

## Self drive holidays

# SDo8 Epernay, Reims and vineyards

6-day & 5-night tour



## Itinerary

### Day 1 - Arrival at Epernay.

Your first day you find yourself in **Epernay**, at the heart of the most prestigious vineyard in the world. In every direction sprawls 20 000 hectares of vines, and underfoot, more than 200 million bottles lie aging in 110 kilometers of wine cellars carved out into the chalky earth. May the festivities begin!

**Visit of Epernay and the champagne cellars.** Since its establishment in the 5th century, the city of Epernay was destroyed several times, pillaged and burned more than 25 times throughout several wars. It was also bombarded and heavily damaged during the two World Wars. Nevertheless, Epernay has conserved some of its vestiges of the past: **Portail St Martin**, the facade of the **Maison Louise de Savoie** and several very beautiful private mansions from the 19th century. But above all, Epernay is the majestic **Avenue de Champagne**, a neighborhood of grand homes and of the production and negotiation of champagne. This avenue is lined with innumerable 19th-century buildings done in the opulence of the Renaissance and Classical styles. You will have the opportunity to visit some of these cellars where the champagne matures in underground galleries. *Lodging and breakfast in Epernay*

### Day 2 - Cote des Blancs and the Coteaux du Sud d'Epernay.

This circuit will take you through the charming winemaking villages of the **Côte des Blancs**, so called because of the white (Chardonnay) grapevines planted here. You will leave Epernay, bypassing the **Mont Bernon** via **Chouilly**. This will take you to villages well known to Champagne lovers, **Cuis, Cramant, Avize, Oger, le Mesnil sur Oger, Vertus** and **Bergères les Vertus**, most of which boast magnificent churches dating from the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, like the one in Vertus that is built on stilts above a spring. Once past **Bergère les Vertus**, you will climb up **Mont Aimé**, steeped in history – and tragedy. It was here that the **Blanche de Navarre** fortress rose up, of which only a few ruins remain, and where 183 Cathars (heretics in the eyes of the Catholic Church) were burnt on 12<sup>th</sup> May 1329. It was also the site of the incredible **Holy Alliance** display of military might (more than 500,000 men), staged by the Russian Tsar Alexander 1<sup>st</sup>, after the 1815 defeat of Napoleon and the French troops. Then you will climb back up towards **Gionges** and **Grauves** where the church houses a beautiful statue of the Blessed Virgin carved in a grape press screw, which leads the inhabitants to say, “The Grauves Virgin has performed more turns than miracles”.

From **Grauves**, you will discover the Coteaux Sud d'Épernay, the hills south of Épernay, and slowly make your way back to **Épernay**, crossing at least 10 villages, each more picturesque than the last: **Moslins** and the ruins of a Cistercian abbey, **Chavot-Courcourt** with its magnificent 13<sup>th</sup> century chapel built on a hillock surrounded by vines, the **châteaux of Brugny Vaudancourt** and **Brugny**. During this fun walk, you will stop at a few local producers to discover – and enjoy – all the finesse, elegance and subtlety of the Côte des Blancs champagnes. Finally, we have suggestions for a few small walking routes for you to discover the vineyards... *Lodging and breakfast in Épernay*

### Day 3 - The Marne Valley, from Épernay to Dormans.

This circuit will take you around the favoured soils of Pinot Meunier, the grape variety that gives Champagne its fruity bouquet. The vines stretch as far as the eye can see towards Paris, on each side of the river on terraced hillsides, where villages, châteaux and churches cling to the sides. From **Épernay**, you will reach **Hautvillers**, the cradle of Champagne. This village is typical of the Champagne region, the houses bear handsome labels, then there is the abbey where Dom Perignon, the famous monk who improved the Champagne making processes, lived. You will walk along the Marne, crossing charming little villages such as **Cumières**, **Damery**, **Fleury la Rivière**, **Villiers sous Châtillon**, **Reuil** and discovering grandiose landscapes from the hilltops. You will reach the village of **Chatillon sur Marne**, birthplace of Pope Urban II and, at the foot of his immense statue that looks out over the vineyards; you will be able to see the entire valley. Then, you will continue walking through the villages of **Vaudières** (Gallo-Roman site), and **Verneuil** with its Medieval church, to reach **Dormans**, a small town that still bears the scars of fighting during the 1914-1918 war. You will then come back into **Épernay** via the valley's other side. You will pass through lovely, welcoming villages: **Troissy** and the old 'Amour Dieu' (Love of God) Cistercian abbey, **Mareuil le Port**, **Leuvigny**, **Festigny**, **Chêne la Reine** that owes its name to Blanche of Castille (who supposedly lost her comb at the foot of an oak tree...). The numerous rest stops will provide chances to visit a few wine cellars and meet the producers. *Lodging and breakfast in Épernay*

