

ESCAPE

To step away from Paris for one of these destinations is akin to 'escaping' from one heaven to another. Absorbing the enchanting French countryside, strolling through gardens that have galvanized generations of painters, and exploring chateaus so magical they induce a childlike euphoria, will leave no doubt as to why so many artists and writers spend their lives in France.



Chateau Villandry



Château de Chambord

rue de la Mairie, Chambord

t: + 33 (0) 2 54 20 31 53

www.chambord.org

hours: check website for hours as they vary by season

Constructed by 25-year-old François I as a hunting lodge, (and, it is said, to be nearer to his mistress) Chambord boasts the largest silhouette in the Loire Valley. The castle weaves in elements of French and Italian Medieval architecture – its spectacular façade inspiring the Beast’s dwellings in Disney’s *Beauty and the Beast* – and is surrounded by not just a moat and stunning gardens, but a 13,000-acre forest and game park abounding with wild boar and deer. The structure itself features corner towers, roofed galleries, vaulted hallways, 84 staircases, and no fewer than 365 fireplaces. Visitors ascend the double-spiral staircase to the first floor, where sumptuous royal apartments include those of Louis XIV and François I; across the way are rooms devoted to the Count of Chambord – the final owner of the chateau – whose coronation outfit and boyhood collection of mini-canons and guns are on display. On the second floor, guests can explore the hunting museum, with coffered ceilings, finely crafted weapons, and exhibits on myths and hunting techniques from the 16th through 18th centuries. The grounds become even more magical at night, when guests can roam the rooftop terrace with a lantern, overlooking the gardens illuminated by starlight.

Tours, Activities, and More

Chambord offers forest walks, cycling, and workshops for adults and children, with themes such as *The Secret Life of Ponds*, *A Historian’s Perspective*, *Daily Life*, and *Architecture*. From June to September, Chambord presents a spectacular sound and light show; kids will especially enjoy the *Horse Show*, full of equestrian arts and riders in costume. Various musical events are also held throughout the year, such as *Renaissance Balls*, and Verdi’s *Rigoletto*.

Getting There

By train: Board at the Paris Austerlitz Station and take the train to the Blois Station, where there are regular shuttle buses to Chambord. By car: Take the A10 highway and exit N° 16 Mer or N° 17 Blois. Visitors who wish to visit other charming chateaus dotted throughout the Loire Valley should take the TGV from Paris to the city of Tours, from where they can rent cars or take buses to the various castles.



PHOTO CREDIT: JARED HUMPHREYS

Giverny

99, rue Claude Monet

t: + 33 (0) 2 32 51 91 32

www.giverny.org

hours: check website for hours as they vary by season

Claude Monet once said 'I perhaps owe having become a painter to flowers' – a statement most believable when standing amid the parade of colors and textures in the artist's garden. This is an essential destination for anyone who has gazed contentedly at Monet's *Water Lilies* series; one cannot help but imagine Monet spending hours walking around this lush haven, taking different routes at distinctive times of the day, gaining novel perspectives on his beloved *nymphaeas*. The painter – who rejected the traditional ideals of order and symmetry over nature – preferred to plant flowers according to colors, often placing common breeds such as daisies or poppies next to more exotic varieties, allowing them to grow uninhibited. Flowerbeds – covered by an iron archway where roses climb and cascade – are filled with vegetation of different heights and volumes. An underground passageway leads to the water garden, inspired by Japanese prints that the painter collected. Fruit trees and weeping willows enclose the pond and its curvatures; a Japanese bridge covered in wisteria links one end to another. The painter's steps can be retraced into his home, where his living room – along with many of his paintings – is arranged as it was during his lifetime.

Families and Children

Those who relished wandering in the gardens will also enjoy the intimate Museum of Impressionism. Sample exhibitions include 'The Clark's Collection: From Manet to Renoir,' which featured Monet's striking 1885 painting *The Cliffs of Etretat* and a variety of masterpieces by Monet, Pissarro, Sisley, Morisot, Manet, and Degas. Before visiting, parents and children may want to read through the Giverny website; in addition to information about the gardens' contents and the surrounding area, pieces about Claude Monet and his work will ensure a more meaningful visit.

Getting There

Visitors may take a SNCF train from the Paris Gare Saint-Lazare to Vernon. From there, there are several options: rent bicycles from a nearby café for 14 euros, walk about an hour and a half, or take a shuttle bus. Visitors are advised to allow extra time for the shuttle bus, as lines to board the bus often take longer than projected.