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For immediate release:

## The ABC of France

Stretching from just east of Paris to the borders of Belgium, Germany and Switzerland, and south to the foothills of the Jura mountains, strategically positioned at the crossroads of Europe, the ABC of France – the regions of **Alsace, Burgundy** and **Champagne-Ardenne** – offers an amazing mix of Mediterranean, Germanic and Gallic art and architecture, and a stunningly varied landscape of infinite plains, ancestral forests, emerald mountains and rolling vineyards, crisscrossed by thousands of miles of tranquil rivers and canals.

With its fabulous museums and monuments, soaring cathedrals, picturesque world-class wineries and vineyards, and unequally gastronomic delights, the ABC of France is *the* place to go to discover and experience some of the best that France has to offer.

*The “ABC of France” is the association of the Regional Boards of Tourism of Alsace, Burgundy and Champagne-Ardenne. The ABC of France was created in 2000 to better promote their destinations in North America, and to better welcome its visitors. While each region retains its authenticity and distinct regional culture, they are geographically close and share a rich history and cultural heritage, adventures for all tastes, some of the best food and wines a warm welcome. For more information on Alsace, Burgundy and Champagne-Ardenne please visit the ABC of France website at [www.abcoffrance.net](http://www.abcoffrance.net)*

## ALSACE

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Tucked between the forested Vosges Mountains to the west and the Rhine River to the east, Alsace is a province of quaint flower-filled medieval wine villages with half-timbered houses, and important cities full of historical and present-day significance. Bordering on Germany, this region of eastern France melds French and Germanic attitudes, culture, foods, and ways of life, with beer gardens neighboring wine pubs known as *winstubs*, and delicate *pâté en croûte* (goose liver pâté wrapped in pastry) served alongside hearty *coq au Riesling* (chicken in Riesling sauce).

### A CITY OF CROSSROADS

Just an hour by plane from Paris, and easily accessible by car or train, **Strasbourg**, capital of Alsace and seat of the European Parliament, is called the City of Crossroads. Its old town is a mix of half-timbered houses and classical mansions, spread out along cobblestone streets and the canals of the Ill River. Soaring over the city is the red sandstone Notre-Dame Cathedral, a masterpiece of Flamboyant Gothic style built from 1176 to 1439, with magnificent stained-glass windows and a fascinating astronomical clock. Adjacent to the cathedral is the Musée de l'Oeuvre Notre-Dame, devoted to medieval and Renaissance Alsatian art. The 18th-century Palais Rohan, formerly a bishop's palace, now houses the Musée des Beaux-Arts, with paintings by Goya, El Greco and Rubens, while the new Musée d'Art Moderne et Contemporain, a pink granite-and-glass modern building, exhibits works by such artists as Gauguin, Monet and Picasso, with a hall reserved for the work of native son Jean Arp. From February 15 to April 21, the museum will mount an exhibit on Spanish artist Antonio Saura (1930-1998), a major figure in the Abstract Expressionist movement.

### THE WINE ROUTE

Starting in **Marlenheim**, west of Strasbourg, and continuing 60 miles south to **Thann**, Alsace's Route des Vins offers a very different view of the region, revealing numerous storybook villages whose vineyards produce such Alsatian favorites as **Gewurztraminer**, **Riesling** and **Sylvaner**.

Alsace's second city, **Colmar** is a wine capital situated along the Route des Vins. Here, small boats and swans glide along the tree-lined canals of the Little Venice district, and the Musée d'Unterlinden, housed in a 13th-century Dominican monastery, holds the famous Issenheim Altarpiece, a masterpiece of painter Matthias Grünewald.

In **Mulhouse**, the “City of Twelve Museums,” the Musée de l’Impression sur Etoffes has nearly 50,000 bedcovers, handkerchiefs, shawls and other textiles, while the Musée du Papier Peint houses an insurmountable collection of wallpaper and the Musée National de l’Automobile displays 500 vintage cars including 112 Bugattis. For railroad buffs, the Musée du Chemin de Fer illustrates the evolution of railways since its origins, and the Musée du Sapeur Pompier (fire-brigade museum), housed under the same roof, displays steamed powered fire engines and a large collection of helmets.

