

24th June departure

About this itinerary

With so many great options it's impossible to fit everything into just 5 days, but we've aimed for a balance of excursions that showcase the best of the area's wine, countryside and history.

You'll see that each day we've suggested two options for excursions, which are detailed in grey text. When you book your cruise, just let us know which of these takes your fancy...if something doesn't appeal we'll find an alternative option or if you really want to do both options that are listed on any day we'll look together at how we can swap things around. Equally if there's something specific you're keen to visit (eg. a certain champagne house or historic site) just tell us and together we'll figure out how to fit it in.

Monday 24th June

Afternoon

We will meet your cruise group at a pre-arranged location in Paris. We'll then drive to where Serenity is moored by the village of Sillery (typically 1.5 hour – 2 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 dinner.

You'll start your trip in style with dinner at a Le Millionaire 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 25th June

Morning – Cruise from Sillery to Isse

About 9am we'll be taking off the mooring ropes to start our cruise along the canal. Here the canal passes through peaceful countryside, past occasional grain silos that are the canal's original raison d'être. You can also see the vineyards in the distance. Around midday we will reach 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.

Afternoon

After lunch on board you have the choice of two excursions this afternoon:

Option 1: Visit to the city of Reims – 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. Settled since Roman times, Reims is awash with history. On our walking tour you'll get to discover of it's hidden gems and beautiful art deco buildings. With this option there is also time for souvenir shopping and a stop at a patisserie. If you wish to make a longer excursion we can visit one of the following city museums:

Option A - San Remi Basilica and Musee San Remi – Built in the 11th century the beautiful Romanesque San Remi Basilica is even older than the main cathedral. Next door we will also visit the 17th century abbey which now houses a museum telling 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.

(Drive time from the barge, each direction: 30 minute).

Option 2: The villages of the Montagne de Reims – This 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 Mailly with a stop for a tasting at a small producer. (Drive time from the barge, each direction: 15 minute)

Evening

As we will be moored in a countryside location, tonight you will enjoy dinner aboard the barge.

Wednesday 26th June

Morning – Cruise from Isse to Mareuil-sur-Ay

We will spend around 6 to 7 hours cruising today so the barge may already be moving as you sit down to breakfast. Serenity will be descending downhill through a chain 6 locks, before passing through the pretty villages of Tours sur Marne and Bisseuil. 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

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

Option 1: 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. Our charming guide Marion will explain the complete process of making champagne as she shows you around the vat house and the 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: 1 minute)

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: 20 minutes)

Option 3: Epernay's Avenue of Champagne and scenic balloon – 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: 15 minutes)

Evening

Dinner tonight is at an excellent restaurant in the nearby city of Epernay.

Thursday 27th June

Morning - Cruise from Mareuil-sur-Ay to Damery

It's a relaxed morning as we continue along the canal this morning, past Mareuil-sur-Ay and Ay. As lunch is served we will leave the manmade canal and descend onto the river Marne. 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.

Afternoon

This afternoon you have the choice of three excursions:

Option 1: Visit to Champagne Le Gallais - 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 on the terrace, 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: 10 minutes)

Option 2: Chocolate and champagne – Get hands on and learn how to make filled chocolate champagne corks with Xavier at his artisan chocolate shop. To round out the afternoon we can take a stroll either along Epernay's famous Avenue of Champagne or the lovely vineyard village of Cramant. (Drive time from the barge, each direction: 15 minutes)

Option 3: Epernay's Avenue of Champagne and scenic balloon – 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: 15 minutes)

Evening

Dinner tonight is at one of our favourite restaurants in nearby Epernay.

Friday 28th June

Morning – Cruise from Damery to Dormans

About 10am we'll be taking off the mooring ropes to continue our journey along the river 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 lunch whilst the barge is cruising and after we are moored in Dormans you have the choice of two excursions:

Option 1: Visit to the Dom Caudron Champagne – This village 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. (Drive time from the barge, each direction: 10 minutes)

Option 2: WW1 history tour – We will visit Chateau Thierry which 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: 30 minutes)

Evening

Tonight you will enjoy dinner at a restaurant on the village square in Dormans.

Saturday 29th June

Morning – Cruise from Dormans to Charly-sur-Marne

Before we depart this morning there's the chance to join Claire on a trip to the small market on the village square in Dormans, where you'll have the opportunity to select some delicacies for lunch today.

Our final morning of cruising takes us further west along the river to the town of Chateau Thierry. The scenery of rolling vine covered slopes and frequent villages becomes more wooded over the course of the morning, before we pass through the pretty town of Chateau Thierry, which has been a strategic crossing point of the Marne river since Roman times.

Afternoon

Lunch will be served as we travel and in the afternoon you can choose from two excursions:

Option 1: Candlelight evening at Chateau Vaux-le-Vicomte - Enjoy a night to remember at this picture perfect 17th century chateau. Upon arrival we will visit the interior of the chateau with its magnificent state apartments. There is then time to wander in the formal gardens by Le Notre (who also designed the gardens at Versailles) before enjoying dinner al-fresco overlooking the chateau. As darkness falls over 2,000 candles are lit throughout the gardens and chateau, a beautiful spectacle and a glimpse of how the chateau would have been felt in the time of Louis XIV. The evening ends with a firework display. (Drive time from the barge, each direction: 1 hour 25 minutes - this is further than we normally travel for excursions, but previous guests who've chosen this option thought the unique experience is well worth the extra time in the car)

Option 2: 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 12th 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, overlooking the river valley below. (Drive time from the barge, each direction: 10 minutes)

Evening

If you choose the chateau excursion you will be spending the evening, and dining, at the Chateau. If you choose the visit to Champagne Pannier you will enjoy a BBQ dinner aboard.

Sunday 30th June

Morning

After a relaxed breakfast it's time to say goodbye to Serenity. You'll leave the boat at around 10am and should be in Paris around midday, depending on traffic.