

More  
than just a feast  
for the eyes, France is a  
sensory experience. Here's how  
to enjoy the country—and  
its capital city—using all  
five of your senses.

# FRANCE

BY GINGER TAGGART

## Through the FIVE Senses

**F**rom gastronomic delights to visual splendors, France offers visitors a true sensual immersion. Whether you sample Lyon's culinary masterpieces, take in the visual splendors of Paris, inhale the sweet-smelling lavender fields of

Provence, enjoy a sound and light show in the Loire Valley, or revel in the invigorating touch of the world's first wine spa in Bordeaux, the following five French destinations are sure to awaken your senses and leave you wanting more.

# GRASSE

**D**escribed as a beautiful balcony overlooking the French Riviera, the town of Grasse was long ago dubbed the perfume capital of the world. Surrounded by inviting Provençal landscape and fragrant lavender fields, Grasse's tranquil setting rises from hills above the Mediterranean, with flora fields and olive trees rolling to the turquoise sea below. The international beachside playground of

Cannes rests only 11 miles to the south.

Once a vacation spot of England's Queen Victoria, the medieval village of Grasse gained fame for its sunshine, clean air, and fragrant wildflowers. Although synthetic scents have reduced reliance on flowers, fields of cultivated roses and jasmine still surround the town.

Remnants of the past greet visitors within the old town, which features winding streets, arched tunnels, and large squares. The 12th-century Notre Dame du Puy Cathedral dominates the

Grasse skyline with its large bell tower, although the real treasures—three Rubens paintings—lie inside.

For those wishing to immerse themselves in the town's signature feature, the Musée International de la Parfumerie details perfume history and features a large greenhouse of aromatic plants used in perfume making. For a modern-day glimpse into the industry, travelers can enjoy complimentary visits to the principal

perfumeries in the area. The Parfumerie Fragonard boasts a collection of artifacts spanning 5,000 years of aromatic history. For a unique souvenir, visit the Parfumerie Galimard and create your own perfume during a workshop at the Studio des Fragrances.



**Opposite page:** A winemaker in Saint-Emilion. **Top:** Perfume jars lined up in Grasse. **Bottom:** The lavender fields of Grasse are as beautiful as they are fragrant.



Celebrity chef Paul Bocuse wows diners with specials such as black truffle soup at his restaurant L'Auberge du Pont de Collonges.

ALL IN GOOD TASTE

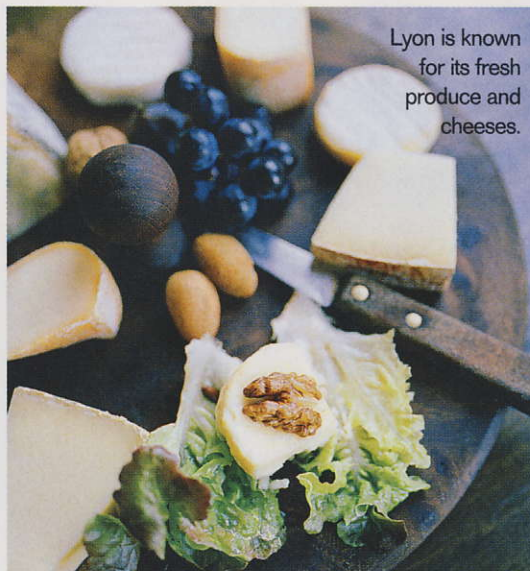
## LYON

Considered one of the world's leading gastronomic centers, Lyon has delighted generations of eaters in its bistros since the 16th century. With more than 1,000 restaurants, many having received illustrious Michelin star ratings, the city continues to tempt visitors' palates with creations from today's finest chefs.

The roots of Lyon's culinary reputation lie in its advantageous location offering diverse local foods, including fish from the Savoy lakes, wild game from Dombes, and produce and wine from the Rhone Valley. Thus, Lyon's local specialties—such as *cervelle de canut* (an herb-filled white cheese named after the “canuts,” Lyon's silk workers)

and pullet hen with black truffles—reflect the rich, flavor-filled region.

