

elite traveler

RESPONSIBLE LUXURY LIFESTYLE

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The Watch Issue

THE PINNACLE OF CREATIVITY,
INNOVATION, PRECISION,
CRAFTSMANSHIP AND ART —
THESE ARE THE MOST EXCITING
WATCH RELEASES



**EXPLORE
CHAMPAGNE**

GUIDE TO **CHAMPAGNE**

"Come quickly, I am tasting the stars!" reportedly said the French monk Dom Pérignon upon his first taste of champagne. The year was 1693, and our enthusiasm for the world's most famous wine hasn't changed since. The region now counts around 16,200 growers and some 370 houses behind the 187.2 million bottles of bubbly exported worldwide last year, according to figures from the Champagne Bureau UK, the official UK voice of Comité Champagne. Of these houses, you'll find most of the big *domaines* around Reims (Ruinart, Pommery, Taittinger and Veuve Clicquot are all here) or in Épernay, after Jean-Rémy Moët wisely chose to build on a key pathway between Paris and Europe, starting what would become the Avenue de Champagne. These days the trip is slightly easier; you can now get to Épernay by train in one hour and 15 minutes from Paris, and to Reims in just 45 minutes. If you're curious to dive into the new trend for low- and zero-dosage wines, then add on visits to smaller producers outside of the cities — just make sure to contact them in advance: A more artisan production also means a smaller team to welcome guests. You'll find the doors to the grand maisons are usually always open, however, to give you a glimpse at the fascinating history behind the world's most famous bubbles.

by Nicola Leigh Stewart



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Dining

The exceptional two-Michelin star **Le Parc (lescrayeres.com)**, housed in the stunning Domaine Les Crayères, is an example of French fine dining at its best. A magical evening begins with a glass of bubbles on the garden terrace before moving inside to the luxurious dining room. You can go à la carte, but for a true immersion in Champagne, let chef Philippe Mille guide you through the surrounding terroir with one of the sublime tasting menus.

Don't let the American dive bar/British pub decor fool you: **The Glue Pot (thegluepot.com)** has one of the best champagne lists in the city — served up in Zalto glasses, no less.

For a classic oyster and champagne pairing, **Le Bocal (restaurantlebocal.fr)** has chosen only the best from Maison Gillaudeau, recognizable by the small 'G' printed onto the shell. The rest of the seafood menu is equally good — think: lobster from Brittany and fish from Noirmoutier — while a small selection of desserts come from Normandy's famed butter maker, Bordier.

The prettiest bottles in Champagne are now being served in the prettiest setting at **Cellier Belle Époque (perrier-jouet.com)**. Located in the historic Maison Perrier-Jouët, which was closed to the public until 2021, the bar takes inspiration from the house's naturalistic Art Nouveau style and serves up champagne, cocktails and light bites in a garden-inspired setting and terrace.

INSIDER TIPS

WHEN TO VISIT

The main event in Champagne is obviously the harvest, when champagne houses will be too busy to welcome visitors, so that's a time to avoid. The date varies by region and year but it usually begins around the beginning of September, although due to climate change that date now starts 18 days earlier than it did 30 years ago.

IF YOU DO ONE THING...

Is there any better way to see Champagne's world-famous vineyards — and enjoy a glass — than from the heights of a hot-air balloon? Aerfun organizes both sunrise and sunset balloon rides for a magical way to enjoy *une coupe de champagne*. paris-balloon.com

GET OUT OF TOWN...

If you make Épernay your base then it's worth getting out of town to Ay, which is just a 10-minute car ride away (or four minutes by train). This charming village packs in champagne houses such as Bollinger, Ayala, Henri Giraud and Leclerc Briant, and a champagne museum, Pressoria, to visit between tastings. Jewellery and Art Nouveau fans will appreciate it as the birthplace of René Lalique, and with a map in hand from Ay town hall, can take a self-guided tour to find out about the life of France's master glassmaker.

COMING SOON

The currently closed Taittinger will reopen its doors in 2024 to welcome visitors back to its *crayères* with a revamped selection of tasting tours and vineyards experiences, plus a new restaurant offering wine pairings inspired by Taittinger's signature collection of champagnes. Also look out for the reopening of the Palais du Tau, the former residence of the archbishops of Reims and now a museum housing treasures such as tapestries, paintings and sculptures from the cathedral. taittinger.com

