

Director

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Gallic getaways

Whether you're seeking a welcome morning off while on business in Paris or a last-minute mini-break in Monaco, having no time to research your leisure diversions needn't be a problem if you choose a hotel that's only too happy to do this for you – as *Director* discovered at these three obliging venues

Words Matt Wagg



Hotel Montalembert and the Buddha-Bar Hotel, Paris

It's easy to spend downtime in the seventh arrondissement of Paris, especially when the Montalembert is your base. This five-star boutique hotel, recently renovated to mark its 90th birthday, provides all the business facilities you'd expect – including the impressive Salon Gallimard for private meetings and dinner appointments – and it also has a wealth of leisure attractions within easy reach.

The friendly concierge was happy to suggest a three-hour walking tour of the main sights for us to follow in the morning. It took us over the Seine to the Louvre, west to Notre-Dame and then, after a brief Metro ride, to the Champs-Élysées and the Arc de Triomphe. Returning via the Eiffel Tower, we were back in time for lunch on the hotel's terrace. For those seeking a

more sedate expedition, the Montalembert can map out a tour that explores the local neighbourhood's characterful boutiques, cafés and galleries. The Musée d'Orsay, for instance, is less than 500m away.

Great dining options abound throughout the city, of course, but the concierge pointed *Director* in the direction of Chez Papa on the nearby Rue Saint-Benoît. This local favourite specialises in south-western French cuisine and lays on live jazz music in the evenings.

Guests who are tired of walking, meanwhile, can stay put and savour the work of the Montalembert's resident chef, David Maroleau. His beautifully presented creations can be enjoyed in the bar or on the terrace, as well as at the restaurant. Signature dishes

Accommodation

Rooms at the Montalembert and the Buddha-Bar start from £365 and £510 a night respectively. Both hotels are part of the LVX Collection from Preferred Hotels & Resorts.

preferredhotels.com

Getting there

Director travelled by Eurostar. At £245 for a single journey, its Business Premier fare offers benefits including flexible travel, a 10-minute check-in, access to an exclusive lounge and a meal from a menu created by Raymond Blanc.

eurostar.com

Above: the dining room at the Buddha-Bar features striking Chinoiserie; right: an example of David Maroleau's cuisine at the Montalembert's restaurant

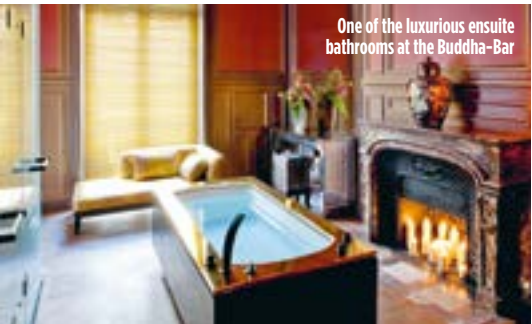


include caramelised roast pork and scampi tartare with Japanese rice and lemongrass stock.

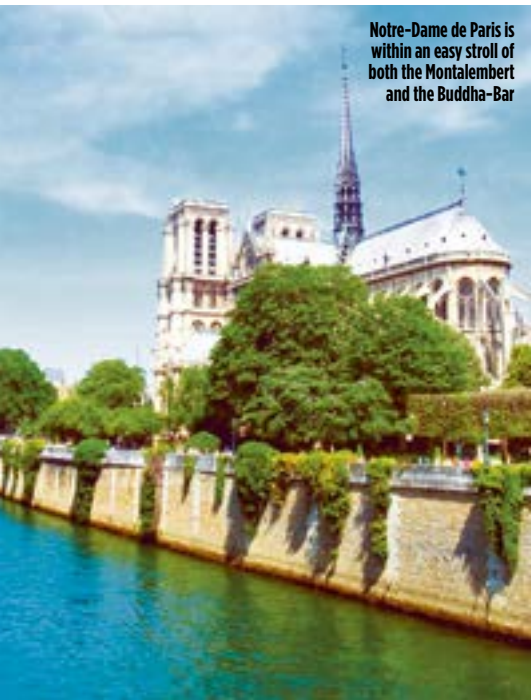
Should this whet your appetite for more Asian flavours, the Buddha-Bar Hotel across the river in the eighth arrondissement offers dazzling Far Eastern style. Decorative touches from Shanghai, Tokyo and even Lhasa combine with

art borrowed from the Opera Gallery to create a majestic atmosphere. We were grateful, though, that the staff encouraged us to visit the gallery itself, situated opposite the Élysée Palace just down the road.

With Gallic history on every corner here – both the Église de la Madeleine, a temple glorifying Napoléon Bonaparte's army, and the Chapelle Expiatoire, dedicated to Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette, are only a short walk away – the Buddha-Bar is as handily located as the Montalembert for sightseeing on foot. For a lazier way to unwind, simply sit in its courtyard surrounded by Asian decor, order a similarly exotic cocktail to accompany one of the seemingly bottomless brunch offerings and experience the Orient right here in the middle of Paris. **D**



One of the luxurious ensuite bathrooms at the Buddha-Bar



Notre-Dame de Paris is within an easy stroll of both the Montalembert and the Buddha-Bar

GETTY IMAGES



Monte-Carlo Bay Hotel & Resort, Monaco

Accommodation

Rooms at Monte-Carlo Bay start from £240 a night. The hotel is part of the Lifestyle Collection from Preferred Hotels & Resorts. Guests of all three hotels are eligible to enrol on iPrefer, a points-based loyalty programme offering special benefits to members, such as free internet access at more than 600 participating locations in the Preferred Hotels & Resorts group.

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Above: Monte-Carlo Bay Hotel & Resort features the only sand-bottomed swimming pool in Europe; below: the hotel's own ultra-modern casino

A rare chance to get away for a couple of days suddenly presents itself and all you can think about is escaping to the sun, but where to go? Just a two-hour flight and a short drive through the hills of Nice lies Monaco and the Monte-Carlo Bay Hotel & Resort. With its sun-drenched sea views and ample leisure facilities, this family-friendly retreat could be the ideal destination. Boasting Europe's only sand-bottomed swimming pool – the focal point of a majestic water garden that has both Mediterranean and tropical influences – the place is seemingly made for escapism.

There are three excellent restaurants here, including the Michelin-starred Blue Bay – the domain of chef Marcel Ravin and

his unique blend of Caribbean and Mediterranean seafood. Before dining, guests are invited to enjoy an aperitif at the Blue Gin waterfront lounge bar, which is especially wonderful at sunset. But, as our concierge noted, the hotel has partnerships with several similarly refined venues around the principality. These include the iconic Casino de Monte-Carlo where, aside from rubbing shoulders with the high-rollers, you can step back in time to experience the culinary twists of Le Train Bleu, styled to the decor of the Orient Express.

People-watching is a great sport here, of course, but, if you tire of sizing up the superyachts and spotting resident F1 drivers, ask the hotel to book you a guided tour of the Palais Princier de Monaco. Built in 1191 as a fortress, it's now the official residence of Prince Albert II. The traditional changing of the guard still occurs daily here at 11.55am.

For a more down-to-earth taste of local life, visit the colourful Condamine Market, where you can buy fresh produce and sample the popular Monégasque snack, Socca, a savoury crepe made from chickpeas.

From sophistication and sightseeing to street food and sun worship, Monaco offers everything you could ask from a mini-break, all within a very manageable 2sq km. **D**

