

Bike and Barge France: Champagne: Paris - Epernay

MS Zwaantje

Characteristics:

Operator: Boat-Bike Tours

Participants: up to 24

Tourtype: guided

Children: no

Regions: Champagne, Ile de France, Marne, Paris, Picardie, Seine, Seine-et-Marne

Countries: France

Benefits:

- Tour and accommodation on board in the booked category 8 days / 7 nights (Sat.-Sat.) from/to Paris or Epernay
- Full board
- 7 x breakfast, 6 x picnic lunch during bike tours, 7x three course dinner
- Use of bed linen and towels (change of towels daily possible)
- daily cleaning service of the cabin
- Welcome drink, presentation of barge + crew and briefing on the first evening
- Tour leader (multilingual) for fully guided cycling tours, daily briefings of the bike tours, 1 full day guided tour of Paris (walking / public transportation)
- Brie cheese tasting, half day guided tour of Epernay incl. Champagne tasting
- Printed instructions and maps for daily bike tours, 1 set per cabin
- Complimentary daily coffee and tea till 4 PM



Additional costs:

- All other costs: on request (bikehire, cabin categories, additional nights, transfers and so on)

Tour description:

Performed again in 2018, the eight day, seven night Champagne, Marne River Valley & Paris tour on board the barge MS Zwaantje is a cycle touring classic that not only allows guests to explore the world famous city of Paris, but also the Champagne region, famous of course, for producing Champagne wine. From the time the

Benedictine monk Dom Pierre Pérignon invented the bubbly drink in 1670 at the Abbey of d'Hautvillers, the Champagne name has been synonymous worldwide with the very best of sparkling wines. On a daily basis from your base on board your floating hotel for the duration for the tour, the barge MS Zwaantje, you will have the opportunity to cycle to boutique wineries, sample a variety of champagnes, taste delicious Brie cheese and generally discover everything the Champagne UNESCO world heritage region, which is centred on the towns of Epernay and Reims, has to offer. But more than just visiting the Champagne region, you will also have the opportunity to explore Paris, one of Europe's most beautiful and beloved cities on a full day guided excursion. Other highlights of the tour include a visit to the city of Meaux, well known for its Brie cheeses and a stopover in Château-Thierry, the scene of major battles in World War I. Along the way you will cycle through almost endless vineyards on the rolling banks of the Marne River. The tour ends in the city of Epernay, the real capital of the Champagne region where you will have the opportunity to visit one of the town's massive champagne cellars.

The cycling tours are fully guided, but cannot be rated as easy: you need to be a fit and well-practiced cyclist. Every day you will cycle small country roads (short distances: un- or semi-paved roads and tracks) that go up and down the beautiful slopes of the wide river valley, through the hills and the Champagne vineyards. Cycling distances vary from 30 - 50 km (19 - 31 miles) per day.

You will travel on board the passenger barge ZWAANTJE, a small and cosy barge with 12 twin cabins with ensuite facilities and air conditioning for max. 24 passengers.

MS Zwaantje

The MS Zwaantje ("Little Swan") is a fully converted passenger barge that sails under the Dutch flag and management. The barge has a length of 40 metres (131 ft.) and can accommodate 24 passengers in total comfort. On the lower deck there are 12 sleeping cabins for guests: 10 twin cabins with two single beds each and two cabins with a double (French) bed and an additional 3rd bed as Pullman bed. All the cabins have a small ensuite bathroom with toilet, shower and wash basin, a fixed window (both double cabins have larger windows that also open) and individual air conditioning. On the main deck you will find the nice and cozy salon complete with air-conditioning and large panoramic windows, a restaurant area, lounge corner and a small bar. Depending on the quality of the network connection (mobile internet, limited data amount) the salon offers free Wi-Fi. The barge has a very spacious sun deck (90 square meters/860 square ft.) with chairs and tables and a beautiful view, where you can relax or join the skipper in the wheel house. Bicycles will be stored in a separate area on the sun deck. Since September 2014, the "Zwaantje" has new owners and operators: Martijn van Tatenhove and Marjorie Kersten, who are experienced as operators of a passenger barge for more than thirteen years. Martijn is your experienced captain on board; he grew up in a family in the hotel and restaurant business and is also a licensed chef. Marjorie graduated in Tourism at the Breda High School and has been working in public relations. The sympathetic and very motivated couple have slightly restyled the interior of the "Zwaantje" in winter 2014-2015 and have created a warm and cozy atmosphere.

