



THE WORLD'S TOP  
**Wine Destinations**

*An Expert's Guide to What to See and Do Beyond the Vine*

**THERESA JACKSON**



**The World's Top Wine Destinations:  
An Expert's Guide to What to See and Do Beyond the Vine**

**By Theresa Jackson**

## PREFACE

I love going to my local wine shop to taste regional vintages. For many like me, dipping into a few bottles from great wine regions around the world is fun and educational, and the bottle I bring home adds another dimension to meals I prepare for family and friends. When traveling, one of my great pleasures is tasting wine at its origin. Indulging in a glass at both storied and less known wineries or vineyards becomes an exploration of the area, its culture, and its history. At home, the bottle I open from those travels brings those memories to life again.

But “wine travel” doesn’t have to be all about the wine. Wine enthusiasts and their more casual companions can equally enjoy the experience—especially if they choose the right region and touring style.

**Simply put: wine travel isn’t just for wine lovers;** many regions famed for their wine offer other great options for travelers of all kinds. For the foodie, there are delectable farm-to-table or “Slow Food” tastings and excursions, and cooking classes are often offered in the area or at the winery itself. For active travelers, tours can be combined with rafting, horseback riding, and even hot air ballooning. And of course, biking or long strolls between and among the vineyards are perennially popular—particularly in the fall when the colors are changing. For culture enthusiasts, there are castles to visit and picturesque villages to meander through, while artistic types can capture spectacular scenery and wildlife in paint or photography. Really, any interest can be combined with a trip to experience the wines of a region!

**And I want to dispel another common myth: wine travel doesn’t have to involve a group tour on a bus.** Instead, you can spend your day with a private driver or guide if you are visiting a number of wineries, with stops along the way for other delights. I like to drive on the SR222 in Italy, called the “Chianti Classico Road,” and stop between wineries to visit a shoemaker who does exquisite work in men’s shoes, wander the streets in small medieval villages, savor time in castles that

inspired Renaissance artists, watch olive harvesting and pressing, wander the hills with a farmer and his dog on a truffle hunt, or savor *chianghale* (wild boar hunted in the hills) at local restaurants. I stay in accommodations from the humble houses on working farms called *agritourismo* to five-star village *borgos* and *castellos*, where I can live like the landed gentry. Eventually I wind my way down to Siena to while away the hours in this fascinating city, frozen in time, with its beautiful Duomo and famous shell-shaped Campo, the scene of the glorious medieval pageant and no-holds-barred bare-back horse race called the Palio.

Italy's not the only destination for wine lovers, gourmands, and adventure seekers. In France, the Rue des Vins of Alsace is a favorite place to bike, and walks in the vineyards that stretch over the entire region from Strasbourg to Colmar are encouraged—luckily, you'll find signs pointing the way. The region flows from the Rhine up through the hills and all the way to the Vosges Mountains that serve as the route's backdrop. From spring to autumn, flower boxes hung from the balconies and windows of enchanting steep-roofed, half-timber houses explode in glorious cascades of reds, pinks, whites, and yellows. With both German and French influences on its history, this region has its own distinct cuisine, so expect both escargot and Alsace Flammekueche, a traditional dish that is not unlike a pizza without tomatoes, smothered with cheese, cream, mushrooms, and local ham. Alsace is also famous for its beer (for example, Kronenbourg or Meteor), its sauerkraut ("choucroute" in French), and Alsatian gingerbread, known as Pain d'Epices. Villages such as Ribeauville and Riquewihr are charming gems and good places to shop for linens (still printed on machinery powered by the streams that flow by the manufacturers) and light-as-air macarons in a rainbow of colors. Of course there are the tasting rooms of the great wineries of the region as well. Jean Sipp in Ribeauville has a sumptuous Reserve Pinot Noir that I loved—until the vintage sold out. Now I hold a bottle at home as a memory, still unopened. Strasbourg is another one of the many fine cities of France. In its historic center is the magnificent gothic cathedral of Notre Dame, home to one of the few medieval astronomical clocks left in Europe. Its Petit France quarter, on the banks of the river Ill, is particularly worth a romantic stroll.

**Make no mistake: wine and travel can combine the best experiences that will satisfy any soul struck with wanderlust.** With that in mind, I have asked some insider friends and experts to share their thoughts on their favorite wine regions, and I've added some of my own reminiscences to inspire you in your next adventures.

## HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

### **This guide is not just for wine lovers!**

This guide contains many (but not all) of the world's great wine regions. The guide is meant to give the reader an introduction to these regions, their major grape varieties, and the wines they produce. The goal of the book is to both give the wine aficionado ideas on how to tour a destination's most impressive wineries, and, even more, to educate the reader on travel options beyond the vineyards.

I believe that travel should be a highly personal experience to every traveler, both when traveling solo and with others, so I created this guide as a source for planning trips, no matter what level of interest in wine a trip participant has. A wine group tour may only include a small variety of activities, but I believe that private travel will create the most personal of connections to the destinations you visit and enduring memories of the people with whom you travel. And when you embark on creating the perfect itinerary for yourself and your travel companions, I encourage you to consult a well-connected travel professional; we have the expertise to add value and insight beyond what can be sourced from the Internet, and we can put together a comprehensive itinerary for you.

Please enjoy this guide, and I hope it makes for some very happy dreaming— and travels!

*A Votre Sante! Gesondheid! Salute! A sua saude! Salud!*

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Unlocking Hidden Doors in Private Travel

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## ABOUT THERESA

When I traveled the world and lived in Europe I began creating experiences for family and friends. It was important to me that whoever was traveling felt as if they were treasured guests being led to all the “good stuff” about the place visited, and not just a tourist in a herd or with their nose in a guidebook. I began by meeting with locals and experts to design unique experiences, and I sought out the best accommodations and asked for added value and special treatment for whomever I was bringing to them. This is how I realized my true passion and purpose.

Upon my return to the U.S., I saw lots of people were traveling, but I was horrified at the WAY they did it—hoping for the best when booking online, wasting time searching and searching the web and STILL not being able to access what I had mined only through personal contacts with the best sources in the world. *I know things that are un-Googleable and have developed relationships with the top experts, guides and hotels in the world!*

I started my travel boutique, ***Enlightened Journeys Travel***, and continue making those connections because I want everyone to feel like a **beloved guest** wherever their travels take them and to **have hidden doors opened** for them so that they can have the best possible memories with every investment of time and money in a vacation. I ensure you experience a destination beyond its highlights and iconic sights; you connect to a place personally, not just “see” it. **I ensure you experience the world as a TRAVELER, not a tourist.** And because all the details are taken care of for you, you can relax and enjoy the journey.

***Enlightened Journeys Travel*** opens hidden doors to extraordinary travel



experiences. You deserve travel experiences created to your specifications. Start exploring the possibilities—the world is out there waiting for you!

I invite you to my website, where you can explore further the benefits of custom-designed travel and make a *Complimentary Planning Appointment*:  
[www.enlightenedjourneystravel.com](http://www.enlightenedjourneystravel.com).

