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[TRAVEL & RECREATION]
JET SET



TABLES SPLENDIDE Clockwise from top: Elegant courtyard dining at Chantilly's Auberge de Jeu de Paume; delectable bites by La Côte Saint Jacques chef Jean-Michel Lorain; the chef at work in the hotel's kitchen.



A MOVEABLE FEAST

A STELLAR TOUR THROUGH BURGUNDY, GUIDED BY THE LEGENDARY LUXURY HOSPITALITY GROUP RELAIS & CHÂTEAUX, PROVES THE PERFECT BLEND FOR LOVERS OF FINE CUISINE.

By Patti Dickey

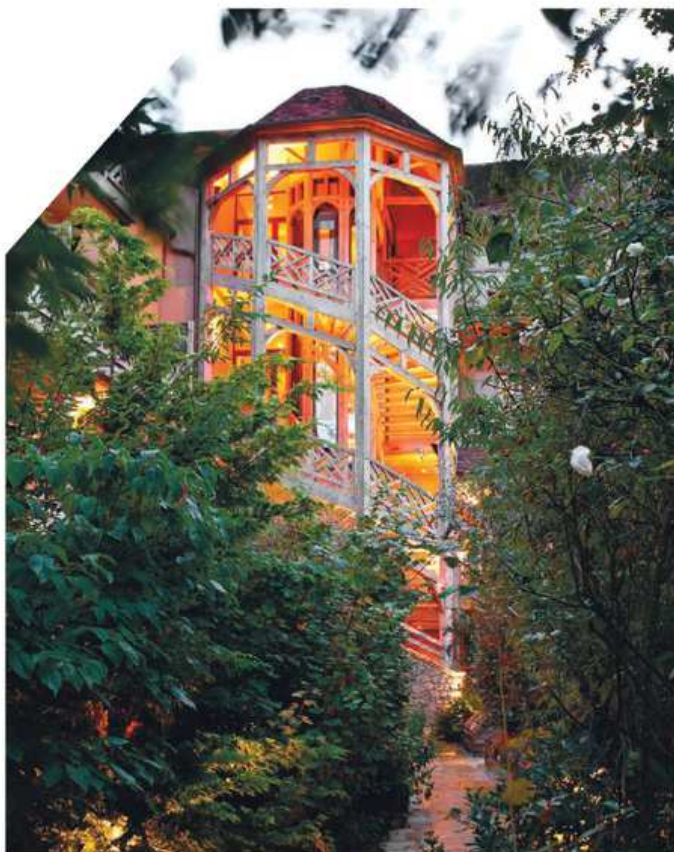
With great anticipation, I boarded my Air France flight, which turned out to be a perfect first step on a luxurious culinary trip through glorious Burgundy. The in-flight meal by Régis Marcon, Air France's three-Michelin-starred chef, whetted my appetite for the gastronomic delights that awaited. In celebration of the 60th anniversary of the Relais & Châteaux hospitality group (relaischateaux.com), known for its unique and sumptuous properties, lavish spas and storied Michelin-starred restaurants, a five-property whirlwind tour lay ahead, promising a once-in-a-lifetime dining experience.

Our first stop was Relais & Châteaux's La Côte Saint Jacques (from \$240, relaischateaux.com/lorain), located in Joigny, a quaint town only 90 minutes from Paris that's described as the gateway to Burgundy. An under-street tunnel connects the two sections, and guests are afforded a glimpse of family photographs as well as the property's fabulous wine cellar. La Côte Saint Jacques boasts 32 rooms and suites, each individually decorated. My suite had a generous sitting area and a king-size bed that had the most heavenly mattress and linens.

Nearby tennis and golf is available, but I opted for an expertly delivered massage in the hotel's Spa Côte Coon. Adjacent to the spa, you'll find a luxurious indoor swimming pool, set off by majestic arches and exquisite mosaic tiles. Totally relaxed, I floated back to my suite to indulge in the beautifully appointed marble bath. I was ready for the gastronomic feast that awaited.

