

6 night cruise - departing 17th July

Wednesday 17th July

Afternoon

We will meet you and your fellow cruise guests at the Novotel Paris Gare du Lyon Hotel at 3pm. We'll then drive to where Serenity is moored in the town of Chateau Thierry (typically 1 hour – 1.5 hour drive depending on traffic).

Upon arrival at the barge you'll be welcomed by the rest of the crew with champagne and canapes. Afterwards there's time to take a stroll up to the ruined hilltop castle or just simply relax and unpack before getting to know your fellow guests over a 3 course dinner onboard.

Thursday 18th July

Morning

After breakfast we will start our cruise along the Marne river to the village of Dormans. This tree lined winding river has for centuries been an important trade route to Paris and even today we will likely pass some cargo barges on our journey. Otherwise the river is a peaceful place with wildlife, fishermen patiently waiting for their catch, pleasure boaters and canoeists.

Afternoon – Cruise from Chateau Thierry to Dormans

After lunch aboard we will visit Dom Caudron in the nearby village of Passy-Grigny. This champagne production co-operative set up by the local abbot in 1929. Our tour starts at the museum's historic wine presses before moving onto the modern cuverie. You will then get to taste their champagnes that focus on the Pinot Meunier grape which dominates the village's vineyards. We'll then take a short drive to the Memorial Chapel in Dormans, with its beautiful views over the Marne river valley, before walking back through the village to the barge.

Evening

Tonight's dinner is at an excellent local restaurant, a short drive from the barge.

Friday 19th July

Morning – Cruise from Dormans to Damery

About 9am we'll be taking off the mooring ropes to continue our river journey. As we move further east into the champagne region the scenery changes from wooded hillsides to rolling vine covered slopes.

Afternoon

We start our afternoon at Chateau Pierry, a charming, privately owned 18th century chateau. Small but perfectly formed, we may well bump into the owner as Claire shows you round the reception rooms, former private apartments, gallery of the kings, champagne granary and wine cellar, before enjoying a glass of champagne in the garden. We will then drive onto the nearby village of Cramant

which is nestled among the vines of the Cote de Blanc, where the chalky soils are ideally suited to Chardonnay grapes. Our stroll around the pretty village concludes with a tasting at a small producer.

Evening

Tonight's you'll enjoy dinner at a popular restaurant in a nearby village, specialising in traditional French food and grilled meats.

Saturday 20th July

Morning – Market visit and cruise from Damery to Mareuil-sur-Ay

A visit to the Saturday morning covered market in Epernay is always a popular excursion with our guests. The stalls are laden with fresh produce from across the region and you'll choose the cheeses and charcuterie to enjoy as a platter style lunch today.

After we return to the barge, Serenity will continue cruising east along the river. As we pass the village of Cumieres, make sure you look out for the metal sculptures along the river bank, depicting different scenes from the vineyards. Soon afterwards we leave the river and turn into the man-made canal with its narrower locks, where Serenity squeezes in with centimetres to spare. Our mooring for tonight is on the edge of the village of Mareuil-sur-Ay.

Afternoon

This afternoon you have the choice of two excursions:

Option 1: A visit to Epernay, often called the Capital of Champagne. The highlight of this town is the famous Avenue of Champagne, the home of Moet & Chandon, Pol Roger, Mercier and Perrier Jouet. As we stroll down the hill into the city there are plenty of opportunities to stop for additional tastings if you wish. Your excursion ends with a flight on a tethered balloon that climbs to 150m, offering fantastic views over the city, vineyards and the Marne river valley (weather permitting).

Option 2: Cellar visit at Champagne Guy Charbaut. This family owned champagne house is just a few minutes walk from the barge. Marion will take you on a tour of the vat house and cellars dug into the chalk cliff above. Established in 1936, the team here focus on bio-dynamic work in the vineyards and are experimenting with aging in oak barrels for their cuvees. Your visit ends with a generous tasting of a range of the vintage and non-vintage champagnes.

Evening

Tonight's dinner is at our favourite restaurant in Epernay.

Sunday 21st July

Morning – Cruise from Mareuil-sur-Ay to Isse

We will spend around 6 to 7 hours cruising today so the barge will probably already be moving as you sit down to breakfast. After passing through the pretty villages of Tours-sur-Marne and Bisseuil Serenity start climbing uphill through a chain 6 locks. With the towpath alongside and several nearby villages this is the perfect opportunity to hop on one of our bikes or take a stroll as there are lots of opportunities to get on/off the barge as we stop in each lock.

Afternoon

Once the barge is moored for the afternoon we will head out to explore the vineyards and villages of the Montagne de Reims. This north east facing hillsides here are famous for their Pinot Noir grapes, with many villages designated as 'Grand Cru' ie. the highest of quality. Our explorations take us to the pretty villages of Verzy, Verzenay and Maily with a stop for a tasting at a small producer.

Evening

Tonight there is a BBQ dinner aboard, giving you the opportunity to enjoy the peace and tranquillity of this rural mooring spot.

Monday 22nd July

Morning – Cruise from Isse to Sillery

Our journey today will takes us through the Mont Billy Tunnel. Built in 1860, this tunnel took 15 years to complete and takes the canal beneath the Montagne de Reims. Passage through the tunnel takes around 45 minutes - if anyone is claustrophobic or doesn't want to travel through the tunnel, the vehicle is available to take you for a visit to the nearby Phare de Verzenay, a lighthouse built in the vineyards as an eye catching landmark, which now houses a modern museum about the vineyards. Or you can take the bicycles and meet the barge at the other end of the tunnel.

Our destination today is Sillery, our "home" village where Serenity is based when not cruising.

Afternoon

After lunch onboard, we'll head out to explore the historic city of Reims. We'll start our afternoon at the magnificent 12th century gothic cathedral. Every king of France since Clovis in 1130 was crowned here and today the cathedral is a UNESCO World Heritage site in recognition of this history, it's architectural significance and the impressive beauty of the external sculpture work. You can then choose from the following options:

Option 1 - Walking tour of Reims city-centre. Settled since Roman times, Reims is awash with history. On our walking tour you'll get to discover its hidden gems and beautiful art deco buildings. With this option there is also time for souvenir shopping and a stop at a patisserie.

Option 2 – Pommery Champagne. One of Champagne's 'Grande Maisons' it was Pommery champagne that first developed the modern "Brut" style of champagne in 1874. Your guide will show you around the beautiful natural chalk cellars which were originally dug out by the Romans, which today house an eclectic collection of modern artworks as well as million of bottles of maturing champagne.

Evening

As a fitting end to your cruise, dinner tonight is at Le Millienaire in Reims. Holder of a Michelin Star since 2011, the father and son team of Laurent and Thibault Laplaige are in the kitchen, offering modern seasonal cuisine based on local products. We love this restaurant for the interesting flavour combinations, beautiful presentation and excellent service to match.

Tuesday 23rd July

Morning

After a relaxed breakfast it's time to say goodbye to Serenity. You'll leave the boat at 10am and should be in Paris around midday, depending on traffic. Again our drop-off point will be the Gare du Lyon, which is in the centre of Paris and offers easy access to the rest of the city via the Metro or a taxi.