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As a private travel expert, I have sought out local guides, destination hosts, and specialists, and I am fortunate to call many of the most knowledgeable experts in the world friends and colleagues. To those that helped me add extra-special content to this guide, I am forever grateful. I also appreciate the insights of wine connoisseurs and shop owners who helped me refine my focus for this first edition. Admittedly, there are so many great wine regions in the world, and this is only a beginning. If your favorite is not here, it very well may be in the future!

The tips from experts came from professionals who are my partners in creating custom-designed itineraries for my beloved clients; it is with them and my own knowledge that magical journeys are made! I wish to give deepest thanks to Corinne Tateossian of DELUXE ARGENTINA; Ian Swain of Swain Destinations; Pamela Lassers of Abercrombie & Kent USA,; Tomislav Milinovic of Calvados Club Luxury Travel; Oliver Maillard, a local guide for Butterfield and Robinson (Burgundy); Marya Dumont, a local guide with Butterfield and Robinson (Bordeaux); Terre Blanche; Head Sommelier Alexandre Pauget for his insights into Provence wines; Marcy Forman, Spain travel expert and Vice President and Co-Owner of Valesa Cultural Services; Sandro and Silvia, local guides with See Italy by Laura Massoni Travel; Giovanni Paris, owner of Montalcino Wine Tours; Petra Stringfellow of Seasonz Travel, a luxury destination management company; Pam McOnie of Cape Town and Cape Winelands Tour Guide who gives private consulting and guiding for Hills of Africa Travel; Florent Maillard of Chocolatine, a private travel company specializing in France.

I am also indebted to the tourism boards of each country for all their help in introducing me to people in the regions for this book. Finally, I would like to thank my myriad of contacts, now good friends, in countries all over the world for opening your hearts and sharing with me your local expertise and knowledge because you recognized my passion for learning your culture, history and ways of life. You have enriched my life beyond measure and it is my avocation to do so for others.

**DISCLAIMER**

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## ARGENTINA



### Mendoza, Argentina

Located northwest of Buenos Aires at the foothills of the Andes Mountains, Mendoza is considered the wine capital of the country. Desert plains, steep vegetation areas, evergreen valleys with large rivers, and the snowy high peaks of the Andes form the landscape of this amazing destination for wine and nature lovers. The dry climate, cool nights, and hot and sunny days, along with the altitude, serve as the ingredients for this wine paradise.

There are more than 300 wineries you can visit in Mendoza, from charming boutiques and small family properties to domains that can blow you away with their cutting-edge architecture and technology. Whether it's the architecture, ambiance, gardens, history, or art that draws you to these wineries, they're all unique in their own way—and all are excellent wine producers.

## Major Wines of the Region

Mendoza is divided into five wine regions. One of them is the Zone of Mendoza River in which lie the Lujan de Cuyo, Maipú, and Agrelo districts. This is the area where the first vines were grown in Mendoza. It is also called “Primera Zona” (first zone), because of the prestige of its wines.

Agrelo is currently the most expensive wine-growing region in Mendoza. Very important wineries—including Viña Cobos from Paul Hobbs, Septima from Cordondiu, Sottano, Catena Zapata, Achaval Ferrer, Dominios del Plata, Terrazas de los Andes, among others—have chosen this magnificent land to grow grapes to produce wine of the highest quality. If there is a Napa Valley in Mendoza, this is it. No shopping malls here, only some of the biggest names in Argentine wine.

The emblematic grape of Mendoza is Malbec, although you can find Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Pinot Noir, and Syrah here as well. The white grapes of the area are Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc.

## When To Go

Using the insights of local experts, Travel Advisors can easily arrange for visitors to spend several days exploring the various great wineries in Mendoza. To coordinate your visits and open cellar doors for you, consult your Travel Advisor to put you in the hands of the top guides.

The best season to visit Mendoza is from October to April; however, March is the harvest season. Visitors can participate in picking, sorting, and “punch down” during harvest season in many wineries.

If you come during the harvest season in late February and March, time your visit for the Vendimia Harvest Festival that celebrates the region's agricultural bounty with concerts and street festivals. The festival's highlight is a beauty queen parade, the "Via Blanca de las Reinas," in which young women in ball gowns who have been chosen to represent their home regions are transported through the crowds on decorated chariots. The beauty queens pelt the crowd with grapes as Argentina's political and celebrity elite watch from the grandstands. The

celebration occurs annually on the first weekend in March, preceded by the symbolic Blessing of the Fruits the Sunday prior.

In April, Argentinean and international performers amaze visitors for one week with their talents in more than 45 classical music concerts at cellars, chapels, museums, or heritage sites.

### **Where to Taste**

**Catena Zapata Winery** is one of Argentina's most revered producers of Malbec. Tour the premises and taste this premium wine on an arranged tour that will provide you with interesting insights into the success of three generations of this wine-making family. International Wine Guru Robert Parker named Bodega Catena Zapata as the only South American winery in his latest book, *The World's Greatest Wine Estates.* For a travel moment that will feed the soul and stomach, enjoy lunch at the winery surrounded by the breathtaking vineyards.

**Vistalba** is architecturally stunning. In the tasting room, one entire wall is a subterranean cross section of the actual vineyard clay. The winery uses fascinating cutting-edge technology while still paying homage to traditional winemaking; the entire winemaking process is completed without pumps using gravity, thanks to ingenious design.

**Ruca Malen** serves up delicious food alongside its wines. Distinguished by *Great Wine Capitals* as a Best of Wine Tourism Global winner in 2014, the Restaurant at Bodega Ruca Malen is simply the best. You can enjoy a five-course lunch paired with wines with a stunning view of the Andes for an unforgettable experience!

**Achaval Ferrer** makes the highest-scoring Argentine wine and provides one of the most interesting wine tours. Barrel tasting includes a unique sampling of each varietal. Guides are passionate and are not afraid to divulge some of the secrets that go into making their world-famous product.

**Pulenta Statea** was founded by two brothers that hail from the most iconic wine family in Mendoza, the Pulentas. The attractive, modern facility runs excellent tours through the production line; visitors can taste the end results (including one

of Argentina's best Cabernet Francs) and even take a special and unique sensory aroma class.

**Carin** is a small, charming winery with an old-style building surrounded by vineyards and olive trees. Most of the time you can meet the owners while touring the winery.

**Benegas** features a building that is one of the few relics of the "old" Mendoza, built in 1901. Their tour offers a detailed history of wine production in the region, as well as a primer on the wine making process. The detailed interior serves as a museum to winemaking.

**Atamisque** is on the way to Uco Valley; here you can enjoy a visit to their trout and fruit farm as well as the beautiful winery built with stunning stone-crafted architecture. Lunch here is highly recommended; try the fresh trout from their farm paired perfectly with white wine.

**O Fournier** is an ultra-modern winery in Uco Valley that's surrounded by a stunning view of the snowy peaks of the Andes. The winery features boutique-style wines and a great restaurant and produces a wine called Alfa Crux that was nominated by *Wine Spectator* as one of the best wines in the world.

**Cruzat** is a boutique sparkling wine producer that won the prize for the best sparkling wine of Argentina in 2012. The winery is located at the foot of the Cordón del Plata mountain range, and their sparkling wine is made under the traditional method of second in-bottle fermentation, just like French champagne.

