



Motorbike Trip Reims mountain and the Chemin des Dames

Leaving from : Reims (51) - Distance : 171 km

Joy of driving



Tourist attractions



Ease for two



From Reims to Laon is only 50 kilometres, but passes two mountains and two entirely different ambiances. On one hand there is the Champagne, region of kings and celebratory sparkle. On the other, rural Aisne still remembers the battles of the two world wars. A journey through cathedral country.

Reims > Fismes

The famous smiling angel watches over the Notre Dame Cathedral in **Reims**, one of the largest (and most beautiful) in France. You need an entire day just to have a look round the town and its main monuments. If you only have time to visit a couple, then at least take a look at the cathedral, a UNESCO World Heritage Site remarkable in its unity of style, its statuary and its memories binding it to the history of France's kings, and also the adjoining bishop's palace, known as the Palace of Tau.

During the Second World War, only the area around the station was affected. Reims' moment of glory in this conflict was when the technical college, transformed into Eisenhower's HQ, played host to the signing of the German surrender on 7th May 1945.



Keep your visit to the great champagne houses for the end of the day and leave Reims from the south, heading towards the Reims mountain. Covered with forests, this hill (peaking at 288m) crowned with a plateau is regional nature park. You will find no grand rugged landscapes here, however, as it is punctuated with market towns dedicated to wine growing. First you will discover **Verzenay**, dominated by a windmill to the west and a lighthouse, built in 1909 and now a vine museum.



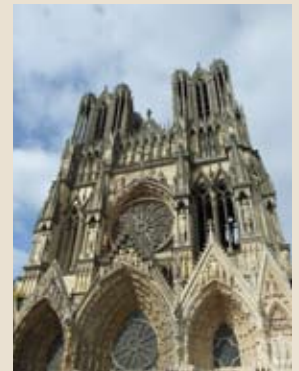
Reims was not spared the fighting of the twentieth century's wars. Eighty percent of the city was destroyed by German bombs during the First World War and in September 1914 a fire devastated the carpentry superstructure of the cathedral, melted the bells and ruptured the stone. One restored, Notre Dame was given a fireproof concrete framework.



Sightseeings

Notre Dame cathedral

T 0892 701 351 0,34€/mn
(Tourist Office)
www.cathedraledereims.fr
Open every day from 7.30am to 7.30pm (7.15pm on Sundays). Open visits, guided tours or audio guides. Guided tours of the towers and upper areas.



Palace of Tau

2 place du Cardinal Luçon - 51100 Reims - T 03 26 47 81 79 - www.palais-tau.monuments-nationaux.fr
Entry €7. Open May to September from 7.30am to 6.30pm, 9.30am-12.30pm and 2pm-5.30pm the rest of the year. Guided tours available (1 hour).

Surrender Museum - 12 rue Franklin Roosevelt - 51100 Reims - T 03 26 47 84 17
Entry €3. Closed Tuesdays and 1st Jan, 1st May, 14th July, 1st and 11th Nov, 24th, 25th and 31st Dec.

Vine Museum - 51360 Verzenay - T 03 26 07 87 87 - www.lepharedeverzenay.com
Entry €7. Closed Mondays. Open 10am to 5pm (5.30pm on weekends and public holidays).

Shortly after comes **Verzy**, famous for its 'faux': a very rare species of twisted dwarf beech with an umbrella shape whose branches form a strange lattice of foliage. Make sure you follow the discovery tour (takes approximately one hour on foot) to avoid damaging them. On the other side of the D34, another car park offers access (10 minutes round trip on foot) to the Mount Sinai observatory, created after Reims was liberated 1914, with a view stretching over the city and the mountains of the Champagne region.



After a quick trip on the Reims mountain, you will leave via **Ay**, a vineyard nestled at the foot of a hill which was already famous in Gallo-Roman times.

Next you will reach **Hautvillers**, a charming wine-growing village 'perched' at an altitude of 250m: as well as the wine press with a capacity for two tonnes of grapes, situated at the village entrance, take the time to admire the hundred-odd forged iron signs along the alleyways, painted by hand as in days of old.