Chef Jean-Michel Lorain, the youngest ever in Michelin's history to earn three stars, presented a multicourse meal that did not disappoint. Each course was paired with the perfect wine to complement and enhance the flavors. The food is deceptively simple, its presentation inviting the discovery of the layers of flavor.

Next on our itinerary was Chablis, the town known for its fine white wines. After a morning excursion touring the Domaine Laroche wine cellars, we strolled to a delightful local brasserie, Bistrot des Grand Crus, for a bite of lunch. The food was regionally influenced and plentiful, and the wine list represented the region perfectly. **CONTINUED...**



dessert course that featured a spun chocolate crown and a perfectly cut green apple, I made my way to my comfortable suite. The next morning, we viewed the hotel's Alexandre Dumaine historic room. Original to the main building, the decor of the room, which now serves as the breakfast room, has been exactly preserved since the early 20th century—and has hosted such luminaries as Prince Rainier, Salvador Dalí, Rita Hayworth and Charlie Chaplin, to name just a few.

Next we traveled to the charming medieval village of Flavigny-sur-Ozerain, where a majority of the scenes from the movie *Chocolat* were filmed. Flavigny is known as one of the most beautiful villages in France and is where the anisette candy, Les Anis de Flavigny, is manufactured. Lunch was enjoyed at La Grange de Flavigny, a local bistro serving family-style dishes featuring fresh ingredients from area farms—farm to table in the truest sense.

After a fascinating tour of the Cistercian Abbey of Fontenay, we were on our way to our next stop, Relais & Châteaux's chef Marc Meneau's L'Espérance (from \$200, relaischateaux.com/esperance), located in Saint-Père-sous-Vézelay. Known as the founding father of modern French cuisine, Meneau and his restaurant proudly sport two Michelin stars. Around his restaurant, the chef and his wife have built and developed a luxury hotel, a winery and a more modest pension and restaurant.

The main stone lodge, with cream-colored shutters, projects a warm, inviting aura. The interiors are modernly furnished and the rear of the house features a dramatic expanse of windows overlooking enchanting gardens. There are rooms available in the main building, although most of it is dedicated to the restaurants, as well as rooms across the road in a converted 19th century mill and a nearby modern single-story guest annex. This property sports 31 bedrooms, a small conference facility and three dining rooms: Bistro Gainsbourg, a casual place; CONTINUED...

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Our next stop, Relais & Châteaux's Relais Bernard Loiseau (from \$260, relaischateaux.com/loiseau) in Saulieu, is five hours from Paris. This five-star property has a historic and colorful past. And the namesake restaurant has maintained its three Michelin stars since first earning them in 1991 under chef Bernard Loiseau. Loiseau forever transformed French cuisine with his technique of cooking with limited use of fats and sugar, and via his signature method of deglazing with water. The food was deceptively simple yet immensely complex and bursting with flavor. Upon Loiseau's untimely death in 2003, his second in command, chef Patrick Bertron, stepped up and continues to run the kitchen in the spirit of his predecessor.

The hotel, under the watchful eye of scion Dominique Loiseau, boasts several dining rooms overlooking the gardens in the back. The property features an outdoor pool and a spa, which carries the cosmetic aromatherapy line Decléor. In addition to the expected spa services, the spa offers intriguing wraps designed to pamper the body and soul.

My suite overlooked the gardens and had a lovely outdoor terrace. The antique furniture and fittings are substantial (you could get lost in the bedding and linens), yet every modern amenity is available. My suite also had a wood-burning fireplace that cast a warm glow on the burgundy floor tiles topped with regionally inspired rugs.

Dinner that evening included one of Bernard Loiseau's classic dishes: frog legs with garlic puree and a parsley jus. Beautifully yet simply presented, it was absolutely delicious. After an incredible



ARTFUL ACCOMMODATIONS
Clockwise from top left: A stunning exterior staircase at the Relais Bernard Loiseau in Saulieu; the inn's classic dish: frog legs with garlic puree and parsley jus; a regal suite at the Relais Bernard Loiseau.





