

TRAVEL

Edited by JANE MEMMLER



Gastronomy, shopping and sightseeing ensured that CAROLINE HENDRIE and friends had a towering time in the French capital

IT WAS tough work. Folding melted chocolate into a stiff almond paste is a lot harder than it looks on The Great British Bake Off. However spurred on by a brisk “Allez! Allez! Allez!” from expert pâtissier Olivier Berté, the mixture was soon ready for me to pipe, somewhat wonkily, on to a baking tray.

My friends and I were in Paris for a girls' weekend of gastronomy with shopping and a little sightseeing thrown in.

We were having great fun learning how to make mini-macarons: light, crisp and a little chewy, sandwiched together with a rather scrumptious chocolate ganache.

Our class took place in the chef's atelier de cuisine, which is an apartment converted into a small cookery school, tucked away in a cobbled courtyard on the Right Bank.

Olivier was a great communicator by demonstration and facial expressions, relying on his vivacious assistant to translate his instructions into English for us.

Our base for our Parisian adventure was Relais Monceau, a boutique hotel in Rue du Rocher in the smart and central 8th arrondissement.

The elegant lounge, furnished with rattan and leather armchairs, twinkled with chandeliers set against dark wood panelling and oriental carpets.

Best of all, the big, squashy sofas of the adjoining book-lined salon were a joy to sink into after a busy day.

Arriving mid-morning on a Saturday we dropped off our bags and hit the shops. First stop was my favourite department store, the dazzling Galeries Lafayette on Boulevard Haussmann in the 9th arrondissement.

With goodies galore under its glorious neo-Byzantine dome, I was in accessories heaven the moment that I walked in. I found a gorgeous suede tote bag in this season's fuchsia pink from the store's own Lafayette collection, a snip at €84 / £71.

On top of the biggest beauty department imaginable, tempting food halls, floor-upon-floor of fashions including lots of gorgeous lingerie, the store also has the best free view of the city.

We took the escalator to the panoramic roof terrace to view the Eiffel Tower, Arc de Triomphe, cathedral of Notre Dame on the Île de la Cité in the Seine and the distant but gleaming white stone Sacré-Cœur.

Shopping is hungry work so we stopped for lunch at Cascade, a sleek dark wood and glass restaurant popular on Saturdays with smart young

The Great Parisian Bake Off



HIGH POINT: The iconic Eiffel Tower and, top left, expert pâtissier Olivier Berté teaches Caroline the art of making delicious mini-macarons

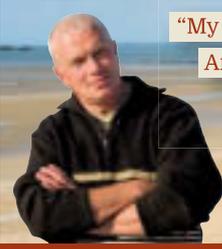
couples laden with glossy designer carrier bags.

I sampled the house speciality, a pascade, which is a slightly sweet, light-as-air version of a Yorkshire pudding with a savoury filling.

I choose one with aromatic steamed salmon, seaweed flakes and hollandaise sauce. It was both beautiful and delicious, a perfect fusion of French and Japanese flavours.

A short walk from our hotel brought us to the charming Musée Cernuschi, a grand mansion once owned by 19th-century banker and avid traveller Henri Cernuschi. He left the property and his collection of oriental art to the city and it is free to visit. We spent a

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