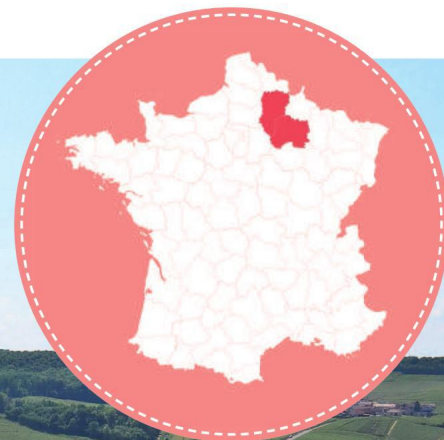


# Road trip

In the driving seat



# CHAMPAGNE

This region, with its rich wine-making heritage, is a feast for all the senses, says **Paola Westbeek**

## Day One

### Château-Thierry to Épernay

Our tour of the Champagne wine region, which stretches out over 34,000 hectares, starts in Château-Thierry. Via the 13th-century Porte Saint-Jean, we make our way through the imposing ruins of the town's medieval castle, stopping to admire the sprawling views over the Marne Valley. In the distance, I spot Saint-Crépin, Château-Thierry's oldest church and the only one to have survived the wars.

Eager to let Champagne's exceptional *terroir* tingle our taste buds, we head north-east to Barzy-sur-Marne for a *dégustation*

at Lévêque-Dehan ([champagne-leveque-dehan.fr](http://champagne-leveque-dehan.fr)) where we meet fifth-generation champagne maker Eric Lévêque who explains the basics of champagne. Most blends consist of three grape varieties: pinot meunier, pinot noir and chardonnay.

Our next stop is the Premier Cru village of Hautvillers, approximately 40 minutes east. G. Tribaut ([champagne-tribaut-hautvillers.com](http://champagne-tribaut-hautvillers.com)) has a history that goes back to 1935. When we visit, the bright and airy tasting room is buzzing with excitement as people swirl, sniff and taste while reveling in the most splendid views over the family's 13 hectares of vineyards.

After a quick lunch of baguettes stuffed with *jambon*, we stroll through Hautvillers' pleasant streets. Known as the cradle of champagne, it was here that Benedictine monk Dom Pérignon devoted his life to his faith and to perfecting the production of the divine sparkling drink.

We drive 11 minutes south to Épernay, Champagne's famous capital. Our B&B, Magna Quies ([magnaquies-epernay.jimdo.com](http://magnaquies-epernay.jimdo.com), €180 per night) is conveniently located on Avenue de Champagne, home to some of the region's most prestigious names including Moët et Chandon.

PHOTOS BY: PIXABAY; HANS & PAOLA WESTBEEK; V BRASSINNE



## Day Two

### Épernay to Reims

Before leaving Épernay, we visit Boizel, just a two-minute walk from Magna Quies. Our guide, Leire, takes us on an awe-inspiring tour through the one-kilometre maze of historic cellars located 12 metres underground (boizel.com)

Waving Épernay farewell, we go south to Cramant, one of Champagne's 17 Grand Cru villages. Voirin-Jumel (champagne-voirin-jumel.com) is situated on the chalky hillsides of the Côte de Blancs, where chardonnay is king.

It is still early and there is a chill in the air as we make our way through the vineyards with the friendly Alice Jumel and her two little dogs. Along with her brother Patrick, Alice has been at the head of Voirin-Jumel for over 40 years. Voirin-Jumel is a *récoltant manipulateur*, meaning they only use grapes from their own vineyards and do not buy from growers. After a tour, we end at the champagne bar for a tasting. Spending time with Alice, who shares her winemaking philosophy with passion, is truly a joy.

We go north to Mutigny, a small village in the Parc Naturel



#### GETTING THERE:

A26 autoroute from Calais to Reims (2½hrs); A4 from Reims and Épernay to Château-Thierry.

#### TOURIST INFORMATION:

champagne-ardenne-tourism.co.uk

Régional de la Montagne de Reims and follow the Sentier du Vigneron trail (a little over two kilometres), offering sweeping vistas over the Marne Valley's rolling patchwork of vineyards (sentierduvigneron.fr, from €12).

Our guide tells us about the region's soil, climate, grapes and production process. We learn that Champagne's hillsides, houses and cellars were declared a Unesco World Heritage Site in 2015.

Ending our Champagne adventure, we head to Reims, approximately 40 minutes north

#### Above:

Reims, the Champagne capital

via the D1/D951. At our B&B, Le Clos des Roys (leclosdesroys.fr, from €100), just a stone's throw away from the 13th-century Notre-Dame Cathedral, we are made to feel like family by owners Marie Anne and Gérard.

Later that evening, while enjoying dinner at Au Petit Comptoir, which serves artfully prepared dishes (menus from €23, au-petit-comptoir.fr), we agree that Champagne's appeal goes beyond its famous drink. The landscapes, history, cuisine and hospitality make the region a feast for the senses. ♥

## CHÂTEAU-THIERRY



63 km

## ÉPERNAY



54 km

## REIMS



**Location:**  
Barzy-sur-Marne, at  
Lévêque-Dehan



**Location:**  
Hautvillers, where all  
signs lead to  
champagne

**Location:**  
Mutigny's  
lush  
vineyards

