



PARISIENNE PLAY GROUNDS

BY ANTHEA GERRIE

Paris is an obvious destination for ladies who lunch—fashionable hotels, chic restaurants, and all that designer shopping along the Faubourg Saint-Honoré, Avenue Montaigne, and edgier rue des Francs-Bourgeois. But where do chic Parisiennes go for fine food and retail therapy when they want to get out of town? Their secret playgrounds are just as enticing a draw for Americans in the French capital as for the locals.

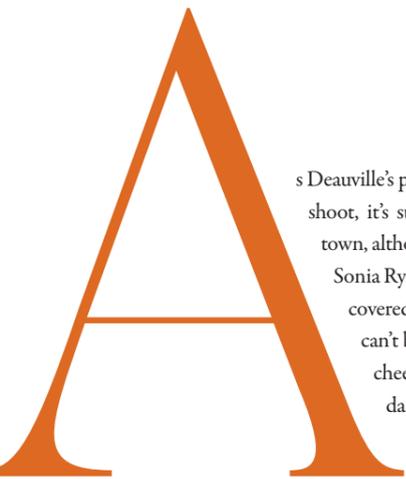
A century ago, the great escape would have been to Trouville-sur-Mer, one of France's first resorts, where grand seafront villas built by bankers and industrialists still stand proud. Now, Trouville attracts a more laid-back crowd, while neighboring Deauville attracts the fashionistas. The two resorts share a train station and are connected by a bridge, yet they are entirely different—and barely acknowledge each other's existence.

People watchers and the poseurs who crave their attention prefer Deauville; it certainly has the smartest lodgings. Groupe Barrière, which operates a casino in each resort, fields neighboring five-star hotels Le Royal on the Deauville seafront and Le Normandy, which boasts an extra soupçon of chic in place of sea views.

While both hotels have spas, the most authentic pampering is at the Algotherm Thalasso Deauville center on the beach. Thalassotherapy, which harnesses the benefits of seawater pumped direct from ocean to resort, is the glory of France's north coast; whichever treatments you choose, make one a soak in a private, warm, saltwater hydrotherapy bath, which changes color as its jets gently deliver a heavenly massage from neck to toe.

View of Trouville, France, with its picturesque rooftops and the English Channel in the distance

Photo by RossHelen / Shutterstock



As Deauville's population resembles the cast of a Ralph Lauren shoot, it's surprising that Ralph gave up his store in the town, although Louis Vuitton, Hermès, Cartier, Dior, and Sonia Rykiel all retain a presence. It's also fun to shop the covered market for local delicacies, even though you can't bring home the exquisite crème fraîche and soft cheeses for which Normandy is famous. Enjoy the dairy at dinner instead, preferably at Le Drakkar; bag a table on the heated sidewalk terrace to soak up the buzz from the street.

This fashionable seaside town also has strong ties to the film industry. In fact, an annual international film festival has spawned a row of beach huts named for big Hollywood names who have visited. However elegant Deauville may be, it would be a gross injustice to go back to Paris without exploring Trouville. Walk over the bridge, turn left along restaurant row, and follow the boardwalk past a scene almost unchanged since Monet immortalized it in paint. After admiring the mansions from the boardwalk, leave the beach at the signs to Villa Montebello, now an art museum exhibiting nostalgic scenes from back in the day. Return via the town to explore historic streets like the rue de Paris and rue des Bains, which were once the height of fashion but today are home to a mix of eclectic shops more charming than chic.

Although there seems, at first glance, nothing to choose between the long line of brasseries facing the fish market, one is special: Les Vapeurs, identifiable by its red and yellow awnings, has earned a well-deserved reputation as one of the most fun places to dine in France. A party atmosphere develops among the packed tables as



NOW, TROUVILLE ATTRACTS A MORE LAID-BACK CROWD, WHILE NEIGHBORING DEAUVILLE ATTRACTS THE FASHIONISTAS.

the night wears on, with the help of a giant Calvados bottle passed around to offer the local apple-brandy digestif to all.

While Champagne is even closer to Paris than this lively pair of coastal resorts, it attracts less traffic because the region takes the €5 billion business of making the bubbly that carries its name so seriously. But Épernay, the wine-making capital, is a charming town easy to explore on foot and home to Perrier-Jouët's Maison Belle Epoque, which houses one of Europe's largest collections of art nouveau.

