

## **5/6/7 night cruise - departing 25/26/27 August**

### **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, 6 or 7 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.

### **Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> August**

#### **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 Loirve (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 getting to know your fellow guests over a 3 course dinner onboard.

### **Monday 26<sup>th</sup> August**

**NB. If you choose the 6 night cruise option you will be met in Paris at 3pm and arrive at the barge late afternoon for your champagne & canapes welcome**

#### **Morning – Cruise from Loivre to Reims**

This morning we start our journey along the canal. Opened in 1848 this man-made canal is a north-south link between two major rivers, the Aisne and the Marne. We pass through two locks, where Serenity is the maximum allowable size and squeezes inside with just centimetres to spare on either side. After passing the village of Courcy, the canal becomes narrow and tree-lined on our journey towards the city of Reims.

#### **Afternoon**

Lunch will be served on board whilst cruising. Today you have the choice of four excursions:

***Option 1: Visit to Champagne Pommery*** – One of Champagne's 'Grande Maisons', it was Pommery champagne that first developed the modern "Brut" style of champagne in 1874. Your guide

will introduce you to how champagne is made and 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. (Drive time from the barge, each direction: 10 minutes)

**Option 2: Visit to the Dragon Caves** – Having captured the area north of Reims, in 1915 German troops transformed a 16<sup>th</sup> century stone quarry into a strategic barracks with dormitories, electricity network, hospital and even a chapel. 15m underground this stronghold was held until 1917 when the French Army took back part of the complex, with the opposing forces living just metres from each other. Our guide will take us on an atmospheric tour of the complex and tell us more about it's fascinating history. (Drive time from the barge, each direction: 40 minutes)

**Option 3: The medieval hilltop city of Laon** – With it's dramatic hilltop position Laon has been inhabited for millennia. With many medieval buildings and the cities 12<sup>th</sup> century defensive walls and gates still standing a visit to Laon can feel like stepping back in time. We will take you on a walking tour of the city through the cities narrow alleys with stops at the 12<sup>th</sup> century cathedral and a charming patisserie. (Drive time from the barge, each direction: 1 hour)

**Option 4: 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. You can then choose from the following options. (Drive time from the barge, each direction: 10 minutes)

**Option A - Walking tour of Reims city-centre** – 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.

**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.

### **Evening**

Tonight you will enjoy dinner at one of the excellent restaurants in the city.

## **Tuesday 27<sup>th</sup> August**

**NB. If you choose the 5 night cruise option you will be met in Paris at 3pm and arrive at the barge late afternoon for your champagne & canapes welcome**

### **Morning – Cruise from Reims to Sillery**

Our cruise this morning starts with Serenity ascending a chain of three locks on our way out of the city of Reims. By mid-morning we are back in the countryside with tree lined banks and occasional grain silos that are the canal's original raison d'être. Our destination today is Sillery, our "home" village where Serenity normally is based when not cruising.

### **Afternoon**

After lunch on board you have the choice of three 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. You can then choose from the following options. (Drive time from the barge, each direction: 10 minutes)

**Option A - Walking tour of Reims city-centre** – 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.

**Option B - San Remi Basilica and Musee San Remi** – Built in the 11<sup>th</sup> century the beautiful Romanesque San Remi Basilica is even older than the main cathedral. Next door we will also visit the 17<sup>th</sup> century abbey which now houses a museum telling the history of the city from Roman times.

**Option 2 – Francois Seconde Champagne and the villages of the Montagne de Reims** – A few minutes walk from the barge, this small, independent champagne house produces around 50,000 bottles a year. Hidden underneath a unassuming bungalow on a residential street, Claire will show you around their cellar and production facilities before you taste their range of champagnes including the award winning Grand Cru Pinot Noir champagne (one of our personal favourites). We will then drive up onto the slopes of the Montagne de Reims to visit the Grand Cru villages of Verzy and Mailly. (Drive time from the barge, each direction: 10 minutes)

**Option 3: Visit to Champagne Pommery (if not previously chosen)** – One of Champagne's 'Grande Maisons' it was Pommery champagne that first developed the modern "Brut" style of champagne in 1874. Your guide will introduce you to how champagne is made and 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. (Drive time from the barge, each direction: 15 minutes)

### **Evening**

Dinner tonight is at an excellent local restaurant.