Women were instrumental in creating Lyon's culinary reputation and giving it its special character. In the late 16th century, many bourgeois families stopped using cooks in their homes. Now out of work, and practiced at pleasing discriminating palates, these female cooks opened restaurants and later gained acclaim by providing subtly flavored cuisine to those who traveled with the Tour de France. Today, male chefs have taken the lead in Lyonnais cuisine and ensure the city remains worthy of culinary accolades.



Lyon is known for its fresh produce and cheeses.

dishes served here include fatted chicken from Bresse, a region known for its farm-fatted fowl.

In addition to its culinary prowess, Lyon demonstrates artistic and cultural offerings. The city was once located on the silk route and its

weavers are still recognized worldwide, inspiring fashion designers to establish local workshops and boutiques. To satisfy the cultural appetites of visitors, Lyon pulls from its legacy as the birthplace of cinema and entertains guests at its opera house, festivals, and markets.

For superb French cuisine by celebrity chef Paul Bocuse, make a reservation at L'Auberge du Pont de Collonges, which has earned three Michelin stars—the highest possible rating. Further gastronomic riches await at Léon de Lyon with famed chef Jean-Paul Lacombe. Regional

# LOIRE VALLEY

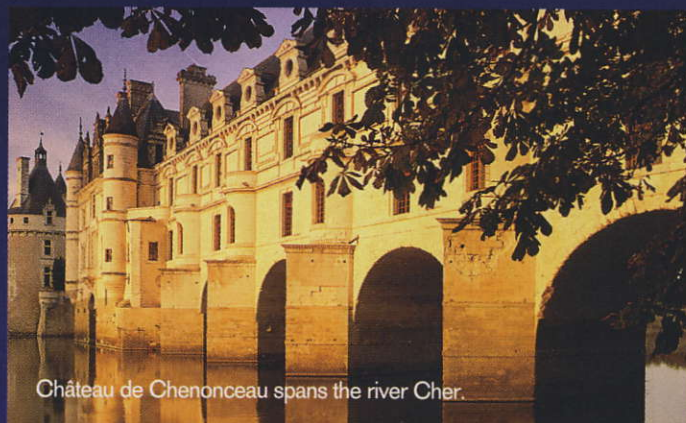
**W**ith its lush fields, meandering rivers, and majestic oaks, the Loire Valley was for centuries the favorite region of French royalty. These pleasure-loving royals built splendid châteaux, which today serve as the backdrop for fabulous *son et lumière* (sound and light) shows during July and August.

At these nighttime shows, multicolored lighting is projected onto the exterior of the château, while music and narration dramatize the history of the location. The concept

originated at the Loire Valley's Château de Chambord in 1952 and has spread worldwide to such sites as the Great Pyramid in Egypt.

Additional châteaux featuring shows include:

- **Chenonceau**—Catherine de Medici's home, this château scenically spans the river Cher. The river divided the free and occupied zones of France during World War II, and the château enabled many individuals to be smuggled to safety.
- **Amboise**—Constructed on top of a Gallo-Roman fortress in the early Renaissance



Château de Chenonceau spans the river Cher.

period, Amboise lies near Clos Lucé, where Leonardo da Vinci died and where drawings and scale models of his inventions can be viewed.

- **Azay-le-Rideau**—This prestigious château is surrounded by water and was once a favorite holiday spot of French kings.

Château de Chambord was the first location to host sound and light shows in 1952.



A TOUCHING EXPERIENCE

# BORDEAUX

For Bordeaux, the most expected sense would be taste, particularly of the region's luscious, ruby-colored wine. However, from its world-class vinotherapy spa to the textured, hand-carved stone architecture of Saint-Emilion, this famous wine region promises travelers a truly tactile visit.

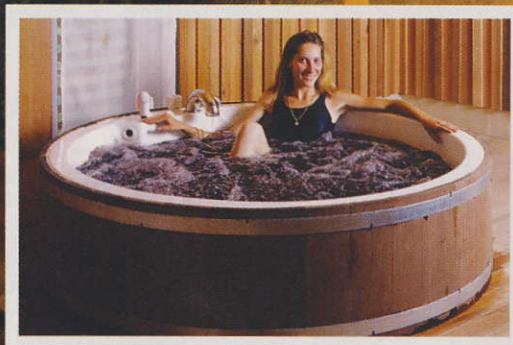
South of Bordeaux city rests the Pessac-Léognan appellation, which is known for award-winning whites and reds. It was here upon the 14th-century wine estate Château Smith Haut-Lafitte that the

trademarked Vinotherapie treatments are offered. Rich in antioxidants, these wine treatments are said to slow the aging process and firm the skin.

