

## **24<sup>th</sup> September departure**

### **About this itinerary**

At the moment there are no cabins reserved for this departure, so as the first people to book you get to choose the duration of the cruise, ie. a 5 or 6 night trip. As soon as you make your booking (which is secured by completion of our booking form and the payment of your 30% deposit) your cruise departure is guaranteed, regardless of whether any other cabins are booked. Infact you might end up getting a private cruise for just the two of you, which happened to one lucky couple last year.

You also get the benefit of choosing the excursions for the week. Once you've booked your cabin and selected your choice of excursions, this itinerary is then locked in for the cruise and will be put on the website so that other people can see it when they book the remaining cabins.

### **Tuesday 24<sup>th</sup> September**

#### **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 by the village of St Jean Les Deux Jumeaux (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 in the village or just simply relax and unpack before getting to know your fellow guests over a 3 course dinner onboard.

### **Wednesday 25<sup>th</sup> September**

#### **Morning – Cruise from St Jean Les Deux Jumeaux to Chateau Thierry**

As we have a longer cruise day today it will be a prompt 9am departure away from the quayside at St Jean Les Deux Jumeaux. Enjoy the relaxing river scenery as we head east on the Marne river through the beautiful countryside and the towns of Le Ferte Sous Jouarre and Nanteuil-sur-Marne.

#### **Afternoon**

We will arrive in the town of Chateau Thierry mid-afternoon, where you can choose from the following excursion options:

***Option 1: Visit to Champagne Pannier*** – On a visit to Champagne Pannier you'll be introduced to the champagne production method. Since 1937 the company have been maturing their champagne in a 2km long network of 12<sup>th</sup> century cellars in Chateau Thierry. At the end of your tour you will get to taste a range of their champagnes. On the way back to the barge we will visit the town's ruined hilltop castle, which with its commanding position overlooking the river valley below has been a strategic stronghold since Roman times. (Drive time from the barge, each direction: 5 minutes)

***Option 2: WW1 history tour*** – Chateau Thierry was a key strategic location during the Aisne Marne Offensive in the closing stages of World War 1. We start our tour at the statuesque Franco-

American Memorial atop Hill 204, with its sweeping views over the champagne hillsides of the Marne valley. We'll then drive a short way to Belleau Wood where the trench lines and shell holes remain as scars of the fierce fighting that took place here. Famous as the first significant engagement of the newly created US Marine Corps, we will also visit the small museum here and the adjoining American and German cemeteries. (Drive time from the barge, each direction: 20 minutes)

### **Evening**

Tonight you will eat dinner at restaurant in Chateau Thierry, a short drive or walk from the barge.

## **Thursday 26<sup>th</sup> September**

### **Morning – Cruise from Chateau Thierry to Dormans**

This morning we continue our journey along the Marne 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**

You will have seen the vine clad hillsides from the barge and this afternoon we take a drive through the vineyards to visit Dom Caudron Champagne, a village 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**

Dinner tonight is at an excellent local restaurant.

## **Friday 27<sup>th</sup> September**

### **Morning – Cruise from Dormans to Damery**

About 10am 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 frequent villages and rolling vine covered slopes.

### **Afternoon**

After lunch, the barge will moor and you have four excursion options to choose from:

***Option 1: Visit to the vineyards of Champagne Le Gallais*** – Here the lovely Marine will take us for a walk in the vineyard and explain how they care for the vines throughout the year. Not only are their vineyards blessed with beautiful views down the Marne valley but the grapes also go right up to the turreted Chateau Boursault, built in 1843 by Madame Cliquot. And whilst tasting the estates champagnes, one of the group will be taught how to open a bottle using a sword! Called 'Sabrage' this technique dates back to the Napoleonic troop's who liked to celebrate victory with champagne. (Drive time from the barge, each direction: 15 minutes)

**Option 2: Visit to the village of Hautvilliers** - Famous as the home of Dom Perignon, who is often credited with discovering how to make champagne, today this village is home to around 800 people and more than 30 champagne houses! Located in the middle of the vineyards, Hautvilliers is considered one of the prettiest villages in the region. On our guided walk around the village you'll visit the abbey and enjoy another champagne tasting at one of the village's small producers. (Drive time from the barge, each direction: 15 minutes)

**Option 3: Epernay and chocolate** – Get hands on and learn how to make filled chocolate champagne corks with Xavier at his artisan chocolate shop. We will then head to the city centre, where on a walk down the famous Avenue of Champagne you'll learn the story of some of champagne's most iconic names including Moet & Chandon, Pol Roger and Perrier Jouet. Unsurprisingly there are plenty of opportunities to stop for additional tastings if you wish along the way. (Drive time from the barge, each direction: 30 minutes)

**Option 4: Visit to Champagne Guy Charbaut** – Established in 1936, this family owned champagne house focus on bio-dynamic work in the vineyards and are experimenting with aging in oak barrels for their cuvees. Marion explain the complete process of making champagne as she shows you around the vat house and century old cellars dug into the chalk cliff above. Your visit ends with a generous tasting of a range of the vintage and non-vintage champagnes. (Drive time from the barge, each direction: 20 minutes)

### **Evening**

Dinner tonight is at an excellent local restaurant which specialises in traditional French cuisine and grilled meats.

