

THE INSIDERS REIMS, FRANCE

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GO: Reims is known as the unofficial capital of the Champagne region, northeast of Paris. There are about 250km of tunnels and wine cellars beneath the city that store Champagne. Go underground to explore magnificent chalk pits, or *crayeres*, dug by the Romans. Outside Reims, you can take lovely day trips by car to learn more about the region's unique *terroir*. To the west lie the picturesque valleys of the Ardre and the Vesle, with their rustic villages and impressive romanesque and gothic churches. To the south the route meanders in and out of the vineyards on the slopes of the world-famous Montagne de Reims; reims-tourism.com.



EXPLORE: Reims is easy to walk around and home to a number of World Heritage sites. A visit to the 13th-century cathedral is a must; it is renowned for its pure gothic architecture, stained-glass windows and the famous Smiling Angel sculpture. Most of the French kings were crowned here and the church still has a wonderful sense of occasion.

EAT: My top tip is Le Jardin brasserie at Les Crayeres, located in a 17th-century chateau hotel surrounded by a park and orangerie, next to the Pommery Champagne house.; lescrayeres.com.

DRINK: Meet the winemakers — growers, Champagne houses and co-operatives — and learn first-hand what makes the region's wines so special. Take the route that meanders in and out of vineyards on the slopes of the Montagne de Reims, then through Verzenay and Verzy. There are about 121 growers, 20 houses and four co-ops in and around Reims. It is always possible to buy direct from the winery. For a different drinking experience, seek out the Perching Bar, a modern venue set in trees, 7m above the ground, in the heart of the Regional Natural Park of the Montagne de Reims; perchingbar.eu.

ENJOY: I have a sweet tooth and I love Maison Fossier, which sells Biscuits Roses de Reims, a pink treat that is a delicacy of the city. Because I often travel around Easter, I also like to visit a local chocolaterie and call into a wine specialty shop to browse. Les Caves du Forum, hidden away in an underground cellar, is well worth a visit; fossier.fr; lescavesduforum.com.

Elisabeth Drysdale is director of the Champagne Bureau of Australia. She is responsible for staging the Biennial Vin de Champagne Award, which honours Australia's longstanding relationship with the Champagne region; champagne.com.au.

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Click Frenzy will run a 24-hour Travel Frenzy online sale from 7pm (AEST) on October 18 featuring more than 500 deals, with discounts of up to 70 per cent; clickfrenzy.com.au.



Victoria's Gippsland High Country Tours has a Nature Sounds and Birdsong bushland adventure from November 2-5 led by Andrew Skeoch from Listening Earth; (03) 5157 5556.



Rome2rio collates the world's road, air, rail, and sea transport routes, claiming to display more options than Google Maps; free from iTunes; rome2rio.com.



Dianne Lechner describes herself as a Maldives "addict" and her luxury concierge service tailors immersive holidays to these lovely Indian Ocean islands; addictedtomaldives.com.

HOME AND AWAY



A modern and efficient hotel with 18-hole championship golf course, clubhouse, parkland-like gardens and Georgian mansion? Only in England. The very name of Bowood Hotel, Spa and Golf Resort, near Chippenham in Wiltshire, trumpets its facilities. The 453-room hotel, which opened in 2009, is enormously popular with locals for wedding and special events but for visitors, aside from keen golfers, the main attraction is the great estate, seat of the titled Lansdowne family for more than 250 years and set in gorgeous gardens with a centrepiece lake, all designed by landscaper Capability Brown in the 1760s. Take excursions around the main house and gardens or book a private 90-minute guided tour of the walled garden of the Marquis and Marchioness of Lansdowne with lunch to follow. Between April and June there's the bonus of rambles around Bowood's Woodland Garden, ablaze with azaleas and rhododendrons. The spa, with full leisure facilities, is terrific, and afternoon tea in The Library, surrounded by wall-to-wall books, makes a delightful treat. Rooms from about £150 (\$254), depending on season, including breakfast and Wi-Fi; golf and spa packages available. More: bowood.org.