Carry on beneath the foliage, passing Nanteuil-la-Forêt, Poury (home to the park centre) and Marfaux. Once you have left the forest stay on the D386, which will lead you straight through the Champagne countryside to Fismes, a small town marking the boundary between Marne and Aisne, between the Champagne and Picardy regions, between the land of the Reims mountain and that of Laon's 'eternal hill'.

Fismes > Reims

Fismes was the last stop before Reims for French kings coming to Paris to be crowned. The town retains some of its battlements from that period, but the moats were filled during the 18th century and turned into walkways. Incidentally, Fismes is also the home town of comic strip illustrator Albert Uderzo, the 'father' of Asterix. Have fun looking for Goscinny-et-Uderzo avenue, which has a standing stone monument.



Cross the river Vesle, a tributary of the Aisne, and follow the road north towards **Laon**. Shortly afterwards you will enter the Aisne region and slightly further on you will pass the river which gives it its name, together with the Canal de l'Oise à l'Aisne.

The village of Cerny-en-Laonnais marks the crossroads with the Chemin des Dames, which you will soon be rejoining. Head on to Laon.



Arriving into Laon from the south is less spectacular than from the north. You are less aware of how much the Carolingian city centre looks down on the plain, peering from a height of more than 100 metres. On the other hand, from the southern side you reach the old town more quickly via the Soissons gate, as the new districts have sprung up in the north around the station.

Before the French Revolution, people came from all over the kingdom of France to admire the seven wonders of Laon, some of which are still visible: the Notre Dame cathedral, of course, completed in 1230, making it one of the oldest gothic examples in the country; the abbey churches of St. Martin and St. Vincent (the second was destroyed during the revolution); the leaning Dame Ève tower; the pool of the monks of St Vincent, with a water level that never drops; the 'Os-qui-pend', half a whale jawbone brought over from England in the 12th century by the canons; and the 'nail-stone', nails driven by hand into a stone by a mother whose innocent children were hanged.

After visiting the cathedral, the Episcopal palace the Chapel of the Templars and the St. Martin abbey, leave the old town by the ramparts and the Ardon gate, naturally followed by the Ardon ramp which makes for a beautiful winding descent.

There is nothing of note until Bruyères-et-Monbérault, after which the road becomes more interesting and leads to Chamouille. Head left to do a loop round the small lake and admire the new 'Disney-esque' housing developments. Head straight on as far as the Chernizy-Ailles exit, where you will turn off to the right and head past the ruins of the Vauclair abbey, devastated by bombing in 1917.

Further on at the Hurtebise crossroads you will find yourself back on the Chemin des Dames, a ridge 30km long and 8km wide which corresponds to a huge area that saw bloody conflict during the First World war, stretching for more than 30km north of the Aisne river between Pinon to the west and Berry-au-Bac to the east. This road covers more than 70 villages, some of which disappeared during the war and were never rebuilt, such as Ailles, Bealune and Troyon.



The wonderful **Caverne du Dragon** museum, slightly further along the road on the right, recounts the difficult conditions endured by French infantrymen (it is likely that 150,000 died here, but the statistics are difficult to establish). Taking a left towards Craonne, you will reach the **Californian plateau** and its lookout with a view of the old village of Craonne, or rather of the village's reconstruction as the houses were razed to the ground during the war. An arboretum has replaced what was formerly Craonne, its ground still ravaged by shell craters, a witness to the severity of the fighting. During the Great War, it is estimated that the ridge was hit with approximately a ton of shells per square metre of ground... Shortly before the plateau at the side of the road you will find the pretty and highly photogenic Chemin des Dames milestone.

Carry on along the road from Craonne towards Corbeny to rejoin the D944, which runs alongside the motorway and will take you straight back to Reims.

Great little restaurants

Reims Brasserie Le Boulingrin

48 rue de Mars - 51100 Reims - T 03 26 40 96 22 - www.boulingrin.fr - Closed Sun, €18 to €28. Since 1925, Le Boulingrin has been one of the most popular meeting places for Reims residents to enjoy themselves in its art deco surroundings, enlivened with Bacchic frescos showing scenes of grape harvests. Here, you will enjoy great little dishes in brasserie style, unless you are tempted by the extensive oyster bar.

