

FRANCE – PARIS TO CHAMPAGNE or RETURN

8-days / 7-nights Moderate **PREMIUM PLUS** Bike & Barge cycling cruises



Departs: Paris to Épernay: 15th June, 10th August, 2019 **EARLY BOOKING ESSENTIAL**
Épernay to Paris: 8th, 22nd June, 17th August, 2019

Cost from: \$2105 per person twin share Single cabin supplement \$585 (early reservation essential)

Includes: Breakfast, dinner on board, picnic lunches, cycling tour guide, bicycle hire, cheese tasting, half-day guided tour of Épernay including Champagne tasting

Highlights: Épernay, Château-Thierry, Champagne vineyards, the Marne River valley, WWI battlefields, Dom Pérignon, Meaux Brie, rolling hills, canal tunnels, great food and a night in Paris

Bike & Barge cruises combine two popular ways of exploring Europe, cycling and river cruising. They allow partners of different abilities and interests to holiday together - trips are just as interesting for leisure cyclists or cycling enthusiasts. Unpack once and come 'home' each night to a wonderful meal and a comfortable cabin with your own bathroom.

For 2019 we have secured a very limited number of berths on a delightful hotel barge to cruise from Paris, *City of Light*, to Épernay in the heart of Champagne, or return. Our Premium Plus class barge cruises offer a high standard of meals and comfortable cabin accommodation (all with lower twin beds and ensuite bathrooms). All cabins have air-conditioning and a fixed window and there are also two double cabins which have larger windows that open. On the main deck there is a comfortable, air-conditioned lounge with panoramic windows, dining area, seating corner and a small bar. On sunny days, there is a very spacious sun deck with chairs and tables, where you can relax and enjoy the scenery or join the skipper in the wheel house.

Our Bike & Barge cycling cruise is a great opportunity to explore the varied and interesting countryside, with visits to historic and cultural centres, sampling the wine and local produce that makes this part of France famous. Each day you can join a guided bike tour, cycle independently and meet up with the group at the boat, or stay onboard to enjoy the cruise. In the evenings our guide may offer a city walk or other activities.

Well-maintained multi-gear bicycles with panniers are provided – comfortable, easy to ride and ideal for this route – and a fascinating and varied guided cycling program with free time to explore each day's destination. A limited number of E-Bikes are also available (at extra cost). Please request early to avoid disappointment.

Cycle routes avoid the traffic wherever possible, taking small country roads, towpaths, and the occasional cobblestone road or unpaved track. Daily cycling distances are 30 to 50km and on some days there may be the option for shorter distances or on a self-guided basis. The cycling is through an undulating landscape with some steeper sections up and down the wide Marne valley slopes, through the hills and the Champagne vineyards. It is possible to avoid the traffic or hillier days by staying on the barge to enjoy the cruise.

Call OUTDOOR TRAVEL on 1800 331 582 for details or reservations



Suggested itinerary: From Paris to Epernay

Day 1 (Saturday): Arrive Paris

Plan to arrive at the barge around 2pm at the Quai de Bercy on the Seine in Paris for a welcome from the captain, crew and tour leader. We take a short walking tour through Paris, then return to the barge for dinner.

Day 2 (Sunday): Paris – Lagny-sur-Marne

cycling distance @ 35km

We depart Paris by bicycle, following a dedicated bike path from our mooring point, past the Bassin de la Villette to the Canal de l'Ourcq, built during Napoleon's time to facilitate the transportation of timber, grain and fresh water into Paris. We cycle through the outer suburbs of Paris to Lagny, a lively town on the Marne River.

Day 3 (Monday): Lagny-sur-Marne – Meaux

cycling distance @ 20-37km

We cycle mainly along the River Marne and the canal parallel. Our first challenge is the hill near Chalifert (the barge will take the tunnel through the hill and you are welcome to stay aboard; keen cyclists can test their fitness by climbing and crossing the hill by bicycle). Today's final destination is the city of Meaux, famous for its "*Brie de Meaux*" cheeses and the magnificent Cathedral St.-Etienne. The overnight mooring is in Meaux.

Day 4 (Tuesday): Meaux – La Ferté-sous-Jouarre

cycling distance @ 30-52km

After breakfast we cycle through the centre of Meaux and follow the hills and slopes of the Marne valley, through forests and many small villages on the southern and northern banks of the river. As time allows we may visit the Château de Montceau, a building started by Catherine de Médici in the 16th Century. During the day there is an opportunity to taste the famous local Brie de Meaux and Brie noir cheeses at a family-run *fromagerie*. Our overnight mooring is at La-Ferté-sous-Jouarre or a nearby village.