## **Wednesday 28<sup>th</sup> August**

### **Morning – Cruise from Sillery to Isse**

About 9am we'll be taking off the mooring ropes to continue our cruise along the canal. The scenery this morning is corn fields next to the canal with the vineyards of the Montagne de Reims 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, the barge will moor and you have four excursion options to choose from:

**Option 1: 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.

**Option 2: 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. You can then choose from the following options. (Drive time from the barge, each direction: 30 minutes)

**Option A - Walking tour of Reims city-centre** – 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.

**Option B - San Remi Basilica and Musee San Remi** – Built in the 11<sup>th</sup> century the beautiful Romanesque San Remi Basilica is even older than the main cathedral. Next door we will also visit the 17<sup>th</sup> century abbey which now houses a museum telling the history of the city from Roman times.

**Option C - 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 3: Visit to Champagne Pommery** – One of Champagne's 'Grande Maisons' it was Pommery champagne that first developed the modern "Brut" style of champagne in 1874. Your guide will introduce you to how champagne is made and 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. (Drive time from the barge, each direction: 30 minutes)

## **Evening**

Tonight you'll enjoy a dinner aboard in the tranquil surrounding of our countryside mooring.

## **Thursday 29<sup>th</sup> August**

### **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**

Once we are moored on the edge of the village of Mareuil-sur-Ay you have three excursion options to choose from:

***Option 1: Epernay's Avenue of Champagne*** – Often called the Capital of Champagne, a highlight of Epernay is the famous Avenue of Champagne, the home of Moët & Chandon, Pol Roger, Mercier and Perrier Jouët. 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)

***Option 2: Visit to the village of Hautvilliers*** - Famous as the home of Dom Pérignon, 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: 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: 1 minute)

### **Evening**

Tonight you will eat at a popular restaurant in one of the neighbouring villages.

## **Friday 30<sup>th</sup> August**

### **Morning – Cruise from Mareuil-sur-Ay to Damery**

During our cruise today we leave the manmade canal and join the winding Marne river. Here the scenery changes with natural riverbanks and wider locks operated by remote control. 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**

Lunch will be served on board on we arrive at our tranquil mooring in Damery. This afternoon you have a choice of two excursions:

***Option 1: Chocolate and champagne*** – Get hands on and learn how to make filled chocolate champagne corks with Xavier at his artisan chocolate shop. After our 1.5hour lesson you can choose to head for either:

**Option A - Epernay:** 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 Moët & Chandon, Pol Roger and Perrier Jouët. Unsurprisingly there are plenty of opportunities to stop for additional tastings if you wish along the way.

**Option B:** Cramant – The nearby village of Cramant 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.

(Drive time from the barge, each direction: 15 minutes)

**Option 2: A Chateau and vineyard village** - 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. (Drive time from the barge, each direction: 15 minutes).

### **Evening**

Tonight dinner is a relaxed BBQ dinner onboard.

## **Saturday 31<sup>st</sup> August**

### **Cruise from Damery to Dormans**

Our last day of cruising takes us further west 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.

### **Excursions**

Today you can choose from three excursion options, what time we depart from Damery will be determined by which option you choose:

**Option 1: Saturday morning market and a guided walk in Dormans** - Held in an art-deco style covered market hall there is fresh produce from across the region at the Saturday morning market – and you'll choose the cheeses and charcuterie for your platter style lunch back on board. Once the barge is moored in Dormans, we will drive up to the beautiful WW1 memorial chapel, with its commanding views over the Marne river valley below. (Drive time from the barge, each direction: 10 minutes)

**Option 2: 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 3: 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: 1hr 25 mins)

### **Evening**

If you choose excursion Option 1 or 2 you will have dinner at a popular restaurant on the village square, a short walk from the barge. If you choose Option 3 you will be dining at the Chateau during your evening excursion.

## **Sunday 1<sup>st</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.