Meandering along the scenic wine route, the visitor will also encounter imposing châteaux, Michelin-starred restaurants, and expansive vineyards. Among the most picturesque of the wine villages are **Ribeauvillé**, dominated by the ruins of three castles; and the medieval **Eguisheim**, **Riquewihr**, and **Kaysersberg**. Whether you arrive by car, train, bicycle or foot, there are plenty of opportunities to explore well-marked paths, visit wine cellars for tastings, and linger over gastronomic treats.

#### **A REGION OF ADVENTURES**

Alsace offers additional intriguing ways to discover the province. Hotel barges and self-drive houseboats can be used to explore the Rhine and Ill rivers, as well as the canals leading to the Rhône or the Marne. Scores of well-marked hiking, biking and horseback trails crisscross the 300,000 acres of the **Parc Naturel Régional des Vosges du Nord**, the surviving part of the vast forest that once spread across central Europe.

The castles and forts of the Alsace provide an incomparable glimpse into the region’s past, with the 12th-century Château de Haut-Koenigsbourg’s fine collection of weapons and 15th- to 17th-century furniture perfectly complementing the dramatic structure of this fortress once owned by the Hohenstaufen and later the Hapsburgs, while the remains of the Maginot Line, including the Fort de Schoenenbourg, recall the days of conflict between France and Germany.

Among the many special events that take place in Alsace are its enchanting, festive Christmas markets, which generally start around early December and continue through Christmas Eve. In addition to local handmade products such as ornaments, pottery and stoneware, the markets abound with the delicious aromas of gingerbread and spice cookies, hot mulled wine and fresh fir trees. The most famous market, and France’s oldest—dating to 1570—is held in Strasbourg.

# BURGUNDY

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The province of Burgundy is a wine-lover's dream come true. The great wine-growing region of the Côte d'Or, following the Routes des Grands Crus, south from Dijon to Beaune, provides abundant opportunity to enjoy tastings (by appointment) of some of the world's best wines. Hearty dishes such as garlicky escargot, boeuf bourguignon and coq au vin are the perfect accompaniments to the region's wines.

## WHERE ART MEETS HISTORY

Just an hour and a half south of Paris, Burgundy has a wide range of historic sites, including the great cathedrals in **Autun**, **Auxerre** and **Sens**, the magnificent Romanesque abbeys of **Cluny**, **Fontenay**, **Tournus** and **Vézelay**, and the Renaissance châteaux of **Bussy-Rabutin**, **Sully** and **Tanlay**, all rich in fine architectural detail.

At the center of it all is **Dijon**, capital of the province. While the attractions found here are plentiful, one not-to-be-missed site is the Musée des Beaux-Art, situated in the palace of the dukes of Burgundy. In its most famous gallery, built by Philip the Good and used in 1474 as the setting for the "Joyous Entry" of Charles the Bold, lie the art treasures from the Chartreuse de Champmol, the necropolis of the dukes of Valois. Here, the resplendent tomb of Philip the Bold, which took 25 years to build, rests near the glorious tombs of John the Fearless and Margaret of Bavaria. The palace also houses a fine collection of contemporary art, including the beautiful works of great animal sculptor François Pompon, whose graceful polar bear also adorns the Jardin Darcy.

Not far away is the medieval town of **Beaune**, the wine capital of Burgundy, perhaps best known for Les Trois Glorieuses, its annual wine auction—the world's largest charity sale—held in November at the Hospice de Beaune, an architectural jewel box with a distinctively Flemish-Burgundian multicolor tiled roof. Formerly a hospital, the Hospice is now a museum that offers a unique view of medieval life, art and architecture, including the triptych of The Last Judgment by Rogier van der Weyden. The Musée du Vin, in the 15th- to 16th-century Hôtel des Ducs de Bourgogne, details the history of wine, and the Patriarche Père et Fils winery offers insight into wine making through tours of its vast wine cellars.