La Vigneraie

14 rue de Thillois - 51100 Reims - T 03 26 88 67 27 - www.vigneraie.com - €15.50 to €66. Disco, theatre, cinema... The Place Drouet-d'Erlon is the pulsing heart of the city. La Vigneraie and its dining room adorned with a remarkable collection of carafes is located right beside it. You will enjoy tasty classic cuisine, accompanied by a wonderful wine list. Excellent value for money.

Laon La Petite Auberge

45 bd Brossolette - 02000 Laon - T 03 23 23 02 38. Closed 29th Feb – 4th Mar, 24th Apr – 1st May, 7th-20th August, Sat lunch, Mon eve and Sun except public holidays, €17/51. Two converted dining areas in a regional-style house: the bistro Le St-Amour, offering simple dishes, and the main restaurant decorated with warm colours, where you can sit and savour personalised cuisine which marries tradition and modernity with astonishing success.

Berry au Bac La Cote 108

02190 Berry-au-Bac - T 03 23 79 95 04 - www.lacote108.com Closed 10th-24th Jul., 26th Dec – 15th Jan, Tues eve, Sun eve and Mon, from €15. A gourmet break in front of Ridge 108: this roadside restaurant invites you to taste modern cuisine in contemporary yet refined surroundings.

Sightseeings

Chapel of the Templars

32 rue Georges-Ermant
02000 Laon - T 03 23 20 19 87
Entry free. June-Sept 9am-6pm, weekends and public holidays 11am-6pm; Oct-May 9am-6pm, weekends and public holidays 2pm-6pm. Closed Mondays, 1st Jan, 1st May, 14th July, 25th Dec.



Caverne du Dragon - Chemin des Dames Museum

RD 18 cd - 02160 Oulches-la-Vallée - T 03 23 25 14 18
www.caverne-du-dragon.com
Guided tour (90mins) July-Aug 10am-7pm; May-June and Sep 10am-6pm; Oct-Apr Tues-Sun (and public holidays) 10am-6pm. Last entry 90mins before closing. Closed 18th Dec – 31st Jan. Entry €6. Bring warm clothing.

CHAMPAGNE  ARDENNE
TOURISME

www.tourisme-champagne-ardenne.com



Route taken from « 90 virées à moto France 2011 »
Michelin Cartes et Guides. Map : Michelin.
Designed by Champagne-Ardenne Tourisme - October 2011
Photo credits : Pascal Stritt - Horizon Bleu - CDT de l'Aisne
Office de Tourisme de Reims.



Road book Reims mountain and the Chemin des Dames

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Stage	Direction	Towards	On	Km in section	Total km
1st Section					
Reims	↑	<i>Cormontreuil – Louvois</i>	D8	8	8
Carrefour	←	<i>Mailly-Champagne</i>	D26	6	14
Verzy	→	<i>Louvois</i>	D34	7	21
Louvois	→	<i>Louvois</i>	D34	0,2	21
Louvois	←	<i>Tauxières-Mutry</i>	D9	8	29
Carrefour	→	<i>Mareuil-sur-Ay</i>	D1	7	36
Dizy	→	<i>Hautvillers</i>	D386	38	74
2nd Section					
Fismes	←	<i>Longueval-Barbonval</i>	D967	9	83
Carrefour	←	<i>Vierl-Arcy</i>	D22	0,5	83
Carrefour	→	<i>Laon</i>	D967	8	91
Cerny-en-Laonnois	←	<i>Soissons</i>	D18	9	100
Carrefour	→	<i>Urcel</i>	D15	5	105
Carrefour	→	<i>Laon</i>	N2	8	113
3rd Section					
Laon	→	<i>Ardon</i>	D54	2	115
Ardon	↑	<i>Bruyères-et-Montbérault</i>	D967	11	126
Chamouille	←	<i>Neuville-sur-Ailette</i>	D19	7	133
Carrefour	→	<i>Oulches-la-Vallée-Foulon</i>	D886	2,5	135
Carrefour	←	<i>Beaurieux</i>	D18	0,5	136
Carrefour	←	<i>Craonne</i>	D985	4	140
Carrefour	←	<i>Corbeny</i>	D18	3	143
Corbeny	→	<i>Reims</i>	D1044	28	171