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Reims

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Notre Dame in Dijon

# TO EASTERN FRANCE IN QUICKER TIME

WITH THE TGV EST PREPARING FOR REGULAR SERVICE, MORE OF FRANCE'S GREATEST WINE REGIONS ARE WITHIN EASY REACH OF THE CAPITAL

BY ETHAN GELBER

As the years roll by, the tempo of life increases; we age and we accept weeks, not days, as the basic unit of time. However, just as we watch Mercury's acceleration, so too do we stay apace by virtue of technology. Today we get where we want to go at an ever-increasing clip to make sure that we lose less time on the way. In France, the TGV Est is part of this trend.

France's *trains à grande vitesse* (high-speed trains, or TGV) fan out across the country and even reach into neighboring ones. On June 10, 2007, regular service begins on the new TGV Est, with a top scheduled velocity of just short of 200 mph. This latest branch of service on an already impressive network significantly reduces travel times from Paris to many eastern destinations, like Reims, Strasbourg and cities in Germany and Switzerland. Differently put: for *amateurs de vins*, Champagne and Alsace will at last join Burgundy, which has been connected to Paris for over 20 years by 15 daily TGV departures.

Via the TGV Est, **Reims** in the Champagne region is a mere 45 minutes from Paris. Certainly, no visit to Reims is complete without a pause at **Cathédrale Notre-Dame**, where 25 kings were crowned between the years 816 and 1825, but the wine cellars of Mumm, Pommery and Taittinger also draw crowds. Back in your rental car, retrieved at the train station, head for the nearby **Parc Naturel de la Montagne de Reims**, a forested hill surrounded by champagne-producing villages and vineyards. Time permitting, visit **Epernay**, whose Avenue des Champagnes hosts the mansion-sized headquarters of Moët & Chandon and Mercier.

At the French-German border in the east, Alsace will soon feel like it's next door to Paris. **Strasbourg**, a regional and European capital city, clocks in at two hours and 20 minutes away by TGV Est. Once there, grab your rental car and head for the vineyard-covered hills. The 90-mile *Route des vins* meanders along, calling at castle-capped wine villages. Return on roads through the **Parc Naturel Régional des Ballons des Vosges**, an outdoor paradise for hikers and cyclists. Back in Strasbourg, go barging on the city's waterways, enjoying its *ponts couverts* (covered bridges) from below and spectacular **Cathédrale Notre-Dame** from afar.

Of course, no one should forget that **Dijon** is still only one hour and 40 minutes from Paris by TGV. Internationally known for its mustard, Dijon is also the regional capital and was the home of the Dukes of Burgundy in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries; its city center includes many old neighborhoods whose *hôtels particuliers* (beautiful old aristocratic homes) have been exceptionally well preserved. Just outside the city is the ideal starting point for your drive along the *Route des grands crus de Bourgogne*, the "Champs Elysées of Burgundy," that will take you through villages whose names are known the world over, such as **Nuits-Saint-Georges** and **Vosne-Romanée**. Along the way, you will encounter many wine-tasting opportunities and famous sites such as the **Hospices de Beaune** and the **Château du clos de Vougeot**.

Contact **FrenchExperience.com** for a fully packaged 9-day Rail 'n' Drive "Journey in Alsace, Burgundy and Champagne." ■

For more about Alsace, Burgundy and Champagne, **abcoffrance.com**



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