Built around a large glass-enclosed swimming pool with views of sprawling vineyards, the treatment rooms feature choices including a wine barrel bath, Cabernet scrub, and Merlot body wraps. Adjacent to the spa, a charming four-star hotel offers two restaurants and hands-on activities including cooking courses.

Moving east from Pessac-Léognan, visitors will find that regions of Bordeaux can be intoxicating for their history and architecture, particularly in Saint-Emilion. Pilgrims passed through the area en route to Spain in the Middle Ages, and Saint-Emilion still maintains the feeling of a medieval village offering wine and lodging to passing travelers.

In addition to wine, the city is known for its stone, including that of L'Eglise Monolithe. The largest of its kind in Europe, this church was carved from a single giant rock in the 11th century. Many travelers delight in exploring the village's cool underground caves or running their hands over the textures created by the ochre limestone and Roman arched tiles that define the hilled village.

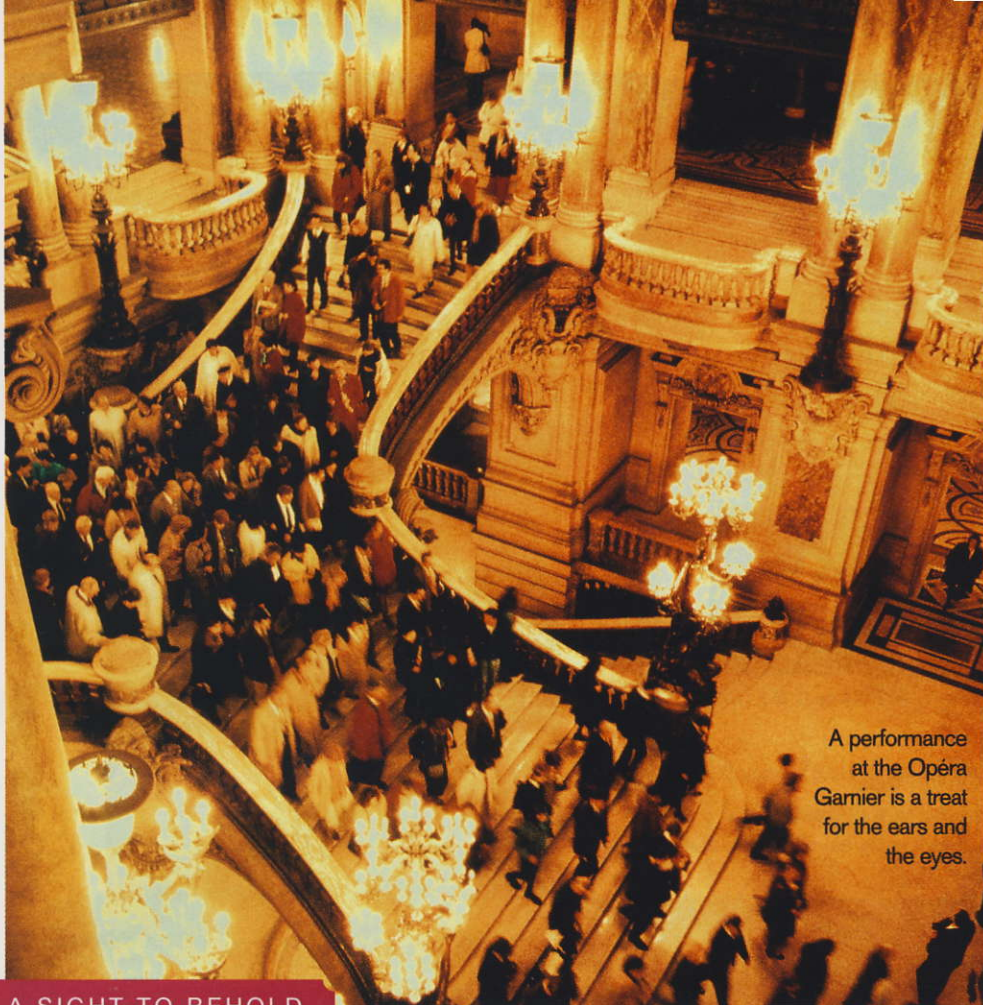


The wine barrel bath is just one of many Vinotherapie treatments offered at Les Sources de Caudalie wine spa.

world's first vinotherapy spa—Les Sources de Caudalie—opened in 1999.

