

# Spectacular Sojourns

Revealing the essential experiences of one of the most beautiful cities in the world, Paris. **By: Mia Tan**



Paris, the perfect setting for love and romance, also happens to be one of the most visited cities in the world, making it a rather crowded place for two. For the seasoned traveller, one will pass on the usual touristy spots and seek out the real essence of the city. INSPIRE Travel takes on the task to reveal a luxurious portrait of Paris, packed with addresses, anecdotes and new experiences in rediscovering Paris' charms.

## BESPOKE ADVENTURES



Stepping out of Charles de Gaulle Airport, the cool and crisp air refreshed the senses before we were whisked off in a Mercedes S550 by a smartly dressed driver to a nearby tarmac 15min away. This was part of a bespoke itinerary arranged by Ultimate Paris Guide ([www.ultimateparisguide.com](http://www.ultimateparisguide.com)). The private airstrip is the boarding area for the hour-long Zeppelin ride (about US\$594 per person) over the city of Paris. Inflated with helium which is completely unflammable, the Zeppelin also has a cockpit with controls comparable to an Airbus. With only 12 seats and panoramic windows, the slow ascent was almost therapeutic as we watched the shadow of the Zeppelin trace the fields below while we floated over spectacular sights around Paris, including Versailles and the Eiffel Tower. It is the only way to put you and your loved one on top of what is often said to be the most beautiful city in the world.

Reluctantly back on earth after such a high, a specially tailored itinerary arrived in the room of InterContinental Le Grand ([www.ihg.com](http://www.ihg.com)) before we did. It was prepared and personally delivered by Mr Zakary Chanou, Founder and CEO of Ultimate Paris Guide ([www.ultimateparisguide.com](http://www.ultimateparisguide.com)). In his years of business, Zakary recounted several guest experiences which included a lady who had a couture rendezvous with designer Elie Saab for her wedding dress, costing a whopping €300,000 or about US\$396,036. Another Russian client had requested flying a private jet to Tahiti to bring back a bag of fresh oysters, not for consumption, but for his selection of the best pearls for his wife.

Opposite page: View of the Eiffel Tower; This page: Café de la Paix



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## BESPOKE ADVENTURES



He added, "As the leading private concierge service, we can meet and provide for the ever increasing requests for top of the range, yet off the tourist path experiences that clients today are demanding, from organising private closed door tours of The Louvre, The Eiffel Tower or even Disneyland to backstage meet and greet with Madonna on her Paris tour."

Personally, we couldn't help but feel like celebrities, pampered in the hands of his team who had indeed made a strong impression from the moment we landed.

If Paris is the most beautiful city in the world, it has long been said that the Seine is its loveliest avenue. We took to the waters at Port Henri IV and sailed off with Yachts de Paris ([www.yachtsdeparis.fr](http://www.yachtsdeparis.fr)) on a sunset cruise aboard Cachemire, a private yacht which has been booked by celebrities such as Brad Pitt, Beyoncé, Carly Rae Jepsen and Madonna. For a very privileged few on the two to 12 guest list (starting from US\$5,445 for six persons), the Cachemire and its fleet of sister yachts, combines the charm of European boats with intimate settings and impeccable taste, showcasing Pierre Frey velvet armchairs and Baccarat crystal glassware. We were treated to a Michelin-starred meal of lobster and thick-cut veal with Dom Pérignon Champagne and were lulled into a sensual mood as we cruised by The Eiffel Tower light show, twinkling in the night sky. The first day had certainly ended on a sweet note.

## PARISIAN ENTICEMENTS



### ELEGANT PATISSERIES

Stephanie Hajjar, founder of Wonderful Time ([www.wonderfultime.com](http://www.wonderfultime.com)) says, "True luxury, today is a combination of authentic experiences and being able to truly connect with other people." The embodiment of that statement is reflected in their stable of talented English-speaking guides, offering beautiful excursions through the capital centered on diverse themes. Tee off with a golf professional on a rite of passage on one of





those never-ending, undulating natural dunes between the land and the sea along the English Channel, where the first games of golf were played. Alternatively, have a personal stylist walk you through the Parisian heart of fashion, inspiring your dress sense with a step back in history of Coco Chanel. You will retrace her footsteps, meet her contemporaries, designers Poiret and Schiaparelli for an insight into Chanel's version of Paris and discover the inspiration behind the world's most popular N° 5 perfume.

Apart from fashion, Paris is also home to many amazing French patissiers and we set out with our guide Alex from Wonderful Time along Rue de Rivoli to seek the origins of the world famous French pastries.

Stepping into the chocolatier, Angelina ([www.angelina-paris.fr](http://www.angelina-paris.fr)) on 226 Rue Rivoli took us right to the sweet spot with their welcoming chocolate scent-infused shop, as you sip on possibly the world's best hot chocolate, enjoying the warm nectar of pure cocoa. Nearby is Hugo Victor ([www.hugovictor.com](http://www.hugovictor.com)), inspired by the famed writer, where the shop display itself is an art, with each column dedicated to a fruit in season and its respective range of dessert. Hugo Victor also has signature designer chocolates (about US\$149 for a Grimoire) to resemble the beauty of our universe and its planets in a book box set, a tribute surely to the late Victor Hugo.

