

MIND & BODY WELLBEING

'I went to Champagne to detox like a French girl'

How do you say heaven in French?

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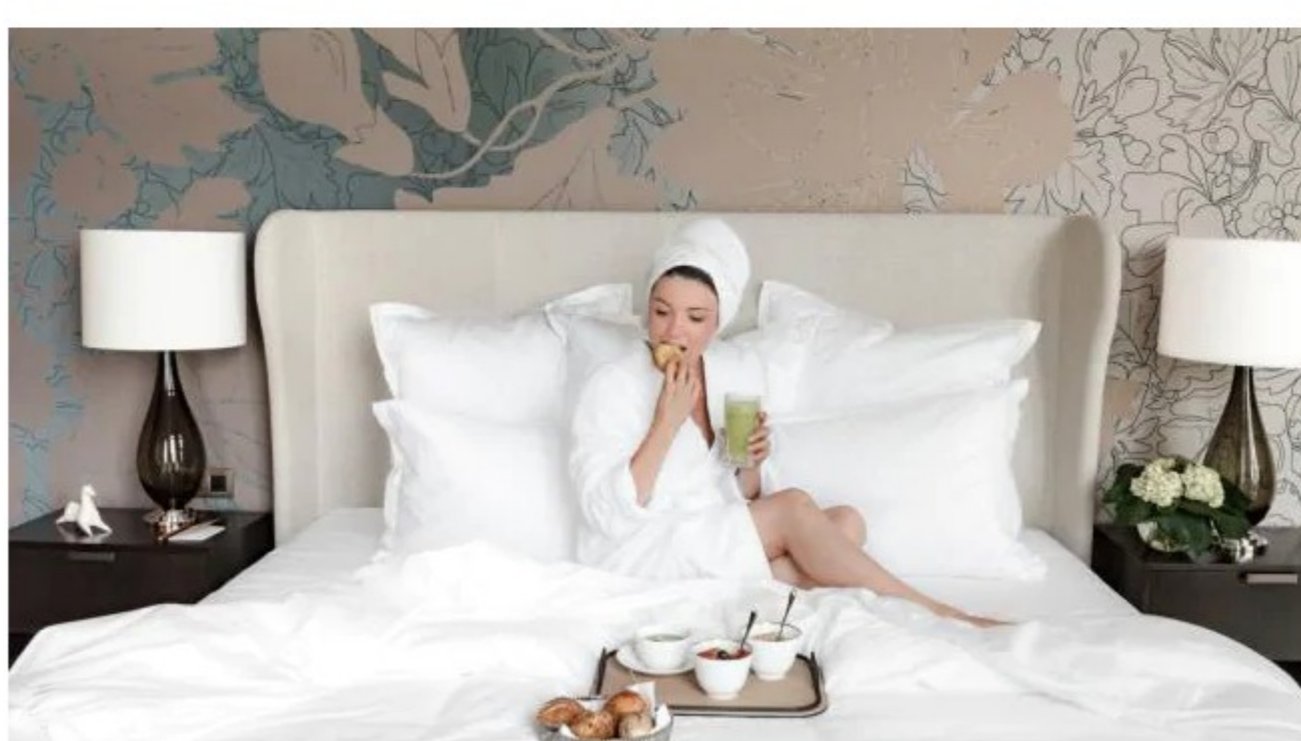


Image: Supplied. Royal Champagne Hotel & Spa. Source:BodyAndSoul

Nestled in the rolling hills of the Champagne wine region and just an hour from Paris, this sparkling new hotel and spa retreat feels a world away from the daily grind.

I arrive at the [Royal Champagne Hotel & Spa](#) ready to "detox". Yet, when I walk into my room at dusk and see the bottle of bubbles waiting for me, it feels blasphemous not to [pour myself a glass](#), sit out on the balcony and take in the vista of rolling vineyards below. So, I do.

Sipping on Champagne and soaking up magic hour, I feel myself start to unfurl. Below, grape-pickers turn in for the day as lights switch on, one-by-one, taking over from the sun. The quiet is foreign compared to the usual buzz and whirl of London, where I got on a train that morning and already feels a world away.

The former coaching inn – which in a prior life hosted kings en route to France to their coronations, and where legend has it Napoleon once stayed – has recently reopened after being transformed by architect Giovanni Pace, best known for his work for Moët & Chandon.