Tour Details France: From Paris to Epernay - MS Zwaantje

Day 1 (Sat): Embarkation: Paris

Embarkation and check-in between 05:00 and 06:00 PM at the Quai de Bercy on the Seine in Paris. Welcome by the captain, crew and tour leader. Dinner on board. First briefing about the barge, bicycles and tour program.

Day 2 (Sun): Paris: full day excursion

After breakfast you will leave the ship and enjoy a full day guided excursion to a choice of the various highlights of Paris. Visit some of the highlights that the "City of Light" has to offer. To mention just a few: the Eiffel Tower, the Sacré-Coeur Basilica in Montmartre, the Notre Dame cathedral, the Louvre museum, the Arc de Triomphe, the Centre Pompidou and the Musée d'Orsay. Your tour guide will take you by public transportation (day ticket, not included) from the barge to the center of Paris and on some walking tours. For safety reasons, no cycling tour in Paris is planned. Return in 30 min. by regional train to the barge in Lagny-sur-Marne.

Day 3 (Mon): Lagny-sur-Marne - Meaux (Approx. 35 km/21 miles)

In Lagny-sur-Marne, you can take your bicycle for a first ride, mainly along the Marne river and its parallel canal. First challenge is the hill near Chalifert. The barge will take the tunnel through the hill but cyclists can test their fitness and muscles for the first time by climbing and crossing the hill by bicycle. Today's destination is the city of Meaux, famous for its "Brie de Meaux" cheeses and the magnificent Cathedral St.-Etienne. Night in Meaux.

Day 4 (Tue): Meaux - La Ferté-sous-Jouarre (Approx. 35-40 km/22 or 25 miles)

After breakfast you will start your cycling tour through the city center of Meaux. Today's cycling tour will lead you over the hills and slopes of the Marne valley and 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 Médicis in the 16th century. During the day you will enjoy a presentation and tasting of the famous Brie de Meaux and Brie noir cheeses (included). Dinner on board and night in La-Ferté-sous-Jouarre or a village nearby.

Day 5 (Wed): La-Ferté-sous-Jouarre - Château-Thierry (Approx. 50 km/32 miles)

Enjoy a somewhat challenging bike tour from La-Ferté-sous-Jouarre to Château-Thierry. The first part of the cycling track leads you along the Marne river. After a few miles you will take a side valley and follow country roads along the small river Ru de Bouillons through various small villages and hamlets. Continue riding uphill until you finally reach the plateau above the northern part of the Marne valley. The side valleys are mainly covered with forest, on the plateau agriculture is predominant. Follow the valley of the small river Clignon. En route you can visit the large WW1 American War Cemetery and Monument near Belleau on the D82. Start your descent to reach Château-Thierry. Easier and shorter cycling option along the river through the valley. Dinner on board and night in Château-Thierry.

Day 6 (Thu): Château-Thierry - Dormans - Epernay (Approx. 30-50 km/19-35 miles)

Château-Thierry owes its name to the castle that once was situated on the slopes above the Marne. You can still see some remnants. The town was the site of two important battles: the Battle of 1814 in the Napoleonic Wars between France and Prussia and the Battle of 1918 at the end of World War I. Château-Thierry is also known as the native town of the world-famous writer of fables Jean de la Fontaine. Choose between a longer and a short bike ride. Today we will enter the official Champagne area. Cycle along the Marne river or cruise to Dormans, a quiet village on the Marne with a castle and chapel in memory of the battle of the Marne. During World War I this area was the scene of close battles. We will see the Château de Boursault, a large castle built in 1848 by the widow of Mr. Cliquot, who gave her name (Veuve Cliquot) to a famous Champagne wine. A ride up the northern valley slope to the village of Châtillon-sur-Marne rewards the cyclist with a stunning panoramic view over the Marne valley and the Champagne vineyards. Dinner on board and night in Epernay.

Day 7 (Fri): Epernay round tour (Approx. 25 km/16 miles) | Afternoon: visit Epernay and Champagne houses

The last half day's bike tour takes you along the quiet canal parallel to the Marne river to Ay and Mareuil-sur-Ay. Return via Dizy to visit Hautvillers. After a somewhat challenging ascent you will reach this picturesque village of Champagne wine growers on the southern slopes of the Montagne de Reims. Highlight is a visit of the chapel with the tomb of the monk Dom Pérignon. According to tradition, Dom Pérignon (1638-1715), who was in charge of the wine cellars of the abbey of Benedictine monks, was the first to succeed in blending various kinds of wine into a wine of superb quality. Double fermentation, characteristic for the making of champagne, was introduced also by him. Return cycling to Epernay. After lunch, visit the center of Epernay. Together with Reims, Epernay is the major wine center of the Champagne region, where three extensive wine regions meet: the Montagne de Reims, the Côte des Blancs and the Vallée de la Marne. Epernay has many town houses dating in neo-renaissance style or classical style dating from the 19th century, especially around the beautiful Avenue de la Champagne where prestigious champagne houses such as Moët & Chandon are situated. Champagne tasting and tour in one of the major Champagne houses.