### Day 4 - La Montagne de Reims.

Vines cover every slope of the Reims Mountain, while the summit is covered with forests and grazing pastures. You will leave **Épernay** via **Dizy Champillon**, pausing at the lookout to admire for one last time Épernay, the Marne Valley and Côte des Blancs that stretches away to the horizon. You will reach **Ay** that was once sheltered by thick ramparts. Numerous French and foreign sovereigns owned wine domains and presses here. The undulating route will lead you to **Bouzy**, famous for its red wine, then to **Ambonnay** where you will discover its press that is more than 100 years old, its majestic fountain and the **St Réol church**. Taking small lanes, between plains and vines you will reach the **Verzy forest** with its famous '**Faux**' the old French name for the twisted beeches crowned by umbrella-shaped branches. Little is known about their origin. Then it is on to **Verzenay**, an unusual village nestled in the base of a small valley, bordered on one side by a windmill and on the other by a lighthouse, built by a winemaker as a publicity ploy and that has now become a museum focusing on vineyards. You will discover the "Grande Montagne" (Great Mountain), kingdom of Pinot Noir with its well-to-do villages. **Chigny les Roses** in particular bears the traces of Madame Pommery and her rose garden. This flower that grows abundantly in the vineyards is a warning sign for diseases that threaten the vines. This walk ends in the heart of the "Petite Montagne" (Little Mountain), which will astound you with the diversity of its churches, such as **Sacy** with its long, elegant spire or **Chamery** with its onion bell tower. You will climb up to the **St Lié Chapel** on the top of a hillock from which you can see the whole region, the vineyards and the town of **Reims** that you will reach via a few small villages. *Lodging and breakfast in Reims*

### Day 5 - Visit Reims.

A town that will be forever remembered for its Champagne and its rich past, which can be seen in its varied and prestigious architectural heritage. For example the **Notre Dame Cathedral**, without question a Gothic work of art, or the **St Rémi Basilica** where Clovis, first king of the Franks, was baptised in 501, or the **Palais de Tau**, or even the **Reims Abbey-Museum**. The town has several museums, town houses and beautiful, grand squares that you can discover during your walk. Reims is also Champagne. The wine cellars and big name labels are to be found around the **Champs de Mars** area and on the chalky slopes of the **Butte St Nicaise**, riddled with galleries often hollowed out by the Romans to extract stone. More than 250 kilometres of galleries house hundreds of millions of bottles from the famous **Mumm**, **Ruinart**, **Pommery**, **Veuve Cliquot-Ponsardin Champagne houses...** Cellar visits and tasting sessions will bring this day to a joyous close! *Lodging and breakfast in Reims*

### Day 6 - Reims.

Tour ends after breakfast. We recommend leaving Reims towards the start of the afternoon, after having visited a museum or ... a couple champagne cellars throughout the morning.

## More details and tips

**The car** - You can do this tour with your own car or with a rental car (not included in the price). We can get a rental car for you (Please contact us)

**Hotels** - On this tour, we suggest you stay in hotels of different categories.

**Prestige self drive tour SDo8-P** – 4 or 5-star hotels and palaces

**Luxe Self drive tour SDo8-L** – 4-star hotels or chateaus

**Comfort Self drive tour SDo8-C** – 3-star hotels

**Standard Self drive holidays Standard SDo8-ST** – accommodation in 2-star family-run hotels handpicked for you and very often listed in Tourist French guides as Red Michelin or Gault et Millau guides

### Price includes

- 5 nights on B&B basis in hotels handpicked by us among the best.
- Parking fees if the hotel has one (only for Prestige and Luxe tours)
- The detailed road book with the GPS waypoints of the main landmarks, villages, attractions and hotels. It also contains maps of cities you will explore. (see below for more details)
- IGN maps of the area (scale 1 cm = 1 km)
- Green Michelin guide (tour guide) of the region
- Emergency phone number available 24/24 and 7/7

### Not including

- trip to the departure city of the self-drive tour
- Lunches and dinners (except if written in the tour description)
- Entrances fees to the different tourist sites
- Personal expenses...

### Starting and ending cities of tours

Tours start and end in cities or airports where you can easily pick up or return a rental car.

Tours start in the morning of the first day, often with a visit to the city. We recommend you to arrive the day before in the afternoon to better recover from your trip from home.

Tours end in the late afternoon in the last city or airport.

We can book a room for you for the night before or for the last day.

### Getting from and away

**By car** - You can easily reach Epernay from A4 motorway (exit chateau-Thierry or Reims) or from A26 motorway (exit Chalons en Champagne)

**By train** – TGV trains from Paris Gare de l'Est to Champagne-Ardenne TGV station sited at 8 Km from Reims – (50mn journey). Several car rental agencies in the rail station. Some TGV trains from CDG2 airport to Champagne-Ardenne TGV station.

**By plane** – Nearest airport is the international CDG airport where you will rent a car to reach Epernay (110 Km from the airport) and to do the tour.

### Other services

On request we can offer this tour with accommodation in charming B&B (manors, private chateaux, stylish villas...)