GOTHIC GLORY Clockwise from top left: Elaborate archways hint at the original use of Vézelay's L'Abbaye de la Bussière; immaculate gardens and pathways await at chef Marc Meneau's L'Espérance in Saint-Père-sous-Vézelay; Auberge de Jeu de Paume and its chef, Arnaud Faye (his agnolotti, gentian and green peas dish pictured), are new, very welcome additions to the Relais & Châteaux portfolio.



...CONTINUED L'Entre-Vignes, which offers Sunday brunch and acts as a gathering space; and the main dining room, a grand, airy expanse overlooking gardens. The latter proves to be the perfect place to savor the freshly innovative dishes that Meneau creates.

My room at the annex, across the road and near the outdoor pool, was cozy and cheerful, featuring hardwood floors, crisp white walls and sliding glass doors that opened onto a private covered patio.

Next, we were off to Vézelay to visit the Basilique Sainte-Marie-Madeleine. Rumor has it that the crypt contains part of the remains of Mary Magdalene. L'Abbaye de la Bussière (from \$240, relaischateaux.com/bussiere), another in the Relais & Châteaux's family of fine properties, was our next overnight destination. Founded by the Cistercian monks in 1133, the abbey is tucked into a 15-acre park that has a large ornamental lake fed by the River Arvot.

The abbey has 18 bedrooms, each with a Jacuzzi bath. Just a half-hour from Dijon, it is

a perfect base for touring the vineyards. The Cummings family has owned this property since 2005. Guests familiar with their other property, in the U.K., Amberley Castle, followed them to France with great (and fulfilled) anticipation. My suite featured beautiful antique furnishings with a modern bathroom and up-to-date electronic conveniences. This is definitely a property to consider for a longer stay if you are looking for some R&R in a sublimely comfortable environment.

The dining room is a gothically inspired space, complete with vaulted ceilings. Chef Emmanuel Hébrard, who has earned one Michelin star thus far, is a rising star in the ranks. The evening of our dinner, we were served one of the chef's signature dishes, escargots de Bourgogne en risotto d'orge perlée et écume de fromage de chèvre, a risotto with snails and goat cheese dressing. Definitely put this dish on your bucket list!

In the morning, after breakfast, we set forth for the Musée des Beaux-Arts de Dijon. Established in 1787 and located in the former Palace of the Dukes of Burgundy, this exquisite gem was opened to the public in 1799, making it one of the oldest museums in France.

Making our way back toward Paris, off we went to Chantilly to sample the delights promised by Auberge de Jeu de Paume (from \$280, relaischateaux.com/jeudepaume), a stunning new addition to the Relais & Châteaux portfolio. This gem with 92 rooms and suites overlooks the gardens of the Château de Chantilly. My room was a study in blue toile with elegant Louis XV armchairs nestled before floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking the château gardens.

Expect Valmont-branded treatments and rituals at the Moorish-inspired spa. The signature treatment, the Thousand & One Chantilly, however, is a real standout: Starting with an exfoliating treatment, followed by a relaxing massage, you're then enveloped in a whipped cream body mask. The entire experience is topped off with a delectable serving of Chantilly cream with berries and a small square of chocolate. The only thing missing was a glass of Champagne.

Thoroughly pampered and relaxed, I made my way down to La Table du Connétable, the hotel's fine dining restaurant, to savor the delights prepared by chef Arnaud Faye (who just recently captured his second Michelin star). The scallops prepared for our dinner were majestic—marinated and served bite-size along with Dungeness crab, kohlrabi, and a fine jelly of French caviar.

We then set off to explore the Château de Chantilly next door. Built in 1528 and destroyed during the French Revolution, the Château was rebuilt in the 1870s and is now open to the public as a museum. The main gallery here houses one of the finest art collections in France, second only to the Louvre. The Château and the adjacent Grand Stables were featured as the home of the villainous Max Zorin in the 1985 James Bond film, *A View to a Kill*.

Auberge de Jeu de Paume proved the perfect spot to spend my last night in France. Just 20 minutes from Paris-Charles de Gaulle Airport, you avoid the stress of the Paris traffic and transition home in a relaxed fashion that does not disturb the wonderful memories you have of fine dining, superb wines and unforgettable château delights. **M**