## GLEE FOR THE GASTRONOME

Since Gallo-Roman times, Burgundy has been known for its fine foods. In the 15th century, Charles VI praised the gastronomic pleasures of **Dijon**, and the dukes of Burgundy filled the palace in **Dijon** with great scents of culinary artistry. Some of

France's best beef comes from the regions of Auxois, Bazois and Charollais, which is also home to some of the best game in France. The Saône and Loire produce great white fish, and delicious mushrooms, including cèpes and morels, grow in the area. While no one can forget the delectable mustard for which Dijon is famous, available throughout the world, you probably will not find many of the local specialties anywhere else, like eggs poached in wine, ham in a cream sauce, or *sansiot* (calf's brain). And no meal in France is complete without cheese, the best of which include the local Saint-Florentin, Epoisses and Citeaux.

The soil and climate are perfect for growing the grapes that produce Burgundy's exquisite wines. Among the many great red wine villages are **Gevrey-Chambertin, Vougeot, Vosne-Romanée** and **Nuits-St-George** of the **Côte de Nuits**, and **Aloxe-Corton, Pommard** and **Volnay** of the **Côte de Beaune**. Fine white wine villages include **Meursault, Puligny-Montrachet** and others. Burgundy is equally famous for its marvelous **Chablis** wines and its Pouilly-Fuissé and Pouilly-Fumé from **Pouilly**.

#### **THE ACTIVE TRAVELER**

The roads of Burgundy provide perfect opportunities for walking and cycling, as well as boating along any of the 746 miles of navigable waterways. Luxurious hotel barges and self-drive boats ply the waters of the Seille, Saône and Yonne rivers, as well as the Bourgogne, Centre and Nivernais canals. The Canal de Bourgogne, first conceived in the 17th century but not completed until 1832, crosses 150 miles total, including a 10,000-foot-long tunnel at the summit.

An ideal way to explore the region on two wheels is to take La Voie Verte (The Green Way), a 27-mile-long paved bicycle path that cuts through the Côte Chalonnaise wine district. Besides passing wine-growing villages and vineyards, the path allows travelers to view castles, landmark churches, mills and museums.

For a different view of the landscape, travelers can float above the vineyards in a hot-air balloon, or those who prefer to keep both feet on terra firma can come in May to watch the ballooning festival in Chalon-sur-Saône. The art of hot-air ballooning, known in France as *mongolfière*, was created in the Burgundy region by two brothers by the name of Mongolfière, who made the first hot-air balloons in 1783.

## CHAMPAGNE-ARDENNE

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The birthplace of the world's most festive wine, Champagne-Ardenne is a land of rolling countryside and vineyards, medieval churches, fortified castles and picture-postcard villages. Medieval Reims, the region's capital and a center of Champagne production, is just 80 miles from Paris, making it the perfect spot for a one-day getaway or part of a longer foray. It was here that between 1223 and 1825, virtually all of the kings of France were crowned within the walls of the 13th-century Notre-Dame Cathedral, now a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

### THE GREAT CITIES

The Gothic Notre-Dame Cathedral, deservedly considered one of the finest cathedrals in Christendom, with its wealth of statues, elaborate gables, remarkable rose windows and stained glass by Marc Chagall, is not the only UNESCO World Heritage Site in **Reims**. The Palais du Tau and the former abbey of St-Rémi are also on UNESCO's list. An archbishops' palace, the Palais du Tau, shaped in the form of a T, was designed in 1690 but retains a 13th-century chapel and 15th-century great hall. Housing the cathedral's treasury and coronation items, as well a number of its original statues, the palace is a joy to behold. Its Salle du Tau, once used for coronation festivities, is still lined with cloth bearing fleurs-de-lis, the symbol of French royalty, and is covered with a vault in the shape of a ship's hull. The basilica and monastery of St-Rémi, erected in the 11th century, houses the tomb of Saint Rémi, the Bishop of Reims who baptized Clovis, king of the Franks, on Christmas Day in AD 498, thus converting France to Christianity.

Each June, Reims hosts the Joan of Arc Festival, during which 2,000 people in medieval dress escort "Joan of Arc" and "King Charles VII" in a pageant celebrating the coronation of the French kings. Reims is also home to some of the best Champagne houses, including Mumm, Taittinger and Veuve Clicquot-Ponsardin.

Shaped like a Champagne cork, **Troyes** is a city of beautifully preserved medieval architecture, with winding roads of half-timbered houses and superb churches with magnificent stained-glass windows. There are more than 16,000 square feet of stained glass at the St-Pierre-et-St-Paul Cathedral, including the *Mystic Wine Press* window, created in 1626 by Linard Gontier, known as the Master of Light. In addition to stupendous stained-glass windows, Ste-Madeleine Church also has one of the few existing rood screens in France, a delicate lace-like structure with foliage, grape and fig patterns. Visitors can watch master glassmaker Alain Vinum at work restoring old and creating new stained glass at his studio, the Atelier "le Vitrail." The 16th- to 17th-century bishop's palace is now an outstanding museum of modern art showcasing the world's foremost collection of paintings by André Derain.

**Charleville**, founded in 1606, was united with medieval **Mezière**, its twin city across the Meuse River, in 1966. The arcades of 16th-century Place Ducale, an almost identical version of the Place des Vosges in Paris, are lined with inviting cafés and boutiques (the architects, Clement and Louis Métezau, were brothers). Nearby is the state-of-the art Musée de l'Ardenne, and on the banks of the Meuse, the Musée Rimbaud is devoted to native son, poet Arthur Rimbaud.

### **A WORLD OF BUBBLES**

Champagne has reigned supreme in the region that bears its name for more than three centuries. Dom Pérignon (1639-1715), a Benedictine monk residing in **Hautvillers**, is credited with discovering the secret to perfecting Champagne. And the region of Champagne-Ardenne has embraced this art wholeheartedly, as can be seen from the beautiful stretches of vineyards that line the countryside as far as the eye can see. Tasting the world's most famous sparkling wine and touring the wineries is a raison d'être for many who come to this region, and the Champagne houses do not disappoint. In **Reims**, famous champagnes houses use the vast network of cellars and tunnels underlying the city and first quarried by the Celts and the Romans. Ruinart, whose cellars are designated historic monuments, is the oldest house in Champagne, founded in 1729, and Pommery offers daily visits through the 11 miles of more than 120 connecting chalk caves holding more than 20 million bottles. Nearby **Epernay** gives Reims a run for the money with its famous Champagne houses, including Moët & Chandon. The museum at Champagne de Castellane showcases the Champagne-making process, bottle labels and posters, and the view from its elaborate tower over the surrounding vineyards is breathtaking. Many of the Champagne houses welcome visitors for tours.

### **DISCOVERING THE OUTDOORS**

It's impossible to escape the famous sparkling bubbly, no matter where you go. It's celebrated everywhere, in dishes served in Michelin-starred restaurants, in Champagne-filled chocolates and in café. Even the slopes of the **Parc Naturel Régional de la Montagne de Reims** are covered with more than 17,000 acres of Champagne vineyards. Exploring trails by foot, horseback and bicycle are popular ways to enjoy the wildlife, forests, lakes and streams of Champagne-Ardenne. Four hundred miles of waterways and lakes are ideal for gliding by houseboat, bateaux-mouche or pleasure craft past migratory birds and animals that have settled along the banks. Deer and boar are plentiful in the mountain forest, and there are 500-year-old twisted birch trees in the forest of **Les Faux de Verzy**, now a biological reserve, all providing an idyllic backdrop to the pleasures of the region.