

Day 6 – Dijon, Nuits-Saint-Georges, Clos de Vougeot, Dijon

After a much-needed restful night, we indulged in the comforts of our five-star hotel beds, waking up recharged beneath fluffy pillows and soft duvets. The morning began with a glorious buffet breakfast: freshly cooked eggs made before our eyes, pain perdu (the decadent French take on French toast), smoked salmon, ripe fruit including juicy cherries, artisanal breads, and tangy cheeses. We lingered over our café crème before setting off into Burgundy once more.

We boarded the bus with Timi for a drive south into the Côte de Nuits. As we rolled through the lush, vineyard-laced landscape, Gwen pointed out our first côteaux, those gentle hills etched with vines, and explained the uniquely Burgundian notion of “climats”—named vineyard plots, each with centuries of winemaking history and distinct geological profiles. These climats de Bourgogne, now a UNESCO World Heritage site, are the building blocks of Burgundy’s wine identity.

This led to a discussion of “terroir”, that cornerstone of French wine philosophy. Terroir encapsulates the idea that wine is an expression of place—of soil, sun, rainfall, and human craft. No two wines, even if made from the same grape variety, will taste the same if grown in different terroirs. In Burgundy, terroir isn’t marketing; it’s gospel.

Our first stop was the Cassissium, a museum and distillery dedicated to the rich world of blackcurrants. We were welcomed by Aurore, an engaging guide who led us through an aromatic journey: from touching the serrated cassis leaves to inhaling their scent and discovering why this small berry is so central to Burgundian identity. We also learned that blackcurrants are banned in many U.S. states, a relic of old agricultural laws fearing crop disease, which makes this fruit all the more rare for some of us.

Inside the Vedrenne distillery, founded in 1923, we were introduced to the traditional and modern processes of turning cassis into liqueur—from historical distillation to maceration, where berries are steeped in alcohol to extract intense, natural flavor.

The tasting was a highlight:

- Crème de cassis de Dijon: dense, sweet, and velvety
- Marcassin: an earthy, full-bodied apéritif made with grape pomace
- A classic kir, with dry aligoté and cassis
- And a flight of modern concoctions: elderflower, wild peach, and bergamot liqueurs

After a few tasty purchases, we rejoined Gabriel, our excellent driver, and returned to Dijon.

There, we walked to Gril’Laure, a warm and lively local restaurant known for its open-fire cooking. We kicked off the meal with a glass of crémant de Bourgogne, offered by the cruise team, before enjoying:

- A crisp salade de chèvre chaud with mustard vinaigrette
- Tender chicken in a Dijon mustard sauce with wild rice
- A refreshing and slightly sweet strawberry soup

All paired with bright white Burgundy and supple Pinot Noir—easy to drink, hard to forget.

In the afternoon, Ibrahim drove us toward one of Burgundy's most storied and iconic places: the Clos de Vougeot. On the scenic route, our passionate guide Christelle told us about the Route des Grands Crus, the legendary wine road that threads through the region's most prestigious vineyards, each name echoing with centuries of winemaking excellence—Vosne-Romanée, Chambolle-Musigny, Gevrey-Chambertin...

We entered through the gated walls of the Clos, one of the oldest and most revered vineyards in France, established by Cistercian monks in the 12th century. The monks understood terroir long before the word existed—they experimented with different soils and exposures, creating one of the earliest documented examples of parcel-based winemaking.

The Château du Clos de Vougeot, built in the 16th century, still houses the ancient wine presses and cellars. It now serves as the headquarters of the Confrérie des Chevaliers du Tastevin, a wine brotherhood founded in 1934 to promote Burgundy's wines, cuisine, and culture. They host elaborate tastings and formal dinners with much ceremony—and just the right amount of wine.

We concluded the visit with a stop at La Grande Cave de Vougeot for a guided tasting with Shi, who led us through an elegant and informative flight:

- Louis Bouillot Crémant de Bourgogne – fresh and citrusy with a fine mousse
- Chablis 1er Cru Montmains (Moreau et Fils) – flinty, saline, and precise
- Saint Aubin 1er Cru “Sur Gamay” (Morin Père et Fils) – creamy oak with floral lift
- Savigny-lès-Beaune 1er Cru “Aux Serpentières” – delicate red fruit, forest floor
- Gevrey-Chambertin (Alex Gambal, 2022) – muscular yet refined, dark cherry and spice

Everyone found their own favorite, and we left content—with bottles clinking discreetly in our bags.

Back at the hotel, we gathered once more for our daily briefing, this time with Gwen taking the lead. With warmth and grace, she announced the bittersweet transition: the end of the cruise portion of our journey and, more poignantly, the time to prepare to say goodbye to Timi, who had supported and cared for us from Day 1. The room was quiet for a moment, but full of appreciation.

Dinner at the hotel was another elegant affair, served once again by our attentive and smiling waitress. We were treated to:

- A luscious cream of mushroom soup with a perfect slow-cooked egg nestled in the middle
- The iconic Bœuf Bourguignon, a dish that embodies the region

Bœuf Bourguignon:

Traditionally made with chuck beef slowly simmered for hours in red Burgundy wine with onions, carrots, mushrooms, and bacon. The meat becomes tender, the sauce rich and velvety. It is typically served with potatoes, pasta, or polenta to soak up the juices.

- Dessert was a light and delicate yogurt mousse with infused strawberries and brioche, sweet and balanced

All accompanied, of course, by local wines: silky reds and expressive whites, just as we had come to expect and love.

The evening wound down with laughter and stories over wine, a fitting end to a perfect day in the heart of Burgundy. We lingered at the table, savoring each sip, each moment, knowing our journey was entering its final act. Tomorrow, we would leave behind vines and valleys, and glide toward the final destination of our adventure: the City of Lights. Paris awaited.