger began making



Champagne in 1932, and now, the Taittinger brand is one of the few remaining family-run Champagne companies left. With some 288 hectares of primarily Chardonnay grapes, Taittinger also grows much of its own fruit. Renowned for its elegance and consistency, the house produces around 400,000 cases of Champagne per year.

The Taittinger cellars are located in the center of Reims, making it convenient for those who want a closer look into the prestigious Champagne house. The cellars are located 55 feet below ground and were originally chalk mines dating to the 4th century Gallo-Roman era. During the 13th century, the chalk pits were connected by a series of corridors and repurposed as cellars for Benedictine monks at the Saint Nicaise Abbey, which was destroyed during the French Revolution. Wandering through the underground maze of Champagne, visitors also see vaults and crypts, revealing the cellars' centuries of history. The



tour finishes with a bit of bubbly; arrangements can be made for custom tastings. Champagne Taittinger, 9 place Saint-Nicaise, 51100 Reims

Sample this Specialty

In the Poitou-Charentes region, in the town of Poitiers, macarons look much different than the Ladurée

version we've all come to know. In addition to a different look, Poitiers' le macaroné have a completely different taste and texture. Two sisters by the last name of Chartier created this unique macarion made from Spanish almonds, egg whites and sugar. The recipe has been subsequently passed down through the family for



five generations, and now, only three people know the exact recipe. It wasn't until 1920 that ancestors of the Chartier sisters created the brand, Rannou Métivier, which is the only remaining company in Potiers making macarons with almonds. Crisp on the outside and soft on the inside, Rannou Métivier macarons are available in traditional, pistachio and other seasonal flavors. Rannou Métivier, 30 Rue des Cordeliers, 86000 Poitiers or www.rannou-metivier.com

Chat with a Concierge

I sat down with Lionel Scourvil, Chief Concierge for over twenty years at Hôtel Vernet in Paris, for insight on some of his favorite things from the City of Light.

Leah Walker: What restaurant would you choose for a special dinner?

Lionel Scourvil: A restaurant I like is Maison Blanche on the rooftop of the Théâtre des Champs Élysées. It's a modern atmosphere, not old fashioned, with a view of the Eiffel

Tower. The chef is famous from the South of France, but Maison Blanche has no star. However, it has an excellent reputation. The food is very good and the view of Paris on the terrace is marvelous. Maison Blanche, 15 Avenue Montaigne, 75008 Paris

LW: What is an ideal Saturday in Paris for you?

LS: I leave Paris on the weekends, because I like the countryside. I like the Middle Age atmosphere, the old stone. There are some cities not far from Paris that are very nice, like Rambouillet. It's a former medieval fortress, most famous for its castle, Château de Rambouillet. The city is next to a forest and very pleasant. Rambouillet is only 40 kilometers from Paris and you can take the train, but you really need a car to explore the area.

www.rambouillet-tourism.com

LW: What classic Parisian experience never goes out of style, even for Parisians

LS: There are places in Saint-Germain-des-Prés that have been there for decades, like Café de Flore and Les Deux Magots. They are institutions and not just for tourists. Parisians appreciate these places for their history. The Marais has changed and gone very trendy, but Saint Germain still has the same

atmosphere. Café de Flore, 172 Boulevard Saint-Germain, 75006 Paris; Le Deux Magots, 6 Place Saint-Germain des Prés, 75006 Paris
LW: What is your favorite café in the city?

LS: I think Café Marly at the Louvre. From the windows, you can see some of the 17th century French sculptures, and from the terrace, you see the glass pyramid. I like this kind of atmosphere—the view and the people—I want a lively place. Café Marly, 93 Rue de Rivoli, 75001 Paris
LW: What's trendy in Paris now?

LS: World food is definitely a trend in Paris, even for the grand chefs. For instance, Joël Robuchon is putting truffles on hamburgers, fusing French food with a typically American dish. When people come to France, they say they want French food, but France is moving. There is an evolution. What people think about France and what it really is can be quite different. This can surprise people. Paris is a diverse city with many cultures and the food is reflecting that fact. The food is becoming international, not necessarily French, although the chef comes from France. L'Atelier de Joël Robuchon 133 Avenue des Champs-Élysées, 75008 Paris or 5 rue de Montalembert 75007 Paris

