



A NEW VIEW ON VERSAILLES

For those who think they've "done" Paris, this historic estate on the city's south-western edge offers a Bridgerton-worthy escape with a thoroughly modern conscience

WORDS: GEMMA GREENWOOD

There's something about arriving at Dolce by Wyndham Versailles – Domaine du Montcel that makes guests instinctively sit up straighter. Pass through its imposing gates and suddenly the world opens up into 14 hectares of manicured parkland. The driveway sweeps ahead, flanked by sculpted lawns and centuries-old trees, and just when it couldn't get more cinematic, a golf buggy appears to ferry guests to reception.

It's the kind of arrival that feels less hotel check-in and more country-house weekend – sprawling, majestic, deliciously removed from the everyday. The neo-classical château rises ahead, symmetrical and serene, its façade shaped in the late 18th century when Madame Oberkampf transformed the estate into an elegant residence of proportion and poise. This is a place steeped in history: founded in the 1760s by textile magnate Christophe-Philippe Oberkampf, later a private residence, then even headquarters of the German Air Force, before evolving into a contemporary art hub. Guests feel those layers the moment they step onto the grounds. And yet, for all its heritage, this is no dusty relic. The lobby is bright and contemporary, with interiors by Sébastien Flamant

weaving in subtle nods to Toile de Jouy – the iconic pastoral prints born in this very region – alongside Impressionist influences. It's refined, yes, but warm. Grand, but not intimidating. Think Bridgerton meets modern Parisian polish.

As the buggy whisks past two monumental sculptures – César's towering Tribute to Eiffel Tower, and Arman's provocative Long-Term Parking, a concrete column of entombed cars – it's striking how perfect this place captures the now. History is preserved, but never static. Art, architecture and nature co-exist in conversation. That balance defines the entire stay.

Our rooms were in Building Three, conveniently home to the spa and fitness centre. We had connecting rooms, which are ideal for families, though there are also spacious suites and apartments for larger groups. Inside, the aesthetic is contemporary with a French flourish: Toile de Jouy accents, soft colour palettes, plush bedding and soundproofed serenity. Balconies overlooked the heated outdoor pool, each with table and chairs for morning coffee, room service decadence, or an evening glass of Bordeaux.

We visited in February, when the air was brisk and the trees skeletal against winter skies.

But indoors it was all warmth and cocooning comfort, with fluffy robes, slippers, generous walk-in showers and soft lighting. But it's easy to imagine it in high summer, with the gardens in full bloom and the terrace alive with late sunsets. This is a hotel that shifts effortlessly with the seasons.

Located in Jouy-en-Josas, just 22km from Paris Orly Airport, the hotel is surprisingly accessible. A five-minute walk takes guests to the train station; from there, with one simple change, visitors can find themselves a stone's throw from the entrance of Notre Dame, a door-to-door trip in under an hour. No battling central Paris traffic, no city centre hotel price tags, just the freedom to dip in and out as you please. And that's the beauty of it.

For travellers who've ticked off the Champs-Élysées, Eiffel Tower and Louvre, this is Paris done differently. A country retreat with city access. One day, guests can wander through the Marais to the Picasso Museum, meander the quieter streets north of Notre Dame and discover corners never explored before. The next, they can drive to the Palace of Versailles – around 25 minutes away – stand in the Hall of Mirrors and imagine Marie-Antoinette sweeping through in silk and diamonds and of course, eating cake! Versailles itself is charming beyond the palace gates and expansive gardens: independent boutiques, coffee shops and antique stores that make for a leisurely afternoon. It feels local, unhurried, authentic. Back at the hotel, the pace softens. Breakfast at La Manufacture unfolds

in a soaring space with high ceilings and generous proportions. There's a plentiful buffet of French pastries, fruit and seasonal produce, with eggs prepared to order if you prefer, and an open kitchen that adds a touch of theatre. It feels grand, but never fussy.