Although many of the grand houses receive visitors only by appointment, a glorious time to visit is in December, when many vigneronns throw open their doors for the Habits de Lumières weekend celebration, which sees the Avenue de Champagne alive with twinkling lights. And when visiting at other times of the year, addresses to note in Épernay include celebrated restaurants Les Berceaux and La Table Kobus; for an overnight perch, check out Villa Eugène and La Briqueterie, the town's two five-star hotels.

Opposite top: The morning light on the beach and homes of Trouville makes it obvious why the town is a perfect vacation destination.

Opposite bottom left: Even the Louis Vuitton store building in Deauville is oozing with charm.

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Opposite bottom right: In Deauville, barriers outside the beach huts on Les Planches bear the names of famous filmmakers and actors.

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FOLLOW IN THE FOOTSTEPS
OF MARIE ANTOINETTE,
WHO DRANK HER FAVORITE
CHAMPAGNE IN THE ROYAL
PALACE OF VERSAILLES.



Courtyard view of the Palace of Versailles near Paris, France

Photo by Felix Lipov / Shutterstock



The famous Hall of Mirrors (Galerie des Glaces) at Versailles

Photo by Takashi Images / Shutterstock



Spicy Rose sparkling wine by Les 12 de Versailles

A visit to the garden, especially on a day when locals come to buy produce for the week, is a special thing to do in Versailles, where too many people arrive and leave after spending only a couple of hours in the fabulous palace. A palace visit should be booked in advance to avoid horrendous queues—even ticket holders face long waits at security checkpoints, but it's worth it to visit the enchanting Hall of Mirrors and wander the spectacular formal gardens where Marie Antoinette and Louis XVI strolled before the empire fell.

It may come as a surprise to visitors that they can sleep within the palace grounds at the elegant Waldorf Astoria Trianon Palace, built in 1911. While the hotel fields a Gordon Ramsay restaurant, it's not the only fine dining in town: there's an Alain Ducasse café within the palace, while La Table du 11 serves cutting-edge food in the gorgeous setting of the Cour des Senteurs, which has been associated with perfume for two hundred years. While the chef prefers to list Corsican wines from his homeland, you can at least pick up a bottle of Les 12 du Versailles at L'Atelier des Saveurs opposite the restaurant, along with essential fragrances, fine French porcelain, and exquisite totes in traditional toile de Jouy. This kind of specialized retail therapy is fit for a princess and worth leaving Paris for, if only for twenty-four hours. ■

Head to www.en.Normandie-Tourisme.fr to start planning your trip to Trouville-sur-Mer, Deauville, and surrounding areas.

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To drink bubbly in a sophisticated setting even closer to the capital, follow in the footsteps of Marie Antoinette, who drank her favorite Champagne in the royal palace of Versailles. It came from Piper-Heidsieck, who first presented the queen with a bottle of their premium Rare vintage around 1783. You might find Rare on the best wine lists in Versailles, but not its latest incarnation, Le Secret, which has just been unveiled following twenty years' aging by a canny cellar master who spotted something extra-special in the wines of 1997. Only a thousand magnums have been bottled, a few of which are available in the US via Sotheby's. Only three lucky purchasers who can afford the \$145,000 price tag for a one-off experience will be able to travel to Paris to have a bespoke jewel designed by Mellerio, the world's oldest family jewelry firm, which shares Marie Antoinette with Rare as a muse and patron.

In France, anyone who attempts to market sparkling wine made outside Champagne is considered bold. But today a daring entrepreneur has created his own link with Marie Antoinette by launching a bottle of bubbly in the royal city itself. "I'm from Versailles and wanted to pay homage to all the talent we have here," says Xavier Trilling of Vins Haute Couture as we prepare to taste a glass of his intriguing rose-and-pepper-scented Les 12 de Versailles. The wine is named for the twelve—and only twelve—wine merchants who had a warrant to supply the court in the heyday of Versailles.

Now Trilling is collaborating with eleven local artisans—together they are the "12" of today's Versailles vintage. The first one we meet is François-Xavier Delbouis, director of plantations at Le Potager du Roi. This enchanting royal kitchen garden, which once supplied all the produce to the palace, is today growing rare pink Szechuan peppercorns to perfume the new wine, while renowned "noses" at the nearby Osmothèque—the national scent archive—supply the rose petal essence and their blending expertise.



The Maison Belle Époque by Perrier-Jouët is a unique destination in Epernay that combines a tasting room, an event space, an art gallery, and more.

Photo courtesy of Perrier-Jouët