Image: Supplied. Royal Champagne Hotel & Spa. Source:BodyAndSoul

I'll admit that my room, with its freestanding bath, Hermès toiletries and high thread-count sheets, makes me feel like royalty. Each room has an Illy coffee machine and Jing teas. Throughout the hotel, there are splashes of creams and golds, bubbly-looking wallpapers, and thousands of crystals dropping from the ceiling, bringing to mind the region's famed tippie.

After all, I reason as I pour myself another glass, the Champagnes on offer at the hotel – of which there are more than 200 and many from local winemakers – are [biodynamic and vegan](#).

In London, my nights tend to be tightly-scheduled: Pilates, dinner, more work, bed. This evening though, my schedule consists of two things: a 5pm facial and 7pm Champagne tasting.

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Image: Supplied. Royal Champagne Hotel & Spa. Source:BodyAndSoul

The world-class spa and wellness retreat includes a hammam, a gym, indoor and outdoor pool, and a range of treatments from the iconic and much-obsessed over French skincare brand [Biologique Recherche](#). Created by French couple Yvan and Josette Allouche, the world-famous products consist of "intentionally pure, raw active ingredients". And yes, after seeing how the signature custom-made facial works magic on my dry winter skin, I too count myself a fan.

Post-facial, I sit at the hotel bar for my Champagne tasting with Bruno Tailly, the hotel's director of operations. The crystal chandeliers glitter above me and the outside terrace sparkles with the gold lights wrapped around the dozens of Christmas trees.

I am onto my third – or is it fourth? – glass of champagne when I start to forget about my so-called detox plan. Luckily, Mr Tailly approves. "Detox is not necessarily cucumbers on the eyes and eating tofu," he reassures me. "For me, it's a long-haul flight: no wi-fi, no emails, Champagne, films and good food." This, I learn, is the French way to detox.

I ask what brings people to the Royal Champagne, nestled in the heart of rural France and overlooking the villages of Champillon and Hautvilliers, and just a 10 minute drive from Epernay, the capital of Champagne.

Mr Tailly tells me that everyone visits for different reasons but leaves with the same feeling. He doesn't specify exactly what that feeling is but, onto my fourth glass, I agree.

I move from the bar to Bellevue, one of the hotel's two restaurants, for dinner: an endive salad for entrée, baked back of cod with organic lentils from the region for main, finished with a dark chocolate éclair, all paired with Champagnes by the charming and knowledgeable staff.

The restaurant's ever-changing menu is the work of chef Jean-Denis Rieubland, who previously had two Michelin stars in Nice and has already won one here in Champagne in just six months. He sources his produce and meats from locals and friends in the region.



Image: Supplied. Royal Champagne Hotel & Spa. Source:BodyAndSoul

The next morning, I return to the same restaurant for a breakfast of freshly baked croissants, blueberry and orange blossom jam, followed by bircher muesli with dates and pistachios. The staff buzz about, topping up my glass with fresh grapefruit juice and my mug with black coffee.

Once again, the day ahead looks deliciously empty: a massage and quick workout at the gym, followed by a whole afternoon of lounging by the spa's 25m indoor pool overlooking the same breathtaking views. I lose track of the time as I dip in and out between chapters of my book.

I've always thought of detoxing as something to endure, not enjoy. Like drinking lemon water and decaf, juicing, going teetotal on booze and carbs and spending hours in the gym.

However, when I speak to Anna Pierzak, the hotel's spa director, she confirms the French detox differently: something she describes as "a pleasant detox".

In France, she says, detoxing is not about doing something you don't want to do or eating something you don't want to eat. People come here to detox from the day-to-day.

For most of us, our lives are packed with errands, work, responsibilities, "shoulds". Why would we detox from all of this with more work and more "shoulds"? As the French say: c'est absurde.

Here in France, to detox is to slow down, to breathe in the country air, to stop to watch the sunset. It is to relish that sip of Champagne and savour that nourishing French fare. After a weekend – or week – doing these things, you return to your normal routine feeling refreshed.

When I leave Champagne, I do feel lighter: maybe not physically, but mentally. A few days of being kinder to myself has brought back a zest for routine that has been missing lately, likely drained by the daily mental load of deadlines, chores, bills and public transport. Suddenly, I realise, I know what Mr Tailly means when he says everyone leaves with the same feeling.

Details

Where: 9, Rue de la République, Hameau de Bellevue, 51160 Champillon, France.

Contact number: 00 33 3 2652 4111

Cost: Rates start from approximately €385 per night

Website: [royalchampagne.com](#)