SUSAN KUROSAWA

T&I LOVES



Calling all lovers of continental food and wine. Next year *The Australian's* national restaurant critic, John Lethlean, and wife Kate, a cordon bleu-trained chef, will host a Cuisine and Culture Cruise from September 3-15. The culinary-focused voyage sails from Lisbon to Rome via ports in Spain and France plus a sail along the French Riviera coast and a call at Monaco. Highlights include expert-led visits to local producers and olive mills, wine and sherry tastings, meals ashore in authentic restaurants, vineyards and bodegas, and forays to food halls, such as Valencia's central market, home to more than 1000 purveyors. There's an excursion to a traditional barraca, or fisherman's house, for a paella demonstration and lunch, and an array of intimate experiences beyond the standard cruise itinerary. The trip has been arranged by Jon Baines Tours on the 350-passenger boutique liner Aegean Odyssey (pictured); single or double cabins are priced, per person, from \$6920 (inside single) to \$10,310 (deluxe balcony), including full board, meals on guided excursions and most extras ashore. More: (03) 9343 6367; jonbainestours.com.

SUSAN KUROSAWA

ACCESSORY

DYEHAUS TRAVEL
SCARF, 150CM X
100CM, \$98

Lovely, light oversized travel scarves from Sydney company Dyehaus are made from 100 per cent Australian wool and hand-dyed with natural indigo; choose from spots, mandala or hexagon patterns or blue on blue. Free express postage within Australia and dyeing workshops are also available, including indigo shibori. More: dyehaus.com.au.



SUSAN KUROSAWA

IN THE HOME

ILANEL GAIA PENDANT, \$365

Ilanel is a Melbourne-based design studio creating bespoke lighting for hotels across the globe. Its range of options for homes includes this distinctive pendant, made from sustainably sourced hand-turned plantation pine and leather. A version with felt shade is also available. More: (03) 9534 1164; ilanel.com.



SHARON FOWLER

ON THE ROAD

SODASHI ARABIAN OUD OIL, 100ML, \$159

Oud wood, frankincense, rose and sandalwood, blended with cold-pressed botanical oils, combine as aromatic ingredients in this latest offering from top Australian skincare brand Sodashi. Company founder Megan Larsen says the pure oud, a rare resin from the aquilaria tree, costs \$9200 a kilo, so it's no boast to call this product ultra-luxurious. Apply to slightly damp skin after bathing or book a rejuvenating 90-minute Sodashi Oud Renewal Therapy, exclusive to CHI The Spa at Shangri-La Hotel Sydney. More: sodashi.com; shangri-la.com/Sydney/.



SUSAN KUROSAWA

Wish I really were there

SNAP DECISIONS

SUSAN KUROSAWA

Back when dinosaurs roamed the earth and we actually disappeared on our holidays, a sign along the lines of GONE FISHING could be hung on the front door. During summer shops would swing a CLOSED ALL HOURS notice in the window with confidence that shut meant shut and customers would somehow survive the hiatus.

All this was before portable technology and social media and the impossibility of disconnecting. It seems no one really believes you are away and not checking voicemail or emails. "I know you will see this, Susan, and your RSVP is required!" barked a recent follow-up email from someone who surely had seen my out-of-office reply. It made me feel furtive, as if I were pretending to be absent.

So I am delighted to find that there is a new Qantas Out Of Office service that "transforms the generic auto email reply into a real-time photographic travel journal" and, hopefully, proves you are not at (or hiding under) your desk or skulking about your workplace, possibly in disguise.

So, you connect your Hotmail or Gmail address with Instagram and the Qantas Out of Office Service updates the auto reply message with photos you've tagged

#qantasoutofoffice. To set up, go to qantasoutofoffice.com, connect your Instagram account and email address, enter dates you are away, where you're travelling to and a message. Obviously the airline hopes holidays will be taken at destinations within its domestic and international networks, which are so vast that there is a reasonable expectation of a high ratio of tied-in travel.

For the second consecutive year, Qantas is offering full-service flights from Sydney to Bali's Denpasar this summer, five times a week from December 14 to February 5. As I write this, I am in Sydney's Surry Hills, not Seminyak, sadly, but nonetheless want to share a picture from a recent Bali visit. It's of a nutmeg mint crush, as served at the fabulous Hujan Locale restaurant in Ubud, part of Will Meyrick's expanding empire of Asian eateries.

Because, you know, you could just make up a load of palaver about being away. Posting pictures after a holiday is a #latergram and a most acceptable thing, apparently. So, see you in Ubud? RSVPs pending.

Follow in Instagram: @susankurosawa