**Opposite page from top:** Yachts de Paris; Relais Christine Lounge; **This page from top:** Mont Blanc, Saint Honore, all from Angelina

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## PARISIAN ENTICEMENTS



it was akin to a  
taste of heaven  
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macaron

Determined to track down the world-famous Ladurée ([www.laduree.com](http://www.laduree.com)), which invented macarons in the 19th century, we found it by following snaking queues leading up to the corner boutique on 21 Rue Bonaparte. It was crowded as expected on a weekend late morning, but Alex very quickly motioned to someone behind the counter, who immediately brought out a box of fresh assorted macarons (about US\$143 for a box set of 60 pieces). It was akin to a taste of heaven with every delicate crusty, cream-filled macaron!

Not too far away on 72 Rue Bonaparte is Pierre Hermé ([www.pierreherme.com](http://www.pierreherme.com)), which also offers you a taste of heavenly macarons. As it is just around the corner from Saint-Sulpice church, if you are a Dan Brown fan, you can pop in to track down the infamous Rose Line in *The Da Vinci Code*.

**This page:** Hotel Plaza Athénée





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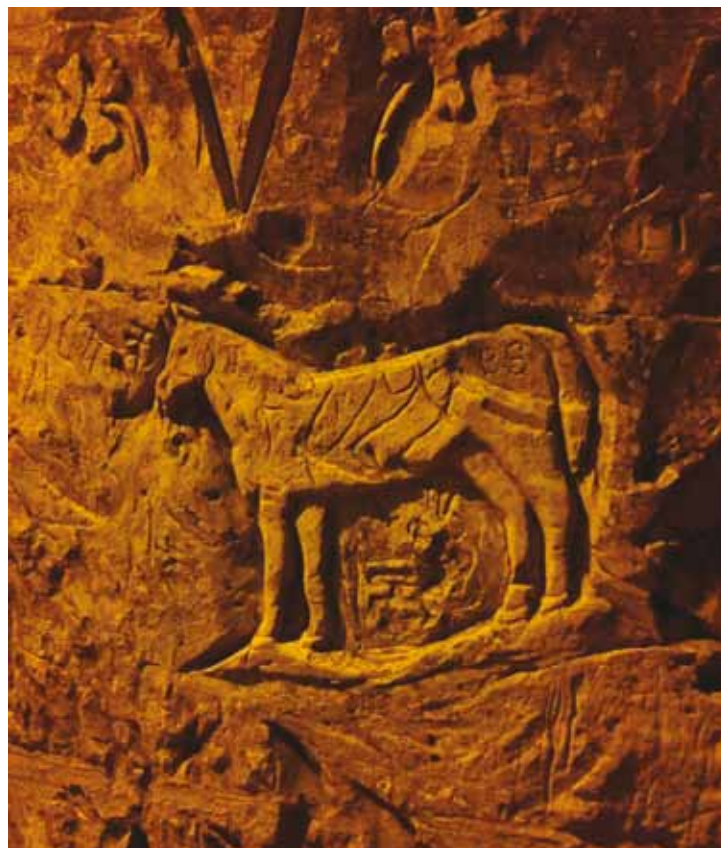
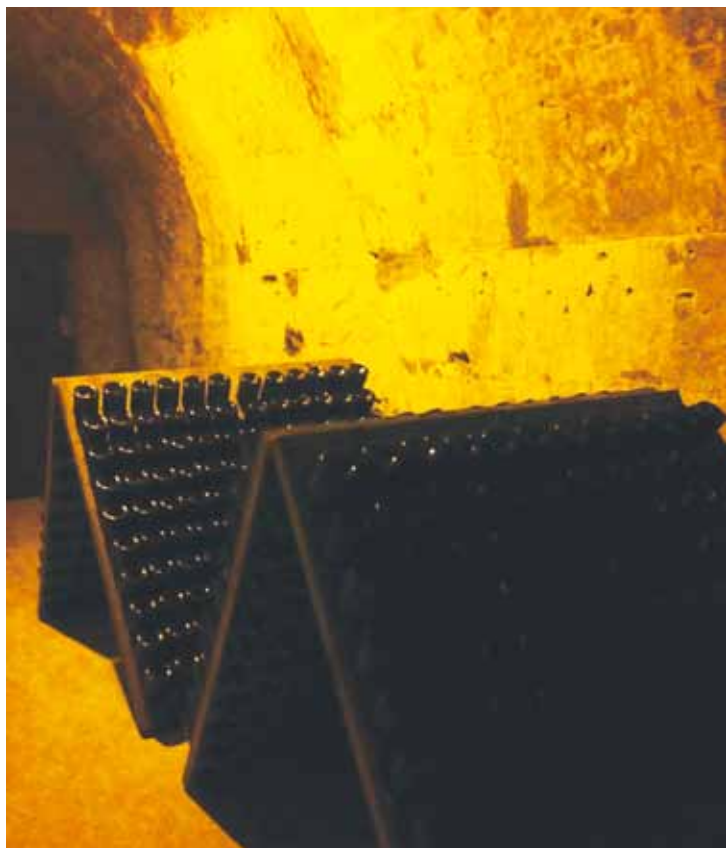
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## PARISIAN ENTICEMENTS



from Gare de l'Est to  
the picturesque town  
of Reims, heart of the  
Champagne region,  
lies one of the last few  
remaining family owned  
champagne estate:  
Taittinger

