

3 Days in

CHAMPAGNE

As stunning a wine region as you could ever hope to visit, here's how to get the most out of your three days in France's famous Champagne region.



Ah, Champagne. That otherworldly wine with its hypnotic bubbles, heady aromatics and *je ne sais quoi*.

Though the bubbles may be the thing that seduces us at first sight, it is something else that captures our imaginations. The coolest of wine-producing climates and chalkiest of lands is unique to the region of Champagne, contributing concentration, freshness, salinity and finesse.

With borders now officially open, there's now no need to live vicariously through your bountifully stocked cellar or that occupying glass of champagne. Relative ease of travel, and a new-found enthusiasm for tourism, makes Champagne the most exciting wine region to visit in 2023 and beyond.

Where once the edifice of Champagne's finest maisons stood imposingly behind firmly shut gates, many are beginning to open, even investing in visitor centres with immersive experiences. There are also more discovery opportunities, vibrant dining options and first-rate hotels springing up all over the place.

Still, don't expect the kind of walk-in access you would get in places like the Barossa, Margaret River or Hunter Valley – for example. If you plan ahead, and armed with these tips, you won't have a problem.

Divide And Conquer

Champagne is an astonishingly large landscape to navigate, so it's best to have a strategy. There are five main growing regions to choose from over 34,000 hectares reaching almost 130km between the northern-most township (Reims) and the southern-most (Troyes). What's more, there are 319 villages spread across these five regions.

Better to taste, rather than trek, your way around Champagne with some well-planned visits and tastings in more accessible locations. Approach your itinerary in the spirit of 'divide and conquer' to maximise your time. If you have three days, make



the most of it by dedicating an entire day to each of the closest and most celebrated growing areas: Reims and the Montagne de Reims; the Grande Vallée; then Épernay and the Côte des Blancs.

Where To Rest

The **Royal Champagne Hotel and Spa**, in Champillon, is the region's newest five-star hotel – voted one of Europe's top three – and a destination in itself. A favourite resting place for Napoleon and his generals, today's renovation cleverly integrates top architectural design and panoramic views with the sweeping landscape of cascading vineyards into the Marne Valley.

The hotel hangs its hat on providing bespoke experiences for guests – almost anything can be arranged, including visits to maisons, bike or horse riding through the vineyards, hot air ballooning or even a crash course in understanding and tasting Champagne, hosted by one of their sommeliers. Each of the 47

rooms casts a gaze over rolling vineyards to Épernay, spaciouly designed and furnished with natural materials. But before you rest your head, dine at Michelin-starred restaurant **Le Royal**, headed up by executive chef, Jean-Denis Rieubland (formerly of La Tour d'Argent in Paris) and the very approachable chief sommelier, Daniel Pires. The wine list is impressively geared to a younger generation of Champagne producers without sacrificing some better-known and favourite maisons.

Résidence Eisenhower, conveniently located in the heart of Reims, is another that recently opened its doors. Not so much a hotel as it is an upmarket B&B, it belongs to the owners of Charles Heidsieck and Piper-Heidsieck, and was the residence of General Eisenhower in the days of deliverance during World War II.

This beautiful old mansion has been passionately restored to capture the former glory of its French heritage. You will be warmly greeted by the Maitresse de Maison, Annelies Pieters, who says she can "open doors to secret locations". All you need to do is ask.



FIT FOR A KING
Resting place of
Napoleon, visit the
Royal Champagne
Hotel and Spa.