

Loire Valley
December 3 - 4

This last minute one-night getaway to the Loire Valley is a perfect option for weekend of less-than-perfect weather. It was one of my pricier weekends but only because we chose to splurge this time. For a longer trip, you could also combine this itinerary with ideas from **Loire Valley 1** or **Loire Valley 2** under **Weekend Itineraries**.

Date	To	Flight/Hotel/Car Details	Cost	Comments
Sat, Dec 3	Tours, Montbazon, Loire Valley	<p><i>Car:</i> Europcar (pick-up in the back of Gare Montparnasse—Hall Vaugirard)—reserved through www.Autoescape.com</p> <p><i>Hotel:</i> Château d' Artigny 37250 Montbazon Tél.: +33 (0) 2.47.34.30.30 http://www.grandesetapes.fr/fr/Chateau-hotel-artigny/</p>	<p><i>Car:</i> €61 (9am Saturday to 9am Monday) <i>Note</i>—we also spent €41 in gas and €38 in tolls.</p> <p><i>Hotel:</i> €305 total including spa package (“Escapade Bien Etre”) & breakfast buffet for 2 people</p>	<p>Saturday morning we picked up the car around 9:30am and were actually on the road a little before 10:30am. Despite heavy rains, we were in Tours in time for lunch (around 12:45pm). We had a nice (though I would not say outstanding despite the #1 rating on Tripadvisor.com) lunch at La Souris Gourmande (100, Rue Colbert, 37000 Tours, France, 02 47 47 04 80, www.lasourisgourmande.com).</p> <p>Château d' Artigny is only about 10km south of Tours. We booked the château through the Grandes Etapes website and had a last minute deal for reservations made less than 7 days in advance that included a nicer than standard room in the main château, a spa package (entrance to the spa with fitness area, warm pool, hamam and sauna) and a 30-min massage each (we paid €20 extra each to upgrade to 45 minutes): http://tourisme.grandesetapes.fr/fr/evenements/promotions/dpart_immediat/chateau_dartigny/offre_derniere_minute.htm?ID=1095&HOTEL=2</p> <p>You could also book a room without the fancy extras for less money. And given the rain we were quite happy to stay indoors all afternoon/evening (in fact, from 3pm Saturday to nearly noon on Sunday we never went outside!) We also splurged a bit (€17 per person) on the <i>Soirée Musicale</i> (“Evening of Music”) that Château d' Artigny has been famous for over the last 5 decades:</p> <p>19h30 – champagne cocktail with hors d'oeuvres 20h - 21h30 concert (piano, violin, cello trio) 21h30 - <i>dîner gastronomique</i>/drinks included</p> <p>Despite the price, the evening was worth the money. The cocktail was pleasant and they were generous with the munchies. The concert was exceptional: a highly talented trio (Virginie Robilliard on violin, David Louwerse on cello and François Daudet on piano) in an intimate setting (no more than 100 guests total, probably far fewer) and the dinner included 6 courses as well as bottled water, white & red wine and coffee.</p> <p>The photos give a better sense of the château than I could convey with words, but I will say that it was quite glamorous feeling but not pretentious—very friendly and helpful staff even with guests who walked in with backpacks (us). Staying in an historic château is an experience, not just a hotel stay.</p>
Sun, Dec 4	Amboise, Blois, Chambord, back to Paris	Return car to Gare Montparnasse		<p>Sunday after leaving the château, we took a brief walk around the picturesque town of Amboise on the banks of the Loire (see my notes on Amboise under Weekend Itineraries – Loire Valley 1) and then had lunch in Blois and explored some of the pedestrian streets of the old city center. We then visited the impressive château of Chambord (€9.50 entrance), which is only about 1 ½ hours from Paris, so easily doable as a day trip. We were back in Paris just after 7pm (as always, we hit a bit of traffic).</p>

Below are some additional ideas I noted before we left for restaurants in the area:

Tour restaurants (TripAdvisor.com): These are the top-rated on Tripadvisor, in addition to La Souris Gourmande:

<http://www.leslinottesgourmandes.com/carte.html>

<http://www.tours-rivegauche.com/contenu.php?id=33>

We also considered staying at Château de Noizay, but opted for the château with a spa. The restaurant is highly rated and while expensive, it seems that through La Fourchette you can get a better deal on a set-price menu:

Through La Fourchette (<http://www.lafourchette.com>):

http://www.lafourchette.com/2_restaurant/restaurant_Tours/restaurant_Chateau_de_Noizay/5313/

Had the timing worked out, I would have liked to visit Château de Valmer, from which I have purchased excellent white wines and *crémants* at the Paris wine fairs (see my recent post). Their hours for the general public are quite limited, but if the schedule works for you, it may well be worth a visit:

Wine Tasting:

Château de Valmer

37210 Chançay, France

Tél : +33 (0)2 47 52 93 12

<http://www.chateaudevalmer.com>