Since that time, top worldwide spas have added wine treatments to their menus, although it is only at the original Caudalie spa and two of the company's international locations in California and Italy that

Saint-Emilion, known for its stone structures, maintains the feel of a medieval village.



A performance at the Opéra Garnier is a treat for the ears and the eyes.

## A SIGHT TO BEHOLD

# PARIS

Just walking the streets of Paris provides visitors with the sense that they are surrounded by a vast open-air museum with countless treasures to behold. From the flowering, fountain-filled gardens and colorful cafés to the scenic Seine River with its ornate bridges, the neighborhoods of Paris are as visually enticing as the city's world-renowned museums.

Below are must-see sites that combine visual delight with sensory pleasures.

- **Sight and Smell:** To feast on flowers, visit the crown jewel of Parisian parks—the Jardin du Luxembourg. Or witness famous sculptures including *The Thinker* statue set amidst a tranquil rose garden at the Musée Rodin.

- **Sight and Touch:** Not often visited by tourists, St.-Etienne-du-Mont near the Panthéon is one of the most beautiful churches in Paris. Unique with its light, ivory interior, the cathedral's central nave contains intricately carved stone and one of the best preserved rood screens in Europe. This classic architectural element, typically made of elaborate stone or wood, was used in the Middle Ages to symbolically divide the holy altar from the common area of the congregation.

- **Sight and Taste:** For a restaurant with a view, the classic Jules Verne within the Eiffel Tower continues to impress visitors with its cuisine, service, and breathtaking views. For those who don't want to wait months for a reservation, try Georges located on the top floor of the Pompidou Center. The

restaurant offers an open-air terrace with a skyline view, excellent food, and a romantic single red rose atop each table.

- **Sight and Sound:** For an unforgettable evening, a performance at the Opéra Garnier is unrivaled in architectural opulence. Alternatively, attend a concert in Sainte-Chapelle. Constructed as a chapel for the royal palace, this reliquary was consecrated in 1248 and contains an upper chapel with walls of astonishing stained glass. Concert tickets can be purchased at the chapel during the day or from FNAC stores throughout Paris. ■

*Paris-based writer Ginger Taggart has worked in the travel industry for more than 15 years and visited more than 40 countries on six continents.*

## EXPERT ADVICE

- "Paris is certainly a **year-round** destination," says Kitty Gobbi of Carlson Wagonlit Travel in Morton Grove, Illinois. However, she says travelers will find the best weather in France during May–June or September–October.

- Spend several days navigating down one of France's many canals on a dining and lodging barge. "**Barging** is an upscale, leisurely way to travel, where small groups can enjoy a graceful pace," says Gobbi. "It goes very slowly, so you can actually bike or walk along the side of it, as well as walk into the nearest town."

- If you plan to splurge on expensive boutique fashions or vintage wines, **notify your credit card company** before you go so that it doesn't become suspicious and block your charges. Also, Gobbi recommends getting a pre-paid travel card that works much like traveler's checks. Travelers can put a pre-set amount on the card and use it at foreign ATMs.

## WE RECOMMEND

- With Globus' **Flavors of Burgundy & Provence** package, your 12-day sojourn begins with two nights in Paris. From there you'll travel to Beaune and Chalon sur Saône, where you'll board the *Avalon Scenery* and sail south through the Burgundy region to Tournus and Lyon, where you'll see Roman ruins and Renaissance architecture.

- Enjoy Paris by bus and boat. Travel Bound's two-day **Paris a la Carte Plus** excursion allows you to see the city with a hop-on-hop-off ride on an open-air tour bus. Then you can take in the sights from the Seine River on a famous Batobus glass-sided boat.