

# Eating out



## CHAMPAGNE

At the gateway to the Champagne wine region you'll find restaurants are a worthy match for the area's famous bubbles, says **Paola Westbeek**

### Château de la Marjolaine, Essômes-sur-Marne

Gloriously situated on the banks of the Marne, Château de la Marjolaine is not only a place to dine at, it is a place to experience. Dating from 1850, the stately Napoleon III mansion boasts peaceful gardens that invite you to bask in their beauty, rooms that breathe history and elegance and a restaurant where carefully prepared dishes made with local ingredients showcase the best of French cuisine.

Our meal opens with a trio of foie gras exhibiting a clever contrast of textures and flavours. There is a slice of foie gras infused with Marc de Champagne and served on thinly sliced French gingerbread, a fleshy artichoke



heart crowned with pan-seared foie gras seasoned with flakes of crisp sea salt and a tiny bowl of foie gras ice-cream (yes, you read correctly) scented with a whisper of cinnamon.

The main is equally decadent: succulent lamb shanks are braised with ratafia (local fortified wine) and served with

a rich gravy, roasted carrots and sautéed mushrooms. A glass of Léquillet Romelot's Notes Noires bursting with ripe yellow fruit and a hint of grilled pineapple mirrors the aromas of the dish perfectly.

Our feast culminates with a soup of mandarin oranges, not cold, but hot. A scattering of pink peppercorns and a dash of ratafia make the broth both zesty and voluptuous.

Impeccable service, a tasteful decor and carefully chosen champagnes with every course complete a dining experience as unforgettable as the location where it was enjoyed.

**Open lunchtime (12-2pm) and evenings (7pm-8.30pm). À la carte and set menus from €18**  
**Tel: (Fr) 3 23 69 77 80**  
**[chateaumarjolaine.com](http://chateaumarjolaine.com)**



## Au 36, Hautvillers

Nestled in the Marne Valley's viticultural slopes, Hautvillers is known as the cradle of champagne and home to Au 36, a friendly *cave à manger* where you can sit back and savour some of the region's sparkling treasures with a selection of bites and dishes.

We arrive on a Saturday afternoon and the place is pleasantly buzzing as we make our way past the terrace and head to the second floor where we are offered a cosy table for two. We order a *dégustation* featuring three flutes of champagne and a plate of 'champardises' (local appetisers). Each little gourmet delight has me eager to sink my teeth into the next, but most memorable are the Champagne lentils topped with a velvety beetroot mousse and crisp fried



onions, the golden *gougère* with *boudin blanc* and Reims mustard cream, and the delicate *macaron* made with pink biscuits and raspberry mousse. Before leaving, don't forget to stock up on a few bottles (sold at cellar prices) and to visit the charming souvenir shop.

Open from 1 April (10.30am-6pm). Platters from €14 and *cocottes* from €16.

Tel: (Fr) 3 26 51 58 37  
[au36.net](http://au36.net)

## Le Continental, Reims

With a history dating from 1880, Le Continental hotel/restaurant reopened last year after extensive renovations.

Our *amuse-bouche*, a flavourful vegetable *velouté* topped with a dollop of herring mousse, is already promising. As is the glass of bubbly that opens our meal: the Apollonis Cuvée Authentic Meunier.

I start with one of the restaurant's signature dishes, the foie gras marinated in ratafia. It is served with feather-light brioche and a zesty pineapple chutney that provides a refreshing contrast to the duck liver's buttery richness.

My partner's starter, a duo of herring fillet, is a visual feast with colourful accents of bright purple vitelotte potato.

My main is a tender veal

medallion, cooked beautifully rosé and paired with sweet carrots, both pureed and sliced. A dessert of roasted pineapple paired with champagne *sabayon* and pink biscuit ice cream is the delectable finale to an utterly enjoyable meal.

Open lunchtime (12-2.30pm) and evenings (7pm-10.30pm). À la carte and set menus ranging from €27

Tel: (Fr) 3 26 40 63 83  
[continental-restaurant.fr](http://continental-restaurant.fr)



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Try some of these moreish specialities from Champagne

## PINK BISCUITS

**Biscuits Fossier**

Tel: (Fr) 3 26 40 67 67  
[fossier.fr](http://fossier.fr)

Created at the end of the 17th century, the dainty Biscuits Roses de Reims are traditionally dipped in champagne and gorgeous in desserts such as charlottes and tiramisu. Visit the Fossier factory (by appointment) to learn more about the history of the biscuits and see how they're made. At the neighbouring shop, you can stock up on Fossier's sweet creations at discount prices.

## MARKET

Dating from 1927, the Boulingrin covered market, a historic monument at the start of Rue de Mars, is a great place to shop for fresh local produce on Wednesday, Friday and Saturday mornings. After your market round, check out some of the gourmet shops on the same street. You'll find a *boulangerie-pâtisserie*, a cheese and wine shop and an excellent *traiteur*.

## CHOCOLATES

**Chocolaterie Thibaut**

Tel: (Fr) 3 26 51 58 04  
[chocolaterie-thibaut.com](http://chocolaterie-thibaut.com)

Shop for Bouchons de Champagne and see how they are made at Chocolaterie Thibaut in Pierry, approximately 10 minutes south of Épernay (Champagne's capital). The cork-shaped chocolates are a speciality of the region and come in a variety of flavours including Marc de Champagne, ratafia and Fine de Marne.

## REGIONAL DELIGHTS

**Terroir des Rois**

Tel: (Fr) 3 26 88 34 95  
[terroirdesrois.fr](http://terroirdesrois.fr)

Just a stone's throw from the magnificent 13th-century Notre-Dame Cathedral in Reims, you'll find Terroir des Rois, a charming boutique carrying a wide variety of local specialities such as Clovis mustards and vinegars, potted terrines, foie gras, truffles, Fossier products and a selection of champagnes and local liqueurs.