Day 8 (Sat): Disembarkation: Epernay

After breakfast at 09:00 AM: end of tour and disembarkation in Epernay near the train station.

Details:

All distances are "approximate distances" of recommended bike tours.

When a guest does not want to cycle one day, she/he can skip the bike tour and relax on board while cruising to the next town.

Program and details barring changes, a.o. as a result of nautical, technical or meteorological reasons.

On the arrival day it is possible to load your luggage on board from 1pm.

Guided bike tours: it is also possible to ride some shorter bike tours self-guided, on an individual basis: descriptions and maps are available on board.

During the day the tour leader is guiding the daily bike tour and - for those who want to cycle individually - can be reached on his/her mobile phone in cases of emergency or technical breakdown of the bicycle.

Tour Details France: From Epernay to Paris - MS Zwaantje

Day 1 (Sat): Embarkation: Epernay

In the afternoon: Embarkation and check-in between 05:00 and 06:00 PM. Welcome by the captain, crew and tour leader. Dinner on board. First briefing about the barge, bicycles and tour program.

Day 2 (Sun): Epernay round tour (Approx. 25 km/16 miles) | afternoon: visit Epernay and Champagne houses

The first half day's bike tour takes you along the quiet canal parallel to the Marne river to Ay and Mareuil-sur-Ay. Return via Dizy to visit Hautvillers. After a somewhat challenging first ascent of the slopes and through the vineyards (cyclists can test their shape and muscles for the first time) you will reach this picturesque village of Champagne wine growers on the southern slopes of the Montagne de Reims. Highlight is a visit of the chapel with the tomb of the monk Dom Pérignon. According to tradition, Dom Pérignon (1638-1715), who was in charge of the wine cellars of the abbey of Benedictine monks, was the first to succeed in blending various kinds of wine into a wine of superb quality. Double fermentation, characteristic for the making of champagne, was introduced also by him. Return cycling to Epernay. After lunch, visit the center of Epernay. Together with Reims, Epernay is the major wine center of the Champagne region, where three extensive wine regions meet: the Montagne de Reims, the Côte des Blancs and the Vallée de la Marne. Epernay has many town houses dating in neo-renaissance style or classical style dating from the 19th century, especially around the beautiful Avenue de Champagne where prestigious champagne houses such as Moët & Chandon are situated. Champagne tasting and tour in a Champagne house on the famous Avenue de Champagne.

Day 3 (Mon): Epernay- Dormans - Château-Thierry (Approx. 30-50 km/19-35 miles)

Start the first full day cycling tour along the canal and Marne river. We will see the Château de Boursault, a large castle built in 1848 by the widow of Mr. Cliquot, who gave her name (Veuve Cliquot) to a famous Champagne wine. A ride up the northern valley slope to the village of Châtillon-sur-Marne rewards the cyclist with a stunning panoramic view over the Marne valley and the Champagne vineyards. Today we will leave the official Champagne area. Cycle along the Marne river (or cruise) to Dormans, a quiet village on the Marne with a castle and chapel in memory of the battle of the Marne. During World War I this area was the scene of close battles. Dinner on board and night in Epernay. Today's destination is Château-Thierry, that owes its name to the castle that once was situated on the slopes above the Marne. The town was the site of the Battle of 1814 in the Napoleonic Wars between France and Prussia and of 1918 in World War I. Château-Thierry is also known as the native town of the world-famous writer of fables Jean de la Fontaine. Short bike tour - if possible - starts in Dormans.

Day 4 (Wed): Château-Thierry - La-Ferté-sous-Jouarre (Approx. 50 km/32 miles)

Enjoy a somewhat challenging bike tour from Château-Thierry to La-Ferté-sous-Jouarre . The first part of the cycling tour leads you along the Marne river. After a few miles you will take a small side valley and follow country roads through various small villages and hamlets. En route you can visit the large WW1 American War Cemetery and Monument near Belleau. Follow the small river Clignon and continue riding uphill until you finally reach the plateau above the northern part of the Marne valley. The side valleys are mainly covered with forest, on the plateau agriculture is predominant. Start your descent along the small river Ru de Bouillons to reach La-Ferté-sous-Jouarre, where you meet the barge. Easier and shorter cycling option along the river through the valley. Night in La-Ferté-sous-Jouarre or one of the villages nearby.

