



We'll always have Paris

A sense of timelessness pervades Paris, the so-called 'City of Love'. Giselle Whiteaker strolls the romantic boulevards of the French Capital.

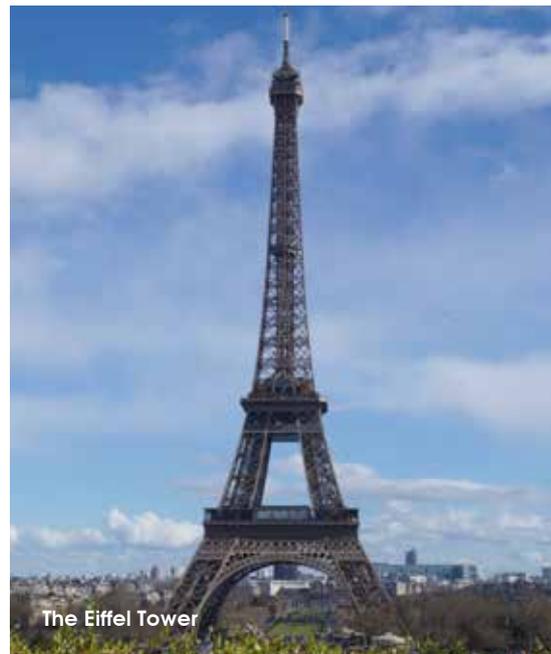
Navigating through the crowds thronging beneath the Eiffel Tower, it's hard to believe that a few months ago Paris was in turmoil. Everywhere I look, happy tourists are posing for selfies with the iconic structure as a backdrop, smiles on their faces. Despite a rainy morning, it's turned into a glorious spring day, the sun casting a golden glow through the spindly trees that are awakening from their winter slumber. It's clear that this is a city that won't be suppressed. Paris is, and always has been, a city worth knowing.

There's a simple joy in walking around the familiar sights here. I've been to Paris a number of times, but I never

tire of watching the traffic zip around the Arc de Triomphe or imagining Toulouse-Lautrec sketching the dancers at the Moulin Rouge. Artists continue to ply their trade in Montmartre, overlooked by the gleaming white dome of Sacré-Cœur, while 35,000 works of the masters, both past and present, line the walls of the Louvre. If you're lucky, while wandering around Montmartre you may even spot the statue of Le Passe-Muraille, the Passer-Through-Walls. Le Passe-Muraille is based on a story by Marcel Aymé about a man named Dutilleul who discovers he can walk through walls, and here he can be seen half in and



La Tremoille at night



The Eiffel Tower

half out, tempting passers-by to take his hand and offer assistance.

Paris may have said *adieu* to padlocks being locked onto the Pont des Arts crossing the Seine as a symbol of eternal love – glass panels have been installed to prevent a re-occurrence – but there is still a romantic allure to the city that, like true love, refuses to fade.

Beyond the tourist flocks and the well-known sights, there's a certain *je ne sais quoi* to Paris that is quintessentially French and wholly beguiling. In the mornings, Parisians walk their dogs along the banks of the river and down the many side streets, popping into local boulangeries to scoop up freshly baked baguettes. On days like today, when summer tinges the air, the sidewalk cafes are packed with punters sipping cups of strong black coffee and ice-cream parlours like Berthillon, the long-standing grande dame of glaces, have queues that stretch down the street. It's worth indulging in a cone of wild strawberry sorbet, or for something different, *agenaise*; prunes with Armagnac. Food is, after all, the key to understanding France. It's not time for dinner yet, though, so I take a stroll along La Promenade Plantée.

La Promenade Plantée, starting south of Place de la Bastille on Rue de Lyon, is an elevated park, built on the disused 19th-century Vincennes railway viaduct. It's planted with a fragrant profusion of cherry trees, maples, rose trellises, bamboo corridors and lavender, and courtesy of its elevation three storeys above ground, it provides a unique aerial vantage point. Places of interest dot the park, from chic art-gallery-workshops beneath the arches at the Viaduc des Arts to the spectacular art deco police station at the start of Rue de Rambouillet, topped with a dozen marble caryatids.

When dusk falls, I find my way back to the sheer luxury of Hotel de la Trémoille. Sitting on a quiet street, just



The red damask sofa adds style



Foie gras



The restaurant, Le Louis²

moments from the Seine, this is the perfect base for exploring the city. Dating back to 1883, La Trémolle is a legend in its own right. It was transformed from a private residence into a hotel in 1925 and has hosted a plethora of personalities, including some of the world's great jazzmen, Louis Armstrong and Duke Ellington. The photos in reception tell of their passage.

My suite exudes Parisian style and I gratefully sink onto the red damask sofa in the sitting area to rest my weary feet. The deep red is echoed in the drapes above the plush bed, which, paired with a moss-green headboard, whispers 'modern chic' and the black-accented bathroom is stocked with Molton Brown amenities. I don't have time to linger, though. Dinner awaits.

Downstairs, I take a seat in the casually elegant restaurant, Le Louis², which is decked in shades of grape and silver. Louis II, the Sire de La Trémolle, a great knight of the Renaissance period, would no doubt approve of this classy establishment taking his name; even more so, should he dine on the seasonal cuisine on offer, inspired by the classics of French gastronomy.

I'm unable to resist the delicious warm bread delivered to the table, but try not to fill up before my foie gras starter arrives. The two thick, creamy slabs are served

with sweet chutney and a crunchy, crouton-style slice of bread. To balance the delicious richness, I opt for a main of Sea Bream, which is plated with a medley of stir-fried vegetables and a bowl of sweet chili sauce on the side. The flavours nod to South East Asia, blended with French panache, the white flesh of the fish firm and the skin crispy. The finale is moelleux au chocolat, a disc of molten chocolate cake, served with creamy vanilla ice-cream. It's delectable. It's with a sigh of satisfaction that I return to my suite.

At Gare du Nord a few days later, as I pass through immigration to board the Eurostar, the officer flicks through my passport, studying each stamp intently. For a moment, it feels like she may not allow my passage. I'd happily soak up another day in Paris, but it's not to be. With a smile, she pushes the stamp down onto the page, and I am free to leave. I know though, that Paris will wait for my return. ■

To book a stay at the Hotel de la Trémolle, see www.tremolle.com.

Rates this spring at Hotel de la Trémolle start from €360 (\$285) per double room per night including a continental breakfast and wi-fi.