Day 5 (Wednesday): La-Ferté-sous-Jouarre – Château-Thierry

cycling distance @ 42km

Today offers a somewhat challenging ride from La-Ferté-sous-Jouarre to Château-Thierry. First we cycle alongside the River Marne. After a few miles we take a side valley and follow country roads through villages and hamlets to reach the plateau above the northern Marne valley. The valley is mostly forested whilst up on the plateau agriculture is predominant. We follow the River Clignon and can visit the large WWI American War Cemetery and Monument near Belleau, then descend to our overnight mooring at Château-Thierry. Château-Thierry owes its name to the castle that once was on the hill above the Marne; you can still see remnants. The town was the site of two important battles, in 1814 during the Napoleonic Wars, and at the end of WWI.

Day 6 (Thursday): Château-Thierry – Dormans – Épernay

cycling distance @ 35-50km

We officially enter the Champagne region today. We cruise to Dormans, a quiet village on the Marne with a castle and chapel in memory of the battle of the Marne. During WWI this area was the site of many fierce battles. A ride up the northern valley slopes to the village of Châtillon-sur-Marne offers a stunning panoramic view over the Marne valley and the Champagne vineyards. We see Château de Boursault, a large chateau built in 1848 by the widow Cliquot who gave her name (Veuve Cliquot) to a famous Champagne house. Dinner tonight is served onboard as we overnight in Épernay.

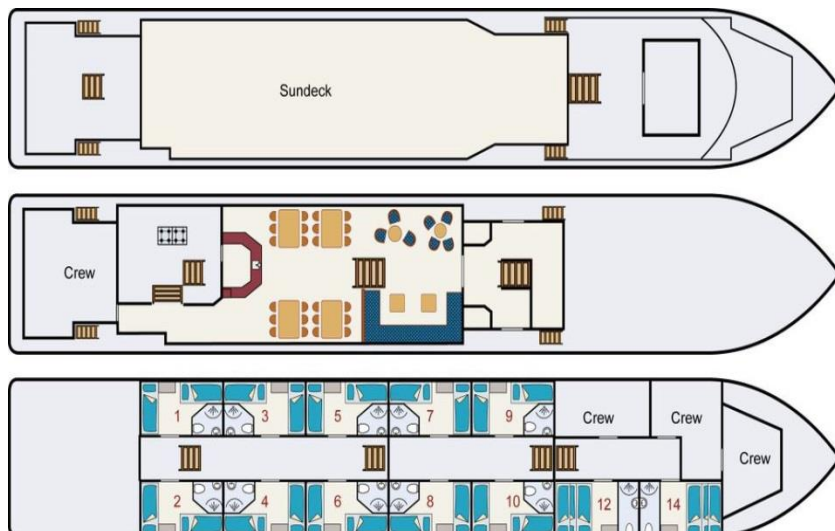
Day 7 (Friday): Épernay tour and Champagne house visit

cycling distance @ 25km

A morning ride takes us along the quiet canal that runs parallel to the River Marne to Ay and Mareuil-sur-Ay. It's a challenging ascent via Dizy to Hautvillers, a picturesque village with many vineyards on the southern slopes of the Montagne de Reims. A highlight is a visit to the chapel and the tomb of the monk *Dom Pérignon*. According to tradition, Dom Pérignon (1638-1715) was in charge of the wine cellars of a Benedictine abbey. The monks were the first to blend the various grape varieties into a wine of superb quality and to introduce double fermentation, a key process in making champagne. We return by bicycle to Épernay and after lunch explore the city which, together with Reims, is the major wine centre of the Champagne region. Here three important wine regions meet: the Montagne de Reims, the Côte des Blancs and the Vallée de la Marne. Épernay has many interesting 19th Century townhouses in neo-Renaissance or Classical style, especially around the beautiful Avenue de Champagne, the location of many prestigious champagne houses such as *Moët & Chandon*. We have planned a Champagne tasting and a guided tour of a major Champagne house.

Day 8 (Sat): Tour ends in Épernay

Your holiday ends after breakfast in Épernay. From here you may take one of several daily direct trains to Paris Gare de l'Est, or take a regional train to Reims.



Suggested itinerary: From Épernay to Paris

Day 1 (Saturday): Arrive Épernay

Make your way to embark the barge moored at Épernay at 2pm. There are several daily direct trains from Paris Gare de l'Est to Épernay. Stow your luggage, then meet the captain, crew, cycle tour leader and your fellow guests, and take a short test ride on your bike. Dinner is served on-board followed by a walk around Épernay, with its many interesting 19th Century townhouses in neo-Renaissance or Classical style, especially around the beautiful Avenue the Champagne where prestigious houses such as *Moët & Chandon* are situated.