Day 5 (Wed): La Ferté-sous-Jouarre - Meaux (Approx. 35-40 km/22 or 25 miles)

After breakfast you will start your cycling tour that will lead you over the hills and slopes of the Marne valley and through forests and small villages on the southern and northern banks of the river. After just a few miles you will enjoy a presentation and tasting of the famous Brie de Meaux and Brie noir cheeses (included). On the way we may visit the Château de Montceau, the building of which was started by Catherine de Médicis in the 16th century. Today's destination is the city of Meaux, famous for its "Brie de Meaux" cheeses and the magnificent Cathedral St.-Etienne. Visit the historical city center of Meaux. Dinner on board and night in Meaux.

Day 6 (Thu): Meaux - Lagny-sur-Marne (Approx. 35 km/21 miles)

Visit the beautiful city center of Meaux. Then you can take your bicycle for a last ride, mainly along the Marne river and its parallel canal. Last challenge is the hill near Chalifert. The barge will take the tunnel through this hill, but cyclists have to ride up to take the hill by bicycle. In the afternoon you will meet the barge in Lagny-sur-Marne, where you will stay for the night.

Day 7 (Fri): Paris: full day excursion

After breakfast you will leave the ship and enjoy a full day guided excursion to many highlights of Paris. Take the regional train (30 min.) to Paris and visit some of the may highlights that the "City of Light" has to offer. To mention just a few: the Eifel Tower, the Sacre Coeur in Montmartre, the Notre Dame cathedral, the Louvre museum, the Arc de Triomphe, the Centre Pompidou and the Musée d'Orsay. Your tour guide will take you by

public transportation (day ticket not included) from the barge to the center of Paris and on some walking tours. For safety reasons, no cycling tour in Paris is planned.

Day 8 (Sat): Disembarkation: Paris

After breakfast at 09:00 AM: end of the tour and disembarkation in Paris.

Details:

All distances are "approximate distances" of recommended bike tours.

When a guest does not want to cycle one day, she/he can skip the bike tour and relax on board while cruising to the next town.

Program and details barring changes, a.o. as a result of nautical, technical or meteorological reasons.

On the arrival day is it possible to load your luggage on board from 1pm.

Guided bike tours: it is also possible to ride some shorter bike tours self-guided, on an individual basis: descriptions and maps are available on board.

During the day the tour leader will guide the daily bike tour and - for those who want to cycle individually - is reachable on his/her mobile phone in cases of emergency or technical breakdown of the bicycle.

BICYCLES:

The bicycles on board are 21-speed touring bicycles with hand brakes and a pannier bag. A limited number of e-bikes (electrically assisted bicycle) are available on request (early booking is strongly recommended). Other bikes (e.g. children's bikes, tandems, etc.) are not available in this area and cannot be ordered for these tours. Due to limited space on deck guests cannot bring their own bicycles or E-bikes. Only in exceptional cases when you need a special bike or tandem. Please let us know well in advance when you would like to bring your own special bicycle/tandem. This is only possible after reconfirmation by us. Neither crew nor tour operator are liable/ responsible for any damage, loss or theft of own bicycles. In France cyclists are not obligated by law to wear a bike helmet. However we urgently recommend you to bring your own (well fitting) helmet. There is a very limited number (only standard size) bike helmets available on board.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

The General Conditions (travel conditions) of Boat Bike Tours apply to cycling cruises, as well as to confirmation and cancellation of such tours. Children are very welcome on board, however, before booking, we advise you strongly to check whether your child is able to manage a cycle trip of ca. 50 km in hilly surroundings with up to 350 meters of altitude (aggregate) over two cycling days. Of course you may stay on board and skip cycling for one or more days; children under the age of 18 years must be under supervision. For this tour a child discount is NOT available. The interior of the ship is a non-smoking zone: smoking is only allowed on the sun deck. As a safety measure, a statutory smoking ban applies in all cabins; this means that all cabins and rooms on board are non-smoking areas.

CYCLING IN THE MARNE - CHAMPAGNE AREA

The cycling tours are fully guided, but cannot be rated as easy: you need to be a fit and well-practiced cyclist. Every day you will cycle small country roads (short distances: un- or semi-paved roads and tracks) that go up and down the slopes of the wide river valley, through the hills and the Champagne vineyards (aggregate per day up to 350 meters). Cycling distances vary from 30 - 50 km (19 - 31 miles) per day and tours are generally more challenging than tours in Holland / Belgium!

<http://www.boat-and-bike.com/tour/bike-and-berge-france-champagne-paris.html>