

A regal retreat

23 Dec, 2022 | Travel



Immerse yourself in an indulgent world of bubbles with a stay at Royal Champagne & Spa

Words: Jonathan Whiley

In Champagne, *mon ami*, the finest things in life begin almost immediately. It is not unknown that during baptism ceremonies in the region, babies will be given a droplet of this amber nectar as a welcome into the world.

So far, so ooo la la! From the outside looking in this may be mistaken as an act of French fancy, but you would be mistaken. In this region, it's simply a way of life. Champagne, as a brand, is beloved and revered the world over – the de rigueur celebratory drink of choice – and yet here bottles forever reside in the fridges of residents as casually as milk. “We drink champagne the way that you [the English] drink tea,” one resident tells me, with a smile.

Champagne may be synonymous with luxury, but the region itself is not spoilt for choice when it comes to indulgent places to stay. When Royal Champagne & Spa opened in 2018 it was – perhaps surprisingly – the first five-star contemporary hotel in Champagne.

Its reinvention dates back to 2014 when the current Boston-based owners came for lunch at the hotel – then owned by Baglioni – and immediately fell in love. Realising it was on sale, they duly bought it and embarked on a multi-million pound four-year facelift.

Working with local architect Giovanni Pace, their vision was to create a luxury resort that would nod to its rich history as a former coaching inn where Napoleon would stay during one of his campaigns. “It’s an emotional place for the locals,” a member of staff tells me with pride.

The results are show-stopping: a light, bright, spacious hotel with bags of atmosphere and modern elegance that offers knockout views of the rolling vineyards and storybook villages below (Épernay, where you will find the Avenue de Champagne, is a 15-minute drive away).

From London, the best way to travel is with Eurostar. Not only is St Pancras to Gare du Nord in Paris an effortless and speedy journey (around 2 hours 15 minutes), their Business Premier class offers a supreme hassle-free experience.



A dedicated check-in is quick and easy to beat any queues, a spacious business lounge in both London and Paris offers a chance to kick back, and the journey itself includes complimentary Piper-Heidsieck Champagne alongside a menu devised by Michelin-starred chef Raymond Blanc.

Much more sustainably minded than flying (the carbon footprint from one flight can be the same as 13 Eurostar journeys), for those heading to Champagne the generous luggage allowance in Business Premier (two suitcases and one piece of hand luggage per person – no weight restrictions and no extra charges) is particularly appealing.

From Paris, the hotel is a short train ride away (approximately 40 minutes), where champagne (naturally) awaits your arrival. Each of the 47 spacious rooms and suites have outdoor terraces and hotel facilities include two swimming pools (a huge indoor and heated outdoor), steam room, sauna, jacuzzi, fitness room and yoga studio.

Le Bellevue Restaurant and Terrace offers an expansive breakfast buffet as well as French classics with a modern twist for lunch and dinner (the pepper crusted beef fillet is outstanding and the amount of locals speaks volumes), while Le Royal showcases Michelin-starred cuisine (won in its first year) with decadent touches (champagne and caviar sauce madame?).



Champagne is never very far away; there are 440 champagnes on the wine list and a selection is even available in the spa. A tasting with Champagne-born Antony Laviron – one of two sommeliers at the hotel – is an essential part of your stay.

Like all of the 100-strong staff we encounter (80 per cent local) he is friendly, enthusiastic and highly knowledgeable with contacts that ensure Royal Champagne has some of the most highly sought-after champagne in the world. We learn about a new variety of grape, the best time to drink champagne (toam – the humidity in your mouth is at its optimal), the strict classification rules (18 months minimum for ageing) and the fierce annual debate on the price of the grapes.

While many of the big luxury champagne houses are within easy reach of the hotel, those looking for an alternative can visit (by appointment-only) Champagne Leclerc Briant. Since 2012 it has been owned by none other than Champagne Hospitality Group (who run Royal Champagne & Spa) and the fizz on offer is organic and biodynamic and – crucially – delicious.

Offer activities on offer include hot air balloon rides, a new champagne concierge service, horse riding and the chance to rent an e-bicycle for a 20-minute scenic journey to the tomb of a certain monk by the name of Dom Pérignon.

Plans are afoot for the owners to open a new hotel in Burgundy next year – with 37 rooms and a spa set in a former castle – but until then, loyal oenophiles will continue to savour a regal taste of Champagne at this outstanding retreat. In a region which – to quote sommelier Antony – “the world comes to you”, this hotel has romance running through its veins and a permanent place in even the most discerning traveller’s little black book.

royalchampagne.com/en/
eurostar.com/uk



MORE TRAVEL