**A BIT OF BUBBLY**

With lingering sweetness, we set off in search for the one thing that should always be paired with chocolates: champagne. An hour's journey away by the Rail Europe train ([www.raileurope.com](http://www.raileurope.com)) from Gare de l'Est to the picturesque town of Reims, heart of the Champagne region, lies one of the last few remaining family owned champagne estate: Taittinger, the official brand of the Brazil World Cup 2014. Two first-class rail tickets are priced at US\$176.

The key people who oversee the brand are family members who bear the Taittinger signature with pride: Pierre Emmanuel Taittinger and his children, Vitalie and Clovis. Vitalie is Taittinger's artistic director and also the beautiful face of the elegant champagne. Clovis drives business development in new emerging markets and is the warrior of the brand.

We were greeted at the station and escorted to the gorgeous estate which sits on the grounds of a 13th Century Abbey. As we descended down the stairs into its cellar, the temperature dropped and at 18m below ground, we went down the path of history where monks made the first bottles of champagne, in the dark and cool labyrinth of chalk pits, formed in the 4th century due to chalk mining.

**This page both photos:** Taittinger Estate's wine cave

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The chalk walls keep the humidity and temperature constant at 12°C all year around, the perfect setting for making champagne. And here at Saint Nicaise Hill, Taittinger started producing its top range of vintage champagne, the Comtes de Champagne Blanc de Blancs (US\$165 for the 2004 vintage) since 1952. Only the best selection of 100 per cent Chardonnay grapes, which takes between five to 10 years to age before reaching your glass, are used.

Pierre Emmanuel Taittinger said candidly, "There are two categories of wine lovers: those with beautifully wine cellars filled with expensive wines and those with nearly empty cellars." He acknowledged he belongs to the latter category as he believes champagne should always accompany the pleasure of people; family and friends. When a Taittinger is unavailable at the restaurant he's dining at, he graciously said, "I also drink the champagnes of my colleagues." We reckon its fortunate that he can always pick a vintage Comtes de Champagne any time from the caves. **INSPIRE**



**This page from top:** The fireplace in the lounge, Relais Christine; Taittinger entrance; Wine bottles stacked in the caves, both from Taittinger Estate

## LIVING AND DINING



For the authentic Parisian stay, one can only check in at **The Ritz, Paris** ([www.ritzparis.com](http://www.ritzparis.com)). A name synonymous with the city since 1898 and situated nearby iconic sites of the Louvre Museum and Tuileries Gardens, it is the world's first hotel to lay claim to having a private bath in every room. Book The Suite Imperiale (about US\$17,683 per night). With its 6m high ceilings, great chandeliers, impeccable service and décor furnishings to match that of the Palace of Versailles, it's no wonder that Coco Chanel herself has stayed at The Ritz for 37 years. The property will reopen in early 2015 after a US\$140m refurbishment.

Alternatively consider the **Hotel Plaza Athénée** ([www.dorchestercollection.com/en/paris/hotel-plaza-athenee](http://www.dorchestercollection.com/en/paris/hotel-plaza-athenee)), which has hosted a wide array of guests from Grace Kelly to Anna Wintour and has recently reopened its doors after a US\$259m renovation. The living room of its suites are now decorated with ample satin, silks and brocades with chandeliers and marble with inlaid mosaic bathrooms. Book the 450sqm Royal Suite (about US\$25,843 per night).

If you prefer a more intimate stay, choose the Garden Suites (about US\$1,555 per night) in **Relais Christine** ([www.relais-christine.com](http://www.relais-christine.com)) located in Saint-Germain-des-Prés, just 5mins away from the Seine. Retaining the original architecture of a 13th Century abbey, each of the guest rooms is individually designed to either retain the original beams and stone vaults of the abbey or is restyled for a more modern and contemporary setting.

In terms of dining, we recommend the **Café de la Paix** ([www.cafedelapaix.fr](http://www.cafedelapaix.fr)) located on the ground floor of InterContinental Paris Le Grand Hotel. Named after the nearby Rue de la Paix, the cafe opened on May 5 1862 and was declared a historic site in 1975. Do try the seafood platter for two with fresh oysters and lobsters (about US\$143), freshly displayed at the storefront. Alternatively, for a true Parisian pride and passionate experience, dine at **Le Bel Canto** ([www.lebelcanto.com](http://www.lebelcanto.com)), which marries food with opera. A troupe of 100 singers and 20 pianists will entertain and thrill you with live opera as you dine on a prix fixe three-course menu at about US\$110.

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