

Travel Journal – Day 2: Paris, Reims, Troyes

We left the heart of Paris early this morning, guided by the one and only Alex—our driver with nerves of steel and a smooth style behind the wheel. He expertly maneuvered through the early city traffic as we wound our way past les grands boulevards, Place de la République, and the elegant Haussmann-era facades that define Paris' architectural soul. We caught glimpses of the historic Cirque d'Hiver, the symbolic Bastille, and the peaceful Canal de l'Ourcq. Along the way, the iconic Colonnes Morris dotted the sidewalks, advertising plays and concerts, and finally, we crossed the serene Seine River, glinting in the morning light.

Once free of the city's embrace, we hit the highway—smooth and straight, slicing through the green French countryside. Our first stop was Château-Thierry, where we visited the American Monument. It was a sobering experience, standing in quiet reflection, remembering the sacrifices of the young men who fought here during World War I. Nearby, we learned about Jean de La Fontaine, the beloved French fabulist born in this town, whose animal fables are still taught to children today.

Next, we headed northeast to Reims, a city steeped in royal and religious history. We walked through the stately Place Royale before visiting the awe-inspiring Cathédrale Notre-Dame de Reims, the very place where French kings were once crowned. This Gothic masterpiece, scarred by war yet resilient, is adorned with over 2,000 statues and holds centuries of stories within its soaring vaults.

From there, we took a scenic drive through the Montagne de Reims, a forested and vineyard-rich region gently rolling with hills. The landscape was a tapestry of neatly ordered vines, charming stone villages, and stretches of woodland—an idyllic introduction to Champagne country.

Our destination was Champagne Le Gallais, a family-run domaine perched with a view over the vineyards and the Château de Boursault, once owned by Madame Clicquot herself. Our guide, Justine, welcomed us warmly and took us through the winemaking process, her passion evident in every detail she shared. We ended the visit with a tasting:

- The Brut Nature was crisp and precise, with green apple, chalk, and a hint of almond on the finish.
- The Rosé sparkled with notes of wild strawberries, red currant, and a delicate floral lift.
- The 2015 Vintage was richer and more layered, offering brioche, ripe pear, and a touch of honeyed hazelnut—complex and elegant.

As the late afternoon sun dipped lower, we made our final drive to Troyes, a medieval town with half-timbered houses and winding cobblestone streets. After checking into our hotel, we took a short evening stroll to La Fille du Potager, a cozy restaurant where we ended the day with a nourishing meal and tired, contented hearts. Then, it was time to rest—our minds full of history, beauty, and bubbles.