### **Where to Dine**

**Terruñ:** Tucked away inside Club Tapiz Resort, Terruñ boasts an elegant interior, amazing service, and an excellent wine list.

**Azafran:** Named after saffron, this restaurant offers charming old-world décor in a welcoming atmosphere. Serving up gourmet cuisine with great variety, it has one of the best wine cellars in Mendoza.



**Francis Mallmann 1884** was named one of the 50 Best Latin American Restaurants. It is elegant and refined.

**Nadia O:** For the ultimate romantic dinner head to Nadia O to experience a six-course tasting menu. You will be dining in a restored home with an intimate back patio, complete with herb garden; the restaurant also has a private dining room. Choose dishes off of a Spanish-Argentine menu that changes every week.

**Siete Fuegos:** Located in Valle de Uco, this restaurant exemplifies the Classic Argentine barbecue with meat, fish, vegetables, and fruits flame-grilled seven different ways. The restaurant is set among the grapes at the Vines of Mendoza with an outstanding view to the Andes.

### **Where to Stay**

While the city of Mendoza has hotels and nightlife, the real wine action is in the countryside among the vineyards. The stars of the region are the wine resorts that feature not only great wines but also delicious food to pair it with. Their settings range from rustic with an old-world charm and cozy atmosphere to luxurious accommodations with spas (one with a Hammam) to a Relais & Chateaux property.

If you want to stay in the heart of the best Malbec region, head to **Casa de Uco Vineyards & Wine Resort**. The resort is located in the Uco Valley . Amidst stunning mountain landscapes and incredible natural beauty, the valley is home to several of the most distinguished wineries in the world. The property, bordered by the Andes Mountains, has extensive vineyards and a lake on its 790 acres. Here guests can explore the valley or relax on the grounds and enjoy exceptional cuisine and great outdoor activities.

*Besides special rates, in 2015 Virtuoso clients also receive these value-added amenities: upgrade on arrival, subject to availability, a la carte breakfast daily in the restaurant or through room service, a complimentary dinner for up to two people per room once during stay (excluding alcohol, taxes and gratuities) and early check-in/late check-out subject to availability.*

### **In-the-Know Tips from the Locals**

Corinne Tateossian, an Argentinian private travel expert: “One of my favorite things to do is to walk through the vineyards every morning and smell the land.”

Gabriela Celeste, Wine Maker at Eno Rolland: “In my free time I love to take a horseback ride and trek some paths through the mountains. I also love to go to our main park, General San Martín (with more than 300 hectares), and sit for a while under the huge, old trees.”

### **What to Do**

**Heart-Pumping Activities:** For a pure adrenaline rush, enjoy a full day of outdoor activities by combining rafting with a canopy adventure. The rapids of the Mendoza River are classified as grade III rapids year round, going up to grade IV during the summertime. Experience another rush while listening to the cable sing as you are guided over a 5,000-foot course on six different zip line cables above the valley floor while crossing the Mendoza River.

**Trekking:** Looking for something that’s a little slower paced? Try trekking, which can be practiced on all kinds of terrains and has no restriction of age, gender, or physical condition. Just choose the right level of trekking for you, from “relaxed” to “difficult.”

Corinne recommends a breathtaking trek that’s about an hour and a half from the city of Mendoza: “My favorite hike climbs to about 11,500 feet and takes you along a gorgeous stream and through mountain meadows with views of snowcapped peaks, guanacos, and condors. You also have the chance to see wild horses and gauchos. Spectacular scenery, exotic plants and wildlife, and a wonderful picnic await you at the top!”

**Horseback Riding:** You can experience a memorable day on horseback in the Andes; rugged terrain and beautiful vistas capped off by an authentic Argentine

barbecue are the highlights of this wonderful experience. Depending on the season, you can witness a live roundup of the cattle where gauchos bring the stock down the mountain to lower levels for the upcoming winter.

**World-Class Art:** Although Mendoza doesn't have the great display spaces of Buenos Aires, another option would be to visit one of the renowned artists of the region in their ateliers. Mendoza is a haven for artists of all disciplines, and you can get a sense of the art scene there by visiting their workshops.

## AUSTRALIA



### South Australia, Barossa

The Barossa is located in South Australia, about 70km (a 1.25-hour drive) northeast of Adelaide, the state's capital city. Once you are in the area, it is an easy drive to the towns and hamlets of the Barossa. Who wouldn't want to visit an area called by early expeditioners for the South Australia Company in the 1830s "the cream, the whole cream, and nothing but the cream"? After that glowing praise, an entire European community flocked to the Barossa from various Prussian provinces, including German-speaking settlers from Silesia (now part of Poland). The settlers cleared land for mixed farming, built churches and schools, and planted small vineyards, some of which remain in the same families today. You can spy Germanic influences in the area's stone houses, Lutheran churches, and the pioneer cemetery—and you can immerse yourself in all of this on the Tanunda Heritage Trail. The area has a rich culinary tradition as well; a

famous foodie personality based her center of operations here (you can visit her exquisite store, café and t.v. kitchen). Chefs from all over come to take part in the farm-to-table wealth of the area during various festivals and events, and the Barossa's restaurants are world-renowned.

For the ultimate travel experience, combine a trip to the Barossa Valley with other cultural exploration. The city of Adelaide is home to a vast collection of Aboriginal art and artifacts that document the Aboriginal way of life. Tour the art and artifacts with the grandson of a tribe elder, who will bring to vivid life both the ancient ways of the Aboriginals and their modern history. The area is also a jumping off point for other Australian wonders—the splendid coast, the Outback, and the fantastic Kangaroo Island, Australia's version of the Galapagos. Here you can walk among sea lions sunning themselves on the beach, spy huge seal colonies, catch glimpses of koala in the gum trees, and be charmed by fields full of kangaroo.

### **Major Wines of The Region**

Shiraz, Cabernet Sauvignon, Grenache/Shiraz/Mourvedre blends, (dry) Riesling, and Semillon are all used to make spectacular and satisfying wines.

### **When To Go**

Summer and autumn are particularly lovely in the Barossa Valley, thanks to the warm days and exciting grape harvest. The reds and golds of the changing leaves in fall makes for spectacular drives—or views over the vineyards to the hills surrounding the valley as you sit and sip wine in the cellar doors of the wineries. Spring is also beautiful as new growth on the vines appears, and winter can be cold but equally great for tasting big reds by a fire!

### **Where to Taste**

**Two Hands Wines** derives its big juicy wines of quality from Shiraz. Their Cellar Door, a late 19<sup>th</sup>-century stone cottage and bake house, is open for tastings and sales and offers visitors an intimate, informative structured tasting of the wines throughout their portfolio, accompanied by a small tasting plate. For an even

more exclusive experience, they offer private master class tastings for up to eight guests.

**Torbreck**, a high-end winery renowned for its reds, offers tastings at its Cellar Door by appointment.

**Charles Melton** has accommodations onsite in a renovated church. The winery offers Cellar Door tastings and lunch on the veranda—talk about great views!

Other wine experiences:

Learn the about the importance of Oak at **Murray Street Vineyards** with a wine flight tasting; try the “Taste Your Birth Year” fortified red wine tasting at **Seppeltsfield**.

