



## WHERE PARIS



It all began back in 1623 with the construction of a relatively humble hunting pavilion for the French king Louis XIII in a region of marshes and game-filled woods. Louis XIV, who became king at the tender age of 5, would transform and enlarge the structure in 1668 when the monumental construction works were launched to bring into being one of the world's most glorious castles, Versailles. It would become the seat of court and the government of France under Louis XIV as France and its Sun King outshined the rest of the world. A UNESCO World Heritage Site, with its 2300 rooms, 1944 windows covering 18,000 square metres, the palace and its stunning grounds are well beyond vast.

Perhaps its most glorious interior is the Hall of Mirrors (pictured on opposite page, top left), or the Grand Gallery, as it was known back in the 17th century, which played host to diplomatic receptions, princely weddings and masked balls. Costumes worn during the balls in the Gallery ranged from Turkish headdresses to yew trees. It was here that the masked ball for the wedding of Marie-Antoinette and the Dauphin – who would become Louis XVI – was held in 1770, and it was also here in a hall capable of accommodating hundreds of dignitaries that the Treaty of Versailles was signed on June 28th, 1919, sealing the end of World War I.

# LONG LIVE THE KING

BY PATRICIA VALICENTI

The castle also served as a home to, among others, Louis XV who made his own hot chocolate and marzipan in his private kitchen and Marie-Antoinette, who enjoyed playing her harp, revived the glamorous balls and hosted a host of parties.

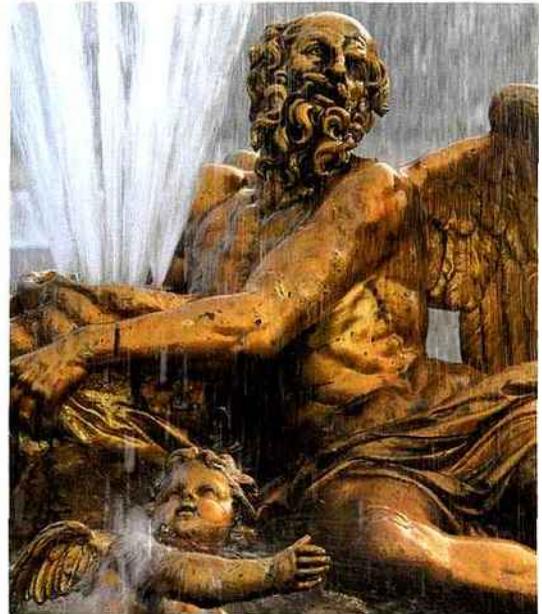
The Sun King himself initiated diplomatic relations with China notably through the creation of a French Jesuit Mission and relations continued during the reigns of Louis XV and Louis XVI. Versailles is currently hosting a wonderful, and at times whimsical, temporary exhibition celebrating the 50th anniversary of diplomatic ties between France and modern-day China with an exhibition bringing together some 150 works showcasing

the French court's taste for Chinese art and objects and featuring paintings, furnishings, lacquer pieces and porcelains.

Louis XIV loved his immaculate grounds, statues and dancing fountains. He was particularly fond of tulips. For the king, the great gardener André Le Nôtre designed and modelled terraces, floral beds and copses, conjuring up a surprise-filled world that charms to this day, for the glorious grounds and gardens are a high point of a visit to Versailles. The major junctions and paths are punctuated with statues and yew trees sculpted into the most astonishing of shapes.

Classical music, entertainment and the fountains

DANCING FOUNTAINS PHOTO © JACQUES DE GIVRY; HALL OF MIRRORS PHOTO © CHRISTIAN MILET; A VIEW FROM THE GROUNDS PHOTO © DIDIER SAULNIER; FLOWER BEDS WITH TULIPS PHOTO © THOMAS GARNIER



played a leading role at court at Versailles, which still today enjoys a festive demeanour in the summertime. Louis XIV paid special attention to the construction of his gardens in which a large canal, reservoirs and canalisations were built to feed the castle's famous fountains whose mission was to bring to life each sculpture and each wooded area. The finest Italian fountain makers, the Francine dynasty of Florence, were brought in to work hand in hand with the sculptors. Their creations were dedicated to the mythology of Antiquity and the king personally supervised the creation of each copse. Today, on Saturdays and Sundays, the fountains of Versailles come to life with music and water during the day. Meanwhile, on Saturday evenings the Royal Serenade in the Hall of Mirrors is played out as musicians and dancers take you back to the reign of Louis XIV and the balls of France's Great Century. Then when night falls (on Saturdays) Louis XIV's Royal Garden turns into an astonishing journey punctuated by sound, water and light. From the Bassin de Latone to the Grand Canal, myriad surprises await as dusk falls and the

grounds become enshrouded in a night filled with illuminations culminating in a display of fireworks in front of the Grand Canal to cap off a royal evening.

Royal days, and at times nights, for the women of the French court meant spending time in the rural setting of the two palaces of the Trianon. It was once a woman's world, the Trianon palaces and surroundings, nestled into the grounds of Versailles, a countryside retreat that offered an escape from the formalities of court, which you can now visit. Here the queens and empresses of France came with their court ladies, children and friends, as did the favourite mistresses of the kings like Madame de Pompadour and Madame du Barry. Louis XV's mother, the Duchess of Burgundy, held a carnival in 1702 in the Grand Trianon where she had taken up residence while Louis XVI gave the Petit Trianon to Marie-Antoinette as a wedding gift. It is in the Trianon that the Belvedere and its Rock are found nestled in the English Garden landscaped for Marie-Antoinette in the 1780s, with the Belvedere dominating the ornamental lake of the garden.

You can discover another dimension of the Chateau de Versailles and enter into the secret world of the kings and queens of France, a private world unknown to the public at large. Extraordinary visits for 1 to 10 people can be booked by appointment to see the private apartments of Marie-Antoinette, the bathrooms and the royal living quarters hidden away behind the ceremonial apartments and away from the crowds. A professional lecturer conducts these special visits.

**Avenue Rockefeller, Versailles 78000,  
01 30 83 78 00**

**RER C to Versailles Chateau Rive Gauche**

**For tickets and reservations for the fountain shows call 01 30 83 78 89 or visit**

**[www.chateauversailles-spectacles.fr](http://www.chateauversailles-spectacles.fr).**

**Tickets are also available at the entrance to the gardens on the day of the show.**

**For the private visits call 01 30 83 78 00 or email [visites.conferences@chateauversailles.fr](mailto:visites.conferences@chateauversailles.fr)**