Day 2 (Sunday): Épernay with a visit to Champagne houses

cycling distance @ 17-25km

The first morning's ride takes us along the quiet canal that parallels the River Marne to Ay and Mareuil-sur-Ay. There follows a challenging ascent to Hautvillers, a picturesque village with many Champagne vineyards on the southern slopes of the Montagne de Reims. A highlight is a visit to the chapel and the tomb of the monk *Dom Pérignon*. According to tradition, Dom Pérignon (1638-1715) was in charge of the wine cellars of a Benedictine abbey. The monks were the first to blend the various grape varieties into a wine of superb quality and to introduce double fermentation, a key process in making champagne – it produces the 'fizz' in sparkling wine. Although many of the stories surrounding Dom Pérignon are apocryphal, there is no doubt he is an important figure in the history of Champagne.

We return by bike to Épernay and after lunch we explore the centre of Épernay which, together with Reims, is the major wine centre of the Champagne region. It is here that three important wine regions meet: the Montagne de Reims, the Côte des Blancs and the Vallée de la Marne. This afternoon we have planned a Champagne tasting and a guided tour of one of the major Champagne houses.

Day 3 (Monday): Épernay – Dormans – Château-Thierry

cycling distance @ 35-50km

We start the first full day of cycling with a ride along the canal and River Marne. As time allows we can see the Château de Boursault, a large chateau built in 1848 by the widow Cliquot, who gave her name (*Veuve Cliquot*) to a famous Champagne house. A ride up the northern valley slope to the village of Châtillon-sur-Marne can offer a stunning panoramic view over the Marne valley and the Champagne vineyards.

We bid farewell to the Champagne region as we cycle along the River Marne (or cruise if you prefer) to Dormans, a quiet village on the Marne with a castle and chapel in memory of the battle of the Marne. During WWI this area was the scene of many fiercely fought battles. Our destination is Château-Thierry with its fortified castle which was the site of a battle in 1814 during the Napoleonic wars between France and Prussia and again at the end of World War I. Château-Thierry is also the native town of the writer of fables Jean de la Fontaine. For a shorter cycling route today, cruise with the barge to Dormans and begin cycling there.

Day 4 (Tuesday): Château-Thierry – La-Ferté-sous-Jouarre

cycling distance @ 42km

There is a challenging ride this morning from Château-Thierry to La-Ferté-sous-Jouarre. The first part of the cycling tour leads us along the River Marne, then, after a few kilometres we take a small forested valley ride up to a plateau. En route we may have time to visit the large WW1 American war cemetery and monument near Belleau. We follow the River Clignon and then descend alongside the River Ru de Bouillons to reach La-Ferté-sous-Jouarre and the barge. Overnight mooring is at La Ferté or a nearby village.

Day 5 (Wednesday): La Ferté-sous-Jouarre – Meaux**cycling distance @ 30-52km**

After breakfast we ride over the undulating hills and slopes of the Marne valley, through forests and small villages, on the southern and northern banks of the river. On the way we may visit the Château de Montceau, the building of which was started by Catherine de Médici in the 16th Century, and we taste the famous Brie de Meaux and Brie noir cheeses at a family-run *fromagerie*. Our destination is the city of Meaux, famous of course for its eponymous cheese and the magnificent Cathedral St-Etienne.

Day 6 (Thursday): Meaux – Lagny-sur-Marne**cycling distance @ 20-37km**

This morning there is time to visit the historical centre of Meaux. Afterwards we ride mainly along the River Marne and nearby canal, then join the path alongside the Canal de l'Ourcq, which was commissioned by Napoleon to facilitate transport of timber, grain and fresh water to Paris. In the early afternoon we meet the barge in Lagny-sur-Marne, our mooring point. You may like to add an optional 20-kilometre return ride through the Marne Valley to the Château de Champs-sur-Marne, a magnificently furnished 18th century chateau.

Day 7 (Friday): Lagny-sur-Marne – Paris**cycling distance @ 35km**

We cycle further alongside the Canal de l'Ourcq through the outer suburbs of Paris to the Bassin de la Villette. Here the Canal de l'Ourcq ends; the Bassin de la Villette links to the Canal St-Martin and thence to the River Seine. We leave the canal system behind and ride on a dedicated cycle path to the Place de la Bastille. Our barge is usually moored not far away, at the Quai de Bercy on the Seine. There is free time this afternoon and after dinner to explore Paris.

Day 8 (Saturday): Tour ends in Paris

Tour arrangements end after breakfast.



Outdoor Travel offers Bike & Barge cruises on the canals and rivers of France, Holland, Belgium, Germany, or Italy; and along the Danube in Austria, Hungary and Romania. Bike & Boat holidays are available in the coastal and island regions of Croatia, Greece and Turkey or Vietnam. River and canal hotel barge cruises are available throughout Europe (where bicycles are available for passenger use). Outdoor Travel also offer inn-to-inn guided or self-guided cycling tours or walking holidays in many areas of Europe and in New Zealand, the USA, Canada, South Africa, Japan or Australia. Self-skipped boat hire (with bikes) is available in the UK, Europe and Canada.

Contact Outdoor Travel for more details and reservations – early bookings essential

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