## Where to Dine

In addition to area farmer’s markets and the various wineries that offer platter lunches, the Barossa Valley is home to establishments that will delight the palate.

**Appellation** at The Louise: Also offering accommodations as one of the Luxury Lodges of Australia, the renowned, award-winning restaurant is home to an innovative chef who harvests foods from the restaurant’s own garden and other local sources. The creative 10-course tasting menu is designed to match the food with the wine, rather than the other way around. Their Winemaker’s Dinners afford small groups a chance to talk and dine with the vintners, whose wines are paired with a five-course meal.

**Hentley Farm** is a winery on a beautiful property dotted with stone buildings reminiscent of a managed farm. The stables, built in the 1880s, were converted into the Relais & Chateaux restaurant, where the chef offers two menus: the Discovery and the Du Jour. The restaurant harvests produce from the farm’s 150 acres, including foraged ingredients growing in the wild. In 2014 it was awarded a “Best Restaurant in a Winery” distinction from the South Australia Restaurant and Catering Awards.

## Where to Stay

Although the Barossa Valley can be visited in a day trip from Adelaide, it is a worthwhile place to stop for a night or two for the wine and outdoors lover alike. Accommodations range from the simple to the sumptuous, but are never overly glitzy—properties don't want to compete with the natural surroundings of this idyllic countryside.

### Recommended:

**The Louise:** Set in the heart of the Barossa, guests here are treated to a winery tour and tasting at nearby **Two Hands** winery, housed in a lovely historic stone building, plus a sumptuous dining experience at the Appellation restaurant.

*Tip: Ask your Travel Advisor about special rates and added amenities to secure on your behalf!*

### In-the-Know Tips from the Locals

Ian Swain, Australian Travel Expert: “On a Saturday morning, head to the local Farmer’s Market where you can taste and buy the best the Barossa has to offer. More than 50 stallholders provide meats, bread, cheese, fresh fruit and vegetables, oils, preserves, and local specialties. Try going with **Appellation’s** Executive Chef Ryan Edwards and shop for the evening’s menu. Or grab a bicycle and ride through the rolling vineyards. “

### What to Do

Foodie Delights: The Barossa is a major gastronomic destination; for foodie fun try these activities:

- Pick up picnic provisions while taking a tour along the Butcher, Baker, Winemaker Trail.
- Stop by Maggie Beer’s Farm Shop, where you can browse through locally produced regional goods, taste samples, or purchase one of Maggie's signed books. There are daily cooking demonstrations.
- Have breakfast with the kangaroos at a nearby conservation park.

- Visit the Barossa Brewing Company, producers of small batches of pure, traditionally fermented beers, hand-crafted from the best ingredients available. The brewery is located in the historic old Wheat Store in Greenock.

**Explore the Arts:** Seemingly every town hosts a gallery or craft center, while intimate concert venues showcase music events.

**Shop Til You Drop:** The area boasts many fine boutiques, and artisans have galleries and demonstration venues throughout the Valley.

**Enjoy the Great Outdoors and Culture:** In the Barossa Valley, they seem to be one and the same. Gently rolling roads make for great bike riding and touring, or walk historic trails to immerse yourself in the culture and history of this magical place. Don't miss the amazing heritage and culture in Angaston and Bethany.



## CHILE



Wine was a major component of the Spanish diet at the time of the conquest, and the earliest settlers wanted to produce their favorite beverage in the New World. After many failed attempts in more northerly climates, they discovered that Chile offered the perfect conditions for growing grapes and making wine. Its Mediterranean climate provides cold, rainy winters and warm, dry summers, broad fluctuations between daytime and nighttime temperatures, and rain-free harvest seasons. Not only are these perfect growing conditions for the right varietals, they also limit the need for the use of chemicals in the vineyard. Today, high-quality biodynamic wines and a strong eco-friendly sustainable ethic dominate much of the Chilean wine culture.

Other wine influences came following Chile's independence from Spain in the early 19th century when wealthy travelers, who had made their fortunes in the

mining industry, sailed to Europe. To them, France was the destination of choice, and so France became Chile's international role model. New French influences appeared in Chile's architecture, arts, cuisine, and dress. Luxurious mansions rose on the outskirts of major cities such as Santiago, Aconcagua, and Curicó. This new lifestyle called for fine wines made from noble French varieties, and by the mid-19th century new vineyards, modern wineries, and the latest European technologies raised the standard and quality of Chilean wine to new heights.

### **The Wine Valley of Colchagua**

Located in Chile's Central Valley region in the foothills of the Andes, the Colchagua Valley produces some of Chile's best wines. The oldest and perhaps most well regarded wine-producing area in South America, this valley is home to several of the most important wineries on the continent. The destination is known for the Chilean cowboy, called the "huaso," and it is also one of the best places to learn about traditional Chilean country activities. Spend your time visiting local farms, participating in the wine harvest, or joining local craftsman who will share their techniques for working in clay, cane, and other local materials. You can have lunch at a family-owned winery and watch a huaso demonstration before heading out for a ride with them.

### **Major Wines of the Region**

The major wines grown here include Cabernet, although distinctive to this valley is the grape of the Carmenère. This is an ancient Bordeaux grape, which was originally planted in abundance in the Médoc region of Bordeaux, France, and was used to produce deep red wines and occasionally for blending. Fortunately, the grape was brought to Chile by French winemakers in 1850. The grape flourished in South America; meanwhile in Europe the grape was virtually eradicated due to a Phylloxera plague that hit in 1867. Vineyards in Bordeaux were not replanted with Carmenère, since it was difficult to grow there. The grape was long considered extinct until relatively recently; in 1993 a detailed scientific survey was conducted, revealing that Chile's Merlot and its Carmenère vines had been growing together for more than a century. Thus the rebirth of the "lost grape of Bordeaux."

## Where to Taste

The area of Colchagua concentrates several of the most recognized wineries of Chile, making it possible (with special arrangements) to visit many of their boutique cellars and enjoy their excellent wines.

**Vina Lapostolle Clos Alpata Winery** is an architectural wonder designed by both a French family (founders and owners of the world-renowned liqueur Grand Marnier) and a Chilean family, both deeply involved in winemaking. The vines are descendants of those originally brought over from France, and a tasting here is highly recommended with a lunch at its Relais & Chateaux restaurant.

**Vina Montes** is also in Alpata, and the owner produces in Napa Valley as well. Its premium wine is the Cabernet Sauvignon Montes Alpatas, and several of its wines have scored 90+ points in Wine Enthusiast. In addition to wine tastings, visitors can enjoy vineyard tours and a botanical trek past native plants up to a spectacular lookout, while lunch can be savored at its café.

**Vina Vik** in Millahue has been the center of recent buzz. Its architecture is ultra-modern and futuristic, conceptualized by a Norwegian husband-and-wife team who share a love of wine and art collecting. Maintaining eco-friendly practices throughout, the winery features a rooftop flowing “mirror” of water, which is not only a visual masterpiece that visitors can wander around on paths, but also cools the barrel room below. In addition to wine tastings on its 11,000 acres, the property also features daily outdoor activities for guests who also stay there.