For dinner, lean into classic French gastronomy at La Toile, where Chef Benoist Rambaud revisits traditional dishes with a contemporary edge – think beautifully executed seasonal plates paired with exceptional libations. Or opt for Le Cèdre, a more relaxed setting with deep armchairs and, in warmer months, a terrace overlooking the estate's magnificent 200-year-old cedar tree. Here, the menu turns international – poke bowls, burgers, salads and small plates that feel fresh and unfussy rather than heavy.

But what also stands out most at this hotel is despite the opulence of the setting, there's no sense of wasteful indulgence. This refuge has robust sustainability initiatives in place, from responsible sourcing to energy efficiency. Ingredients are seasonal and often organic, and the estate itself is maintained with genuine respect for its environment. It's luxury without excess; elegance that understands the moment we're living in.

From dining to wellbeing, and the Spa du Montcel Sothis is a leisure destination in its own right. There's an indoor pool, heated outdoor pool, sauna, hammam, and even a snow cave for an invigorating contrast therapy. Treatment rooms host an extensive menu of face and body rituals, from organic skincare therapies to

Previous spread: The modern reception area blends with original architecture; *Left page:* A country retreat for all seasons, with an outdoor heated pool part of the wellness experience; *This page:* Restaurant La Manufacture, located in the historic wing of the château; The room aesthetic is contemporary with a French flourish



seasonal facials, available solo or as experiences for two. There are beauty treatments, tailored options and thoughtfully curated wellness packages too; think yoga followed by brunch, or restorative weekend stays that combine spa time with accommodation. There is an effortless flow of it all. Guests can simply move from the fitness centre to the sensory showers, then unwind in the relaxation lounge without ever feeling rushed. It's immersive, but entirely at your own pace.

For those who like to stay active even on holiday, bikes are available to hire and there are several celebrated golf courses nearby. The estate's grounds are ideal for a morning jog or a long, contemplative walk beneath centuries-old trees. This is a place suited just as well to couples on a romantic escape as it is to families, groups of friends or even corporate retreats.

With 18 event spaces, it's also become a sought-after venue for weddings, business gatherings and incentive groups in a setting that really does half the work for you. For companies looking to take their team somewhere inspiring (and a little different from the usual city hotel), there's even a signature Le Montcel adventure game designed exclusively for the estate, adding a playful, collaborative edge to any off-site. And when the working day winds down, the transition back into relaxation mode feels entirely effortless.

When we visited, a high-end BMW event had taken over part of the estate; sleek electric cars lined up against that neo-classical backdrop, guests drifting between meetings and social moments. And yet, remarkably, it never once felt crowded or compromised. The scale of the grounds allows everything to breathe; corporate energy on one side, tranquil retreat on the other. Perhaps because it only opened last year, the hotel still carries that delicious sense of discovery. A hidden gem. The kind of place you're almost reluctant to talk about – but absolutely will.

For those flying in from the UAE, it makes perfect sense. Land at Orly, hire a car (secure parking is available on-site) and within half an hour you're behind those gates, breathing in countryside air instead of city smog. Spend a few days immersed in gardens and



spa rituals, then hop on the train for a culture fix. Mix Michelin-starred dining in Paris with relaxed brasserie lunches in Versailles. It's the ultimate mix-and-match itinerary.

Most importantly, it reframes what a Parisian escape can look like. We're so used to equating Paris with hustle: boutique hotels in the 1st arrondissement, taxis weaving through traffic, queues for landmarks. Dolce Versailles offers the antithesis. Space. Silence. Grandeur without chaos. It taps into the current appetite for historical drama – that romanticised, pre-revolution aesthetic that's on trend – while firmly planting itself in the present with contemporary art, sustainable practices and modern comforts.

Standing on our balcony on the final morning, overlooking the still waters of the pool and the sweep of winter gardens beyond, I realised this wasn't simply a base for visiting Paris. It was the destination. Paris, yes, but with breathing room. With history you can touch. With a sense of theatre that begins the moment the gates open. If you thought you'd exhausted the French capital, consider this your invitation to see it anew. www.dolcehotelversailles.com



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