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## High spirits

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## THE HIGH LIFE

# Bubbles with everything...

Lucy Roue visits a hotel at the heart of the Champagne-Ardenne area of France



A tasting session at The Royal Champagne Hotel and Spa

The room has a panoramic view over the Champagne hillside



The restaurant design is inspired by Napoleon



**A**s we whizz through the autumnal vineyards of the French countryside on electric bikes I make a quick mental note - I love this country. The quaint villages of the Champagne-Ardenne region spring up before us during our quest to find the final resting place of Dom Perignon.

It may sound like an unusual visitor's attraction but this is the heart of France's champagne region and, as we soon find out, they live and breathe the bubbly stuff here.

In fact during our two night stay in this rural haven, just a 40 minute train journey from Paris, we become connoisseurs of the famous French sparkling wine.

It's hard not to when staying at the Royal Champagne Hotel and Spa with its spectacular views of the rolling hillside, awash with grapes.

This newly-renovated luxury hotel has a fascinating history as legend has

it that Napoléon Bonaparte once stopped here to rest his horses at the former historic coaching inn.

The French statesman and military leader has left his mark either way becoming the proud emblem of the hotel.

Perched on the hillside it overlooks the charming villages of Champillon and Hautvilliers and is within 10 minutes of Épernay, the capital of Champagne.

Arriving at this pristine complex and we are made to feel like royalty with a hearty welcome from the receptionist and hotel manager.

The interior is stunning and my eyes flicker between the huge floral chandelier and subtle architectural detail.

After a chirpy check-in we are shown to our huge double room with its crisp white bedding and classic marigold walls.

A bucket of Champagne is laid out as an extra welcome, of course, and we cheers to a safe arrival in the French



A pool with a view at The Royal Champagne Hotel and Spa

countryside.

Striding through the room we draw back the glass doors and step out on to our panoramic balcony as a mist settled on the vines.

It's stunning and atmospheric in equal measures although we soon retreat back into the warmth.

The impressive hotel has 49 spacious rooms looking out across the vineyards all with outdoor terraces where you can soak up the views.

Dining in style

Our two nights at the re-imagined retreat gives us ample time to tuck in to some great French cuisine.

We take dinner and lunch at the main restaurant Le Bellevue sat beneath a thousand crystal pendants which softly reflect the wintery sun.

The restaurant takes its cues from the 'terroir' of Champagne as chef Jean-Denis Rieubland sources his produce and meat from locals and friends in the region. This results in an ever-evolving menu full of rich stories and intense flavours.

During our stay I try the herb crusted chicken with pasta and fresh mushrooms while my dining partner goes for the Ardennes pork tenderloin, served with risotto, olives and full bodied jus.

There is also a Michelin-starred restaurant on-site, Le Royal, which exudes intimacy with carefully painted wall partitions of the most prominent women in Napoleon's life, including his mistresses, which raises an eyebrow.

Between the champagne sipping and high dining make sure you leave enough time to enjoy the spa.

The endless views and outdoor

heated infinity pool make it a joyful experience and let's face it very Instagrammable.

We take a dip in the cool elongated pool before warming up in the jacuzzi, steam room and sauna with a welcome glass of cucumber water.

I also pay an early morning visit to the spa later in our stay to experience one of their many treatments.

The 30 minute Biologique Recherche facial leaves me refreshed and smelling divine followed by a relaxing 30 minute KOS massage.

Later we are chauffeured to a local Champagne House for a tasting session which turns out to be a highlight of our stay.

Maison Leclerc Briant, in Epernay, has a fascinating history as it conceals a maze of underground wine cellars and tunnels used during war-time.

This is a really special place and well worth a visit to see first-hand the passion and intricacy that goes into making their organic and biodynamic Champagne.

They are pioneers, no doubt about it, and we eagerly drink in the information from our knowledgeable guide.

Although some of their ideas are outright quirky, like getting inside a gold lined barrel for a spiritual experience, I sort of love it!

My favourite of their Champagnes is Abyss which is aged in a crate under the Atlantic resulting in an awesome barnacle encrusted bottle.

The taste is quite dry and am I imagining a hint of saltiness? Who cares, the concept is next level and it's got people talking as well as quaffing.

Our stay at The Royal Champagne Hotel and Spa is top notch and well

worth the 40 minute trip from Paris.

The staff can not do enough for you and we were even sad to leave this place behind, although much more relaxed and clued up on their most famous export.

● **EasyJet flies to Paris Charles de Gaulle from 10 UK airports, including Manchester, with prices starting from £47.08 per person (return, including taxes.) All flights can be booked at [www.easyjet.com](http://www.easyjet.com)**

**Rates at Royal Champagne Hotel and Spa start from around £300 per night in a Garden Junior Suite on a B&B basis. To book a stay at the majestic rural hotel visit [royalchampagne.com](http://royalchampagne.com).**

**The fast TGV train from Paris to Champagne takes approx. 40 minutes and fares start from €10 one-way.**