## **Saturday 28<sup>th</sup> September**

### **Morning – Market visit and excursion**

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 as we start our cruise today.

After the market you can choose from the following excursions:

**Option 1: Epernay's Avenue of Champagne (if you did not choose this for Friday)** – Often called the Capital of Champagne, a highlight of Epernay 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/queues permitting). (Drive time from the barge, each direction: 20 minutes)

**Option 2: Visit to a private 18<sup>th</sup> century chateau** - Just south of Epernay, Chateau Pierry, is a charming, privately owned 18th century chateau. Infact, 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. (Drive time from the barge, each direction: 20 minutes)

**Option 3: Visit to the village of Hautvilliers (if you did not choose this for Friday)** - Famous as the home of Dom Perignon, who is often credited with discovering how to make champagne, today this village is home to around 800 people and more than 30 champagne houses! Located in the

middle of the vineyards, Hautvilliers is considered one of the prettiest villages in the region. On our guided walk around the village you'll visit the abbey and enjoy another champagne tasting at one of the village's small producers. (Drive time from the barge, each direction: 15 minutes)

***Option 4: The village of Ay and Champagne Collet*** – Just 10 minutes drive from the barge is the charming village of Ay. Claire will take you on a walking tour of the village, with its 14<sup>th</sup> century half timbered houses and a stop of at the boulangerie. We then visit Champagne Collet, with its cellars 35m underground, Art Deco villa and museum of champagne production. (Drive time from the barge, each direction: 10 minutes)

#### **Afternoon – Cruise from Damery to Dizy**

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.

#### **Evening**

Tonight you will eat at one of our favourite restaurants in Epernay.

### **Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> September**

**NB. If you choose the 5 night cruise option you will depart the barge around 10am and be driven back to Paris**

#### **Morning – Cruise from Dizy to Bisseuil**

Our final morning of cruising takes us along the Canal Lateral a la Marne, which was opened in 1845. Serenity will passing through the pretty villages of Mareuil-sur-Ay and Tours-sur-Marne, before reaching our final mooring point, opposite the town hall in the small village of Bisseuil. With the canal towpath running alongside 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**

***Option 1: Visit to the city of Reims*** – Although it is around a 35 minute drive away, the historic city of Reims is well worth a visit. We will start our visit at the magnificent gothic cathedral. Every king of France since Clovis in 1130 has been crowned in this cathedral, today it is a UNESCO World Heritage site in recognition of this history it's architecture significance and the impressive beauty of the external sculpture work. We'll take a short walking tour of the city centre, during which you'll discover it's hidden gems and beautiful art deco buildings. This is also a great opportunity for souvenir shopping and a well deserved stop at a patisserie! (Drive time from the barge, each direction: 35 minutes)

To complete your afternoon can choose from the following options:

**Option A - San Remi Basilica and Musee San Remi** – Built in housed in a beautiful old abbey this museum tell the history of the city from Roman times.

**Option B - Musée de la Reddition** - The school which served as the Headquarters of General Eisenhower, and where he received the German surrender that ended combat in WW2 (24 hours before it was re-signed in Berlin) is now a museum dedicated to this historic event and the city's role in the closing stages of the war.

**Option C - Villa Demoiselle** – Originally built for the directors of Pommery Champagne, in the last five years this Art Deco house has been lovingly restored before being opened to the public. The result is a real architectural jewel with floral paintings climbing the walls, stained glass windows, period furniture throughout, sweeping central staircase and superb Baccarat chandeliers. Our visit ends with a glass of champagne in the garden.

**Option 2: The village of Ay and Champagne Collet (if you didn't choose this for Saturday)**

– Just 10 minutes drive from the barge is the charming village of Ay. Claire will take you on a walking tour of the village, with its 14<sup>th</sup> century half timbered houses and a stop of at the boulangerie. We then visit Champagne Collet, with its cellars 35m underground, Art Deco villa and museum of champagne production. (Drive time from the barge, each direction: 10 minutes)

**Evening**

For your final night you will enjoy a BBQ dinner aboard.

**Monday 30<sup>th</sup> September**

**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.