## Where to Dine

**Molecular Gastronomy:** Enjoy chocolate and red wine ice cream made with liquid nitrogen—definitely not your standard dining experience—at **Divino Meson**. Head chef Christian Alvan is a culinary alchemist who trained both in the UK (with Heston Blumenthal at the Fat Duck) and in Spain before returning to his homeland and the city of Puerto Varas (known as the city of roses) in Chile's Lake District.

**Divino Fogón** in Puerto Varas offers many culinary delights courtesy of chef Christian Alvan. Clients tell the chef their food preferences and he makes a four-course meal just for them, using their favorite ingredients.

### **Where to Stay**

Both Lapostolle and Vino Vik have accommodations, but each town caters to different tastes. To ensure you're matched with the right accommodation based on your specifications, it is best to consult a travel expert with contacts in the region.

### **In-the-Know Tip from the Locals**

Pamela Lassers, Chile Travel Expert: "Chile is earning worldwide recognition as a producer of some of the finest wines in the 'New World.' Guests are invited to blend varietals such as Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Carmenere, and Malbec to 'design' their own assemblage and create their own signature wine."

With the right host and the right timing for the harvest in the Colchagua or other valleys surrounding Santiago, you can participate in the harvesting process at a winery—and then a year later you will be sent a case of the final product. Participating locations will depend on climate conditions and the season, since the harvest takes place from mid-February through the end of May.

### **What To Do**

**All About Grapes:** Come to Chile to experience the grape harvest—called the Vendimia—that runs from March to April. You can witness the picking of the grapes, the crush, and enjoy various celebrations throughout the valley.

**Get Outdoors:** For great weather, January and February are the prime season for warm temperatures, cooler mountain visits, or even a trip to the beach, since it is only an hour's trip to the coast from Colchagua.

**Culture and Art:** A visit to Santa Cruz, the sleepy major city of the valley, is a good stop for its well-preserved colonial architecture and cultural museums.

**Take a Soak:** Thermal springs abound in this area of volcanic mountains and range from simple natural pools of mineral water bubbling up through geological faults to luxury spas and wellness centers. Some are best visited December to April when the weather is warm and they are reachable in the mountains, while others are conveniently located near ski resorts and are accessible May through September.

**Mountain Views and More:** Just take in the dramatic scenery of the Andes Mountains and its unspoiled landscapes where you can see 120 million-year-old fossilized dinosaur footprints, thundering waterfalls down steep mountainsides, condors, glaciers, and volcanoes.

**Trail Trekking:** Biking trails abound in the valley; have your travel expert arrange a bike and wine excursion for added fun! Hiking and fishing lodge trips combined with wine excursions can be a great reason to gather a group of friends and experience the best of Chile's Great Outdoors. Horseback treks through vineyards or in the Andes can be arranged for an especially unique touring experience.

**Up in the Air:** Imagine a hot air balloon ride over the vineyards of the valley with the stunning backdrop of snow-capped mountains ... what could be more romantic? Add in a stop for a picnic lunch in a vineyard; it's the perfect venue to propose or declare one's love.

**Natural Wonders:** To savor more of Chile's natural wonders, visit the Llanquihue Lake District, a picture-perfect area of sparkling lakes and snow-capped volcanoes. On its shores, the city of Puntas Varas is known for its German traditions, stunning natural environment, and popularity as a tourist destination, with a scenic location close to mountains, lakes, and national parks. Ski at Center Osorno Volcano May to September, which is Chile's winter. Take photographs of the breathtaking scenery any time of year. You can also explore natural landscapes in Petrohue, located on the shores of Todos Los Santos Lake near by Vicente Perez Rosales National Park. This area affords active exploration, from gentle walks along the paths surrounded by an evergreen forest to tougher hikes up the slopes of the majestic Osorno Volcano—don't miss out on a wander along the banks of the spectacular turquoise-hued Petrohue River. Puerto Varas is well

known for seafood, fresh produce, and its local Chilean cuisine with a unique German influence, thanks to the large German community that settled in town.

## CROATIA



### Istria

Hands-down, Croatia's most exciting wine region is Istria. Situated on the northern Croatian coast, this dramatic region is a feast for all of the senses. The wedge-shaped Adriatic peninsula has a rich, drama-filled history, with ties to the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Italy, and Yugoslavia. Remnants of a Roman occupation and Venetian Empire architecture reflect its storied past; you'll even find mysterious stone outcroppings near Mordele and Picugi that are reminiscent of Stonehenge. With its dreamlike natural landscapes, quaint fishermen towns, picturesque hilltop villages, crystal-clear waters, and historical gems, Istria is a wondrous place to explore. Add to that exquisite restaurants, year-round festivals, inspired cuisine, and fantastic wines, and you have one of the most desirable destinations along the Adriatic.

## **Major Wines of the Region**

Istria's most famous wines are the whites: Malvasia, Chardonnay, and Muskat. Teran, Cabernet Sauvignon, and Merlot are the reds produced here.

The Malvasia grape truly represents the region's identity. Fresh and crisp, it has grown in the Mediterranean since ancient times. It can produce wines that go from very dry to very sweet, with golden color and a very fragrant flavor that contains just a hint of apricots, Muscat, and almonds. Chardonnay grapes are a cross between the Pinot family and a very old, very rare grape variety called Gouais Blanc, believed to have arrived in Croatia from France during the Roman period.

Muscat, aromatic and perfumed, is a late-harvest wine with the golden yellow color of the Istrian sun. The wine is strong on the palate and usually contains a higher alcohol content, typically over 12 percent. It is often served as an aperitif, a dessert wine, or with first-course truffle dishes.

Although not well known far outside the region, Teran is an old Istrian cultivar first mentioned in texts 600 years ago. Up until 100 years ago, it was the main local cultivar grown on most of the outlying vineyards. It produces a rich, slightly sour, full-bodied red wine.

The delightful sparkling wine Pjenvsac is a blend of Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, and Pinot Blanc.

## **When to Go**

Summer is beautiful in this area, and a summer trip can be combined with time on the islands and beaches. Fall is the harvest time when the area bursts with color. From April to November, festivals are held which draw many international travelers to the region.

## **Where to Taste**

The best wineries of the region are worth a visit; make sure you have arrangements made prior to your arrival.



**Kabola:** Wine tastings here are enjoyed alongside nibbles of Istrian delicacies like Istrian ham, extra-virgin olive oil, truffles, and bread. The olive oil is made from olives that are cold-pressed the day they are picked, producing a beautiful golden green-colored oil.

**Trapan** is a vibrant and young winery that grows the traditional varietals and also produces its own artistic blends. This winery practices organic farming and calls its method of blending the old ways of making wine with new techniques “revolutionary”—in homage, one of their signature wines is called “Che,” after Argentine revolutionary Che Guevara.

**Matosevic** is a family-owned winery that strives to preserve the wines of the region, so to taste here is to taste the local tradition. Recently there has been a surge to perfect “fresh” wines, and this winery has led that movement. Now the winery offers both fresh wines and wines aged in barrels from the acacia wood of Croatia, Italy, and Austria. With prior arrangement, you can tour the cellars and participate in guided wine tastings.

**Meneghetti** is a Relais & Chateaux property designed for guests to enjoy the olive groves and vineyards, the wines, and the great food.

### **Where to Dine**

**Zigante** is situated in the charming small village of Livade, home of the famous Istrian white truffle. At Zigante’s almost every dish has at least a discreet touch of truffle in it—even the ice cream. The menu changes seasonally, and the extensive wine list consists of around 200 expertly selected labels.

**Wine Vault** In Rovinj, Monte Mulini’s restaurant, is a contemporary blend of French and Mediterranean cuisine, accompanied by a selection of wines from an extensive collection of 550 vintages. The Chef’s Table experience offers seating for up to six guests in the heart of the kitchen with the chef suggesting the menu and your sommelier assisting you in choosing the best domestic and foreign wines to pair with your meal. The unique experience also includes a tour of the restaurant's impressive wine cellar.

**San Rocco:** Located in Brtonigla, San Rocco's charm lies in an innovative way of preparing and serving traditional Istrian specialties with a luxurious, intimate ambiance. The menu highlights include fresh, locally caught fish, truffles, mushrooms, and ham. Some of the most popular specialties are homemade tortellini with Istrian Boskarin, a foamy soup of wild sea bass, and Istrian scampi with fresh ricotta.

### **Where to Stay**

Your Travel Advisor can help you find just the right place, whether it is your own private house, a seaside boutique hotel, or one surrounded by vineyards and olive groves.

### **In-the-Know Tips from the Locals**

Tomislav Milinovic, Croatian private travel designer: "Kamenjak, at the southernmost part of Istria, is a protected area on a peninsula that offers plenty of beaches, bays, magnificent nature, views, and amazing sunsets."

### **What to Do**

**Tantalizing Truffles:** Tomislav suggests a private truffle hunting demonstration in Livade. A biking tour can be arranged to include wine and olive oil tasting as well.

**Get Active:** Istria can be enjoyed to its fullest during the warmer months from spring to fall. Vineyard and coastal walking and biking are enjoyable on moderate terrain, while extreme sports enthusiasts—and those who just like to watch, thank you very much—gather along the cliffs of the shoreline and in the national parks of the region to climb, sail, glide, and mountain bike. You can have all the pleasure of a beautiful white-sand Adriatic beach and seaside relaxation without the crowds of other European hotspots (for now). Sailing the coastline is a wonderful way to spend a day.

**Culture and Romance:** There is something for everyone in Croatia. For romance, consider a sunset cruise in Rovinj on a traditional fisherman boat, called a "batana," while enjoying a glass of wine and oysters onboard. Cultural sightseeing tours can be arranged with local guides in UNESCO sites in Porec, the old town

Rovinj, and ancient Pula. Sipping espresso in an outdoor square while watching passersby is an art form to itself. The nearby Brijuni Islands are another great place to explore wildlife in the national park or play a round of golf.

## FRANCE



### **Burgundy**

Famed the world over for its wines, Burgundy is one of the great historic regions of France. It lies between Paris and Lyon and is bordered by the Loire River to the west, the Franche-Comté and Champagne regions to the east, and the Rhone Alps to the south. The capital of the Burgundy region is Dijon, a thriving cultural center with old, narrow streets and houses built in the local pale honey-colored stone. The region is divided into the Côte-d'Or, where the most expensive and prized Burgundies are found, and Beaujolais, Chablis, the Côte Chalonnaise, and Mâcon.

### **Major Wines of The Region**

Here it's all about Pinot Noir for the red and Chardonnay for the white. The two areas to visit are the "Côte de Nuits" in the northern part of the Côte d'Or and the "Côte de Beaune" in the southern part, where the great names in Burgundy wine are found.

## When To Go

For tasting, it is best to go in the springtime or early summer because many wineries close to visitors during the harvest later in the year. On the third weekend of November the famous “Ventes des Vins” (wine auction) takes place in the town of Beaune. It’s a great weekend with so much to do and taste!

## Where to Taste

Côte de Beaune:

Try the “lunch tasting” at **La Table d’Olivier Leflaive** in Puligny Montrachet featuring the white wines of the region, or the **Domaine du Comte Sénard**, which features the region’s reds. In both places you have a light, typical Burgundy lunch accompanied by great wines. Domains such as **François Carillon** in **Puligny Montrachet**, **Chavy-Chouet** in Meursault, and **Domaine du Comte Armand** in Pommard are among favorites. These tastings must be planned in advance; ask your Travel Advisor to make your arrangements.

Côte de Nuits:

It’s difficult to gain access to the top domains in this region, since they’re bombarded by requests and refuse almost every demand. **Marchand-Tawse** in Nuits Saint Georges, **Domaine Trapet** in Gevrey-Chambertin, and **Domaine de la Vougeraie** are accessible and offer unforgettable tasting experiences. **Domaine Trapet** also offers a nice “lunch tasting” in Gevrey.

## Where to Dine

Côte de Beaune:

If you are lucky enough to be around during the weekend, a highlight of your trip can be a visit to **the Ferme de La Ruchotte**. Chef Frédéric Ménager prepares his famous menu of the day using only organic products and his farm’s chicken or pork. **L’Hôtel du Centre** in Meursault is a favorite among locals, while the **Bistrot de l’Hôtel** in Beaune has an outstanding wine list. The **Caves Madeleine** is the place to try to get some seats at the large table and share a beautiful dinner with

other travelers or locals. If you're a Michelin star aficionado or want a hands-down incredible dining experience (and you are in France, so why not?), head to **Lameloise in Chagny**, only a 20-minute cab ride from Beaune.

Côte de Nuits:

Try **Chez Guy** in Gevrey-Chambertin, **Castel de Très Girard** in Morey-Saint-Denis, or **Mon Millésime** in Chambolle-Musigny.

If you are looking for somewhere that is slightly more reasonably priced but still a great meal, head to **Le Bougainville** in Vezelay.

### Where to Stay

*Hint: To get the best rooms, rates, special VIP treatment, and extra-special touches, always consult your Travel Advisor.*

In Beaune or around: **L'Hôtel de Beaune** is amongst the best addresses. Otherwise the "**Maison Fatien**" is perfect if you are looking for something more "guesthouse" in style. On the other side of the slopes, the exquisite **Abbaye de La Bussière**, a restored 12<sup>th</sup>-century Cistercian abbey, serves up a special stay as well.

In Côte de Nuits: Try the **Château André Ziltener** or the **Castel de Très Girard** for incomparable accommodations.

In Dijon: **Le Châpeau Rouge** is a can't-miss. If you stay there you'll want to try the sumptuous restaurant of Chef William Frachot, a two-Michelin-star-rated establishment.

### In-the-Know Tips from the Locals

Oliver Maillard, a local guide and wine travel expert: "Sometimes to get the best possible tasting schedule, just refer to your wine store at home or your Travel Advisor. They have better chances than locals of entering the most exclusive domains!"

## What to Do

**Incredible Art and Interiors:** The region literally revolves around wines, so much so that it is difficult to escape the vineyards. However, a visit to the Hospices de Beaune and a tour of the “old Dijon” are obligatory. View masterpieces at the Musée des Beaux-Arts and learn about life in Burgundy in centuries past at Musée de la Vie Bourguignonne. Many of Dijon's finest houses lie near the Palais des Ducs on and around rue Verrerie, rue Vannerie, and rue des Forges, whose names reflect the industries that once thrived there (glassmaking, basket-weaving, and metalsmithery, respectively). You can tour the interiors of some of these beautiful dwellings; major sites to see include the Palace of the Dukes of Burgundy and the gothic Cathedral of Saint Bénigne.

**Slow Down:** You can bike some of the small bike paths along the most famous vineyards in the world. “Slow Travel” your way through the region by chartering a luxury barge, which sails along the region’s canals—that way you can savor each morning by getting fresh croissants in town, visiting cultural and historic sites, and biking the pathways that run alongside.

## Bordeaux



Bordeaux is a port city on the Garonne River in the Gironde region of southwestern France. Formerly controlled by the British for 300 years, it was once a sleepy city (nicknamed “Sleeping Beauty” in French) that is now popular with tourists and wine enthusiasts. It is a City of Culture and a designated UNESCO World Heritage Site. An attractive city, Bordeaux is full of 18<sup>th</sup>-century architecture and boasts a riverfront promenade, the longest shopping street in France, and museums and art galleries to explore. Outside Bordeaux you can explore the Atlantic coast and its many resorts that sit along sandy beaches backed by sand dunes, or go inland to explore lakes and forests while canoeing, walking, and biking.



Many of the most famous wines in the world hail from vineyard regions within 50 miles of Bordeaux, including Medoc, Bordeaux Superieur, Fronsac, Saint-Emilion, Pomerol, Margaux and Entre-Deux-Mers, and the Bergerac region immediately to the east. Most of the wine towns of the region have a “Maison Du Vins” where visitors can learn more about the wines of that particular area. Saint-Emillion is a must visit. This beautiful medieval town was built upon the principle that Man and Nature most harmoniously blend together. This building principle is reflected in Saint-Emillion’s architecture, culture, and in the surrounding vineyards themselves. Unsurprisingly, the town is designated a “Cultural Landscape” on the UNESCO World Heritage List.

### **Major Wines of the Region**

The red wines of Bordeaux are usually blends of two or more of the following grapes: Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Cabernet Franc, Malbec, and Petit Verdot. The percentage of the main grape used depends upon the location of the winery in the region.

The main river in Bordeaux is the Gironde, which is fed by the Dordogne and the Garonne. The “Left Bank” is south of these two smaller rivers where Cabernet Sauvignon is the primary grape used in the Bordeaux blend. The premier wine estates of Medoc are located along the Route des Chateaux du Medoc that stretched between Margaux and Pailiac. The “Right Bank “ area, including Saint-Émilion and Pomerol, produces Merlot-based blends, with a blend of Cabernet-Sauvignon and Cabernet Franc in lesser quantities. White Bordeaux is predominantly made from Semillion, Sauvignon Blanc, and Muscadelle grapes, and producers use other varieties in lesser quantities. The sweet Saunternes, however, are made solely from these varietals.

### **When to Go**

For tasting, the best time to visit is in the springtime or early summer and again in September to early October, after which time many wineries close to visitors during the harvest. For the best coordination of tastings you would be wise to work with a travel expert with connections to local guides. A river cruise in the

region is also great ways to visit. June is filled with festivals, fairs, flea markets, and other events. The biggest wine celebration in Bordeaux is the Fête du Vin extravaganza, held in the city's largest palace.

### Where to Taste

On the left bank, **Château Mouton-Rothschild** is both one of the greatest names and one of the most accessible, with daily visits for individuals available by appointment. **Château Lynch-Bages** is also extremely welcoming, and they offer more in-depth tastings by prior arrangement such as a hands-on blending class. The smaller domain of **Château Gruaud-Larose** has excellent wines, and their tour takes you up into the château's tower for a unique perspective on the vineyards beside the estuary.

On the right bank, domains are smaller and visits are harder to arrange. Ask your Travel Advisor to assist you. **Troplong-Mondot**, near Saint-Émilion, is a beautiful new high-tech facility with an excellent tour in English. Their restaurant, Les Belles Perdrix, is one of the best local tables, offering an elegant dining setting with an al fresco patio for the warm months.

### Where to Dine

Left bank: The restaurant **Le Lion d'Or**, in Arcins, offers traditional dishes in a cozy, charming space—local winemakers each have their own wooden cubby for storing their bottles for when they dine there! The best, of course, is the restaurant at **Château Cordeillan-Bages**, the only two-Michelin-star-rated restaurant in the region.

Right bank: In addition to Les Belles Perdrix, **L'Envers du Décor** is a perennial favorite, with a great selection of wines by the glass, while **Le Tertre** has creative fare in a charming setting—especially the “table de la cave,” where up to four people can dine amid many fine bottles.

Florent Maillet, French Travel Expert, recommends: “In Saint-Émilion you can enjoy a wonderful lunch at **Logis de la Cadène**. Since 1848, the three dining rooms and a shady terrace have been a favorite of locals as well as world

travelers. I especially love the location of **le Logis**—in a tiny square in this UNESCO World Heritage Site town—the perfect place to spend a couple of hours eating classic cuisine with an incredibly innovative touch. Of course the wine list (which includes hundreds of wines!) is exceptional. Many expect the restaurant to be awarded a Michelin star soon, so I recommend seeking it out before it becomes overrun and too expensive. A few steps away, at #1 rue du Clocher, the boutique **Vignobles et Chateaux** has an incredible collection of fine wines and friendly service.”

### Where to Stay

I highly recommend the centrally located **Grand Hôtel de Bordeaux & Spa**. Affiliated with Leading Hotels of the World, the unique and cozy décor is inspired by 18<sup>th</sup>-century designs by Jacques Garcia. At its restaurant, Brasserie Le Bordeaux, Stephane Carrade invites you to discover tasty and inventive cuisine. Inspired by the ancient Roman baths, the 1000-square-meter spa is situated on the top floors of the hotel and offers panoramic views and a beach with views overlooking the Bordeaux Opera House. For wine lovers the concierge can help select wines to enjoy in private tastings, and your Travel Advisor can gain for you access to exclusive Grand Cru wineries.

*2015 All Virtuoso Guests Receive: Upgrade on arrival, subject to availability, daily buffet breakfast for up to two in room guests, an 85 Euro spa credit to be used during stay (not combinable and no cash value), and early check-in/late check-out subject to availability.*

Or try the new Joel Robuchon property **La Grande Maison à Bordeaux**. Other options include:

Left Bank: **Château Cordeillan-Bages**

Saint-Émilion: the **Hostellerie de Plaisance** is right in town; it's full of character and has an excellent restaurant to boot.

But why not make a whole vacation of your trip? Another spa-centered option, this one in the countryside, is **Les Sources de Caudalie**. This resort is nestled in the Grand Cru vineyards of Chateau Smith Haut Lafitte. The spa draws its inspiration from the thermal springs in the area and from Vinotherapies. Rooms

at the resort all have private balconies or terraces overlooking the vineyards. You can practice your golf swing on the property's three-hole course and have a complete round at one of the Aquitaine region's courses. The resort also has a heated pool and Jacuzzi fed by a thermal spring, a gym, and a tennis court. You may choose to hop on one of the resort's bikes to visit nearby wineries, jog on the trail through the private woods, or rent a boat to explore the Arcachon Bay. Other activities included cooking classes with a two-Michelin-star chef, wine tasting classes with the head sommelier, and wine tours.

Your dining choices at the resort include the Michelin-star-rated **La Grand Grand'Vigne**.

Or you can choose the more relaxed **La Table de Lavoir** that has a country-inn feel in a converted 19<sup>th</sup>-century wash house. Order your seasonal fare that includes roasted meats and vegetables from wash-board menus while seated at tables with mismatched antique cutlery.

The property also features a **wine cellar** with tasty fare, where the sommelier oversees 16,000 bottles from the best wine regions of the world. MY TIP: Here you can order from the best Bordeaux wines from the Graves region by the glass! Next door is the French Paradox Bar (a nod to the medical study into the French diet which has a high saturated fat content, but the people have a low incidence of heart disease) for sampling old armagnacs, cognacs, and whiskies. Lastly, the resort features a **Tour de la Degustation** ("Tasting Tower") that overlooks the vineyards.

*For 2015 All Virtuoso Guests Receive: Upgrade on arrival, subject to availability (valid through Junior Suite), daily full breakfast for up to two in room guests, guest's choice of wine tasting class for two organized independently in the Tower of Degustation (or while having dinner in the restaurant) OR a VIP visit for two to Smith Haut Lafitte Castle, its winery, a wine tasting of two Great Growths, and a visit to the owners' cellar called Heaven (either option lasts 1 hr), and early check-in/late check-out subject to availability.*

### **In-the-Know Tips from the Locals**

Marya Dumont, local guide: "To taste the terroir in another way, seek out a steak cooked over sarments de vignes (vine cuttings). It's the perfect match to these big bold reds!"

### **What to Do**

**Cave Paintings, Super Shopping, and More:** Hop on the ferry across the Gironde estuary between the left and right banks to Blaye, whose Vauban-designed fort makes for a lovely stroll on a sunny day. There is an interesting prehistoric cave between Blaye and Saint-Émilion, called the Grotte de Pair Non Pair. Bordeaux has superb shopping, with boutiques offering everything from hand-dyed yarns to specialty teas, books, and antiques. Or drive out to Arcachon for fresh seafood and surfing! Elsewhere in Aquitaine you may visit castles, villages, and churches that have changed little since the Middle Ages. In Western Aquitaine, beaches beckon you to stretch out and enjoy the warm Basque sunshine.

## Provence



Dreamlike Provence is that beautiful region of yellow-gold sunshine, purple lavender and yellow sunflower fields, silver-sage olive groves, and a wild countryside filled with Mediterranean vegetation. The Provençal landscape stretches from the Mediterranean to the snow-capped Alps. Cultural pursuits here include exploring Roman ruins, medieval villages, ducal palaces, farmland, and ritzy seaside indulgences. Artists, reclusive spirits, and the glitterati have all made their homes here.

A particularly varied landscape dominated by a warm and dry sunny climate gives Provence its unique wines. The area is so accessible by sea that the first vineyards were planted 26 centuries ago by the Greeks when they founded Marseilles. The wines produced at that time were light in color, resembling Rosés. Later,

Phoenicians colonized the area, followed by the Romans in the second century BC. They developed the culture of the vine and organized *Provincia Romana*.

The “Côtes de Provence” wines obtained Appellation d’Origine Contrôlée (DOC) status in 1977. They have the innate sophistication of all the best wines: they are subtle enough to accompany the most delicate dishes such as truffles or lobster, yet they are also robust enough to underline the wide range of the Provençal cuisine flavors.

Lately interesting red wine production has cropped up in the area as well.

### **Major Wines of the Region**

Many white and red varieties exist here that come from elsewhere in France and the Mediterranean. The difference this region offers is the incredibly varied landscape and soil types that give each varietal its own unique identity.

In Provence there are three major appellations that represent 96% of the volume of registered DOC of Provence:

- Côtes de Provence, whose local denominations include Côtes de Provence Sainte-Victoire and Côtes de Provence Fréjus, Côtes de Provence La Londe and Côtes de Provence Pierrefeu, and Coteaux d'Aix-en-Provence and Coteaux Varois en Provence.
- Cassis is an AOC area near the coast where white wines are made from Marsanne and Clairette.
- Bandol produces red wines made from Mourvedre grapes, which take advantage of the dry, hot climate conditions and sandy limestone soil. These wines are rich and intense after being aged in the barrel for 18 months.

### **When To Go**

May through August is the best time to enjoy the sunshine, fields of lavender and sunflowers (in bloom and at their best in July), and even red poppies, which bloom in May and June. July and August are filled with festivals and fairs.

September to October is a great time to visit for still-warm weather and less crowds—but you'll have missed the lavender.

### **Where to Taste**

**Maison des Vins de Côtes de Provence:** With over 800 bottles on display, this “House of Wines” is specially designed to help visitors discover the different terroirs and the wines that they produce. There are free tastings from a weekly menu of 16 wines, oenology classes, and a wine bar that sells the bottles at winery prices.

Find out more about wines at the **Musee des Vins** in Chateauneuf-du-Pape.

With arranged visits, here are some of the best places to sample renowned rosé wines of the region, recommended by Alexandre Pauget, a top sommelier in Provence:

**Château d'Esclans** sits on a hill near the Gorges de Pennafort, and their “Whispering Angel” is the star. Other places to try include **Château Minuty**, **Jas d'Esclan**, and **Château Saint Julien d'Aille**.

For the Bandol red wines try **Chateau de Pibaron** and **Domaine e l'Estagnol**.

In Chateauneuf-du-Pape **Chateau de Beaucastel** is one of the top estates. Near Aix-en-Provence **Chateau de Simone** surrounds an 18<sup>th</sup>-century palace (which unfortunately does not offer tours of the interior). Award-winning Cotes du Luberon wines can be found at **Chateau la Canorgue**.

In addition to these, there are numerous small wineries to visit, each offering unique, off-the-beaten-path experiences—one winery is only accessible by four-wheel jeep thanks to its cliff-side location! Check with your Travel Advisor who has contacts in the region to arrange your tours.



## Where to Dine

There are almost too many amazing restaurants to name, spread all over the region. Sommelier friends recommend:

- **Le Logis du Guetteur.** Place du Château, 83460 Les Arcs
- **La Vigne à Table.** Route Nationale 7, 83460 Les Arcs
- **Le Relais des Moines.** Route Saint Roseline D91, 83460 Les Arcs
- **Bruno.** 2350 Route des Arcs, 83510 Lorgues
- **Le Chrissandier.** 18 Cours de la République 83510 Lorgues
- **La Farandole & La Bouscarelle.** Route de Salerne (D10)

And I can personally recommend, for a terrific experience in the uber-charming cliffside Mediterranean town of Eze, the legendary two-Michelin-star-rated **La Chevre D'Or**.

## Where to Stay

In Provence, you have a huge range of choice accommodations! Your Travel Advisor can arrange for you to rