Champagne is a sparkling wine produced from chardonnay, pinot noir and meunier grapes cultivated within the Champagne area, in north-eastern France. Champagne can be white or pink, and is produced from a secondary alcoholic fermentation in the bottle, after having followed numerous strict regulations. It was first recognised as a GI in France in 1907.

The Champagne production area is located in the north-eastern part of France. It represents around 34000 hectares of land, dispatched over 320 towns and villages in five departments: Aisne, Aube, Haute-Marne, Marne, Seine-et-Marne which represents 635 municipalities.

Only permitted grape varieties, such as chardonnay, pinot noir and meunier may be planted. The grape yield is strictly controlled to obtain a maximum quality champagne. A short harvesting period of about three weeks usually begins in September, approximately 100 days after the fruit has appeared. The grapes are carefully hand-cut and only the best are selected. Champagne production is defined by five guiding principles: pressing quickly after picking, whole-cluster pressing, a gentle, gradual increase in pressure, low juice extraction (102 litres from 160 kg of grapes) and separating the juice into fractions. The primary fermentation of Champagne wines is a traditional winemaking process, which transforms the grape musts into wine. After the blending of wines from different grape varieties, villages or vintages, a secondary fermentation makes the Champagne wines sparkle: the wine is bottled and the yeast slowly reacts with the sugar. The wine is stirred during its time in the cellar, where it is stored for at least 15 months, and often for more than three years. After this time, the wines are disgorged to remove the sediments and a small amount of sugar is added to finish the wine. Finally, the bottle is corked, capped and labelled. The cork and label must clearly bear the word ‘CHAMPAGNE’.

Winston S. Churchill, in 1918, said: ‘Gentlemen, please remember that it is not only France we are fighting for but Champagne as well.’