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Why You Need To Plan A Trip To The Loire Valley



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Travel

I cover topical stories in the luxury travel sphere

This summer sees the completion of Hotel Château du Grand-Lucé's spectacular Versailles-inspired gardens and the launch of its brand new plant-to-plate culinary hotspot.



Hotel Chateau de Grand-Luce is an easy jaunt from Paris. ADAM LYNK

U.S. travellers may not be able to travel to Europe just yet but that doesn't mean you can't start making plans for when the time to fly across the Atlantic comes around. At any time of the year, through the blissful summers and cosy winters, the Loire Valley provides a fulfilling retreat shaped by breath-taking chateaux, the great outdoors and an appreciation of the local food and wine.

Hotel Château du Grand-Lucé is an easy jaunt from Paris, with nearby Le Mans just a couple of hours from the City of Lights by train or car. Last year saw the opening of this lavish hotel in a 1760-built chateau, which having been the summer palace of Baron Jacques Pineau de Viennay is said to be one of the finest examples of neoclassical architecture in France.



Hotel Château du Grand-Lucé has elevated its already illustrious appeal by revealing its newly ... [+] ADAM LYNK

Art has always had its place here, with Louis XV commissioning statues for the property, which you'll now find dotted throughout the gardens and forest, and during World War II with the chateau housing paintings belonging to the Louvre. In 2003 the chateau was sold to designer Timothy Corrigan, who set about renovating it as his private home, before being bought by a new owner and made into Hotel Château.

The interiors now pair traditional features like limestone floors, boiserie and chandeliers with modern detailing including custom fabrics by Pierre Frey, Christian Lacroix and Jean Paul Gaultier. This fusion of old and new runs throughout the entire chateau, from its socialising, drinking and dining space to the boutique spa and original stables turned ballroom.



Hotel Château du Grand-Lucé pairs its original features with modern detailing. MICHAEL SPENGLER

This summer, the chateau elevated its already illustrious appeal by revealing its newly completed gardens, which are inspired by the Gardens of Versailles in their design, and with the launch of its brand new fine dining restaurant, [Le Lucé](#) — an elegant space fusing original design characteristics with sparkling chandeliers, wooden tables and olive green banquette seating, running off the chapel turned cocktail bar, [Jack Pine's](#).

Helmed by executive chef Maxime Thomas who previously worked alongside Anne Sophie-Pic, the new restaurant offers dishes designed to resonate with the chateau's opulence, using organic ingredients sourced from the estate's new potager garden and surrounding Loire Valley.



Try a signature cocktail or local wine in the chapel turned cocktail bar, Jack Pine's. COURTESY OF HOTEL CHÂTEAU DU GRAND-LUCÉ

With the completion of its gardens, the chateau has also started offering day passes, complete with picnic hampers and access to the outdoor pool, to give people outside the hotel access to these huge grounds. In the next few months, the hotel director, Ludovic Poirier hopes to offer farm-to-table cooking classes, for which you'll first collect herbs and vegetables from the garden, along with wine and mixology classes and even workshops in gardening.

Ultimately, Ludovic and the team behind the chateau aim to connect you with the estate's bucolic surroundings. From working with farmers and wineries to fill the restaurant and bar, to giving guests insight into the chateau's storied past and getting people out into the surrounding land, the team places the chateau's locale at the heart of the hotel experience.



Pay a visit to Hotel Château du Grand-Lucé for its new new plant-to-plate restaurant, Le Lucé. MICHAEL SPENGLER

“We’re in the countryside, so we want to cook with the people’s produce,” says the executive chef Maxime Thomas. “I know the guy who’s making the cheese, I know the guy who supplies our chicken or beef, and I can talk with the winemakers too. That connection to the community is the best thing for all of us.”

Positioned at the heart of Le Grand-Lucé village, with its sprawling grounds stretching out to the surrounding fields and forest, the chateau places you within moments of the local boulangerie, weekly market and 11th-century church, from which you can hear the bells ringing across the chateau’s leafy walled grounds. Owing to its prominence in the village, the chateau has a history of working with and supporting the community.



You can now dine at Hotel Château du Grand-Lucé's new fine dining restaurant, Le Lucé. MICHAEL SPENGLER

“We want to keep that part of the chateau’s history and support the community by using local producers and inviting people in,” says the hotel director, Ludovic Poirier. “This is why I think it’s important to also visit nearby sites such as the local wineries. That is all a part of the local experience.”

One such local winery is Domaine de la Roche Bleue in Marçon. This is where the owner and winemaker Sébastien Cornille welcomes visitors for insight into his biodynamic method of wine-production, barrel tastings in a troglodyte cave cellar and tastings of the winery’s Jasnières and Coteaux du Loir bottles in an outdoor courtyard by the wisteria-covered blue and white house.



The king suite with village view at Hotel Château du Grand-Lucé. ADAM LYNK

Throughout the summer months, this particular winery is also the setting for outdoor wine dinners, one of which was recently led by the chateau's chef with a number of the hotel guests dining with the winemaker and local gourmands.

Days at Hotel Château du Grand-Lucé can be spent venturing to these local sites, exploring the grounds and surrounding forest on foot and by bicycle and revelling in the chateau's splendour. Next year, you can expect to see six more suites join the chateau's 12 existing guest rooms as the top floor beneath the roof is completed with the same individual attention paid to making each and every room unique.

Even if you have to wait a while to make the journey here, there's certainly plenty to look forward to.