Beyond its backdrop of magnificent monuments, Paris’s magic lies in the unexpected: hidden parks, small bistros and cafés where you can watch local life unfold. Here are our top tips for a romantic break.

**EATING**

*Café de la Nouvelle Mairie*

**CAFÉ £**

(19 rue des Fossés-St-Jacques, 5e)

Just around the corner from the Panthéon, hidden away on a small, fountained square, this hybrid café-restaurant and wine bar is a tip-top secret, serving natural wines and seasonal bistro food, from oysters and ribs to lamb sausage and lentils.

*Ladurée*

**PASTRIES ££**

(laduree.fr; 75 av des Champs-Élysées, 8e)

One of Paris’ oldest pâtisseries, Ladurée first created the lighter-than-air, ganache-filled macaron in the 1930s. Its Champs-Élysées tearoom is a classy spot to indulge yourself. Alternatively, pick up pastries to go. From croissants to macarons, it’s all quite heavenly.

*Marrow*

**BISTRO ££**

(128 rue du Faubourg St-Martin, 10e)

Hay-smoked quail with peat vinaigrette, grilled octopus and fennel confit, and breaded roast bone marrow are among the adventurous combinations from Hugo Blanchet, who partnered with mixologist Arthur Combe to open this neobistro that’s made hands of the innovative chefs. The dinner menu puts you in the starred kitchen produce beautiful creations. The menu reads like an obscure shopping list: each dish is obscure ingredients – guests. Winter drinks are in a wood-panelled library, and summer drinks on the impossibly rustic ivy-draped cottage’s two terraces evoke a guinguette (old-fashioned outdoor tavern/dance venue), with a 21st-century vibe provided by Moroccan decor and DJs. Alongside mostly French wines and craft beers, cocktails include the signature Spritz du Pavillon (Aperol and prosecco).

*Septime*

**GAstronomy £££**

(80 rue de Charonne, 11e)

The fabled ‘phantom of the opera’ lurked in this opulent opera house designed in 1860 by Charles Garnier. Don’t miss the grand staircase and gilded auditorium with red velvet seats, a massive chandelier and Marc Chagall’s ceiling fresco. Also worth a peek is the museum, with costumes, chandelier and Marc Chagall’s ceiling fresco. Also worth a peek is the museum, with costumes, backdrops and memorabilia.

*Pavillon Puebla*

(39 av Simon Bolivar, 16e)

Strung with fairy lights, this rustic ivy-draped cottage’s two terraces evoke a guinguette (old-fashioned outdoor tavern/dance venue), with a 21st-century vibe provided by Moroccan decor and DJs. Alongside mostly French wines and craft beers, cocktails include the signature Spritz du Pavillon (Aperol and prosecco).

*St James Paris*

(saint-james-paris.com; 5 place du Chancelier Adenauer, 16e)

Hidden behind a stone wall, this historic mansion-turned-hotel opens its bar nightly to non-guests. Winter drinks are in a wood-panelled library, and summer drinks on the impossibly romantic garden terrace with giant balloon-shaped gazebos (the first hot-air balloons took flight from here).

**ACTIVITIES**

*Canauxrama*

(canauxrama.com)

During a leisurely trip along Canal Saint-Martin, boats pass through four double locks, two swing bridges and a tunnel section (livened up by an art installation). Summer evening cruises are especially enchanting; there are also gourmand cruises.

*L’Abreuvoir in Montmartre*

Cobbled Rue de L’Abreuvoir in Montmartre

The cobbled Rue de L’Abreuvoir in Montmartre makes for a charming walk, particularly in summer; in winter, it’s covered by a sail-like canopy and warmed by fires burning in metal drums.

**SIGHTS**

*Basilique du Sacré-Cœur*

(sacre-coeur-montmartre.com)

Visiting Sacré-Cœur is a veritable experience. You’ll see musicians performing on the basilica steps and picnickers in the hillside park. Some 300 spiralling steps lead you to the dome, which affords one of Paris’ most spectacular panoramas – you can see up to 18 miles away on a clear day.

*Jardins des Tuileries* (rue de Rivoli)

Filled with fountains, ponds and sculptures, the formal 28-hectare Tuileries Garden was laid out in its present form in 1664 by André Le Nôtre, architect of the gardens at Versailles. The Tuileries soon became the most fashionable spot in Paris for parading about in one’s finery.

*Palais Garnier*

(operadeparis.fr)

The fabled ‘phantom of the opera’ lurked in this opulent opera house designed in 1860 by Charles Garnier. Don’t miss the grand staircase and gilded auditorium with red velvet seats, a massive chandelier and Marc Chagall’s ceiling fresco. Also worth a peek is the museum, with costumes, backdrops and memorabilia.

*Septime*

(75 av des Champs-Élysées, 8e)

The alchemists in this Michelin-starred kitchen produce beautiful creations. The menu reads like an obscure shopping list: each dish is a mere listing of three ingredients, while the mystery carte blanche dinner menu puts you in the hands of the innovative chefs. Book three weeks in advance.

**DRINKING**

*Le Perchoir*

(leperchoir.tv; 14 rue Crespin du Gast, 11e)

Sunset is the best time to head to this seventh-floor bar for a drink looking out over Paris’ rooftops, where DJs spin on Saturday nights. Greenery provides shade in summer; in winter, it’s covered by a sail-like canopy and warmed by fires burning in metal drums.

*Lucien La Chance*

(lucienlachance.fr; 8 rue des Dames, 17e)

For a taste of old-world Paris, linger over a glass of vin naturel (natural wine) at this delightful wine bar with wooden tables between bottle-filled shelves. Small plates of French food enhance the gourmet experience.

**Don’t miss**

The banks of the Seine are where Parisians come to cycle, jog and stroll. Particularly picturesque spots include the areas around the Île de la Cité and Île Saint-Louis. A lesser-known island stroll is the Île aux Cygnes via its tree-shaded walkway. Walking from west to east gives you a stunning view of the Eiffel Tower.
Sleeping

Hôtel du Dragon
Best for an intimate feel (hoteldudragon.com)
It’s hard to believe such a gem of a budget hotel still exists in this ultra-chic part of St-Germain. A family affair for five generations, the 28-room Dragon has spotlessly clean rooms which are decidedly large by Parisian standards, often with exposed wooden beams and lovely vintage furnishings. There is a small lounge for guests to mingle in, with an aquarium and vegetal wall.

Hôtel Providence
Best to impress (hotelprovidenceparis.com)
This luxurious hideaway in a 19th-century townhouse in the 10e is exquisite. Its 18 rooms (seven with balconies) have House of Hackney velvet wallpaper and vintage flea-market finds; the smallest aren’t nearly as ‘Mini’ (by Paris standards) as the name implies. Bespoke cocktail bars in each room come complete with recipes and ingredients. The bar-bistro has a summertime terrace.

Hôtel de Crillon
Best for historic luxury (rosewoodhotels.com)
Built in 1758 and transformed into a hotel in 1909, this palatial address overlooking the Place de la Concorde reopened in 2017 after four years of renovations. Its original splendour has been retained throughout. Sumptuous rooms have high thread-count linens, and marble bathrooms with Buly 1803 toiletries. There are also two restaurants, a bar, on-site spa and two courtyards.

FURTHER READING
Our Paris city guide is suited to a longer trip (£13.99) or pick up the Pocket Paris guide for a short break (£7.99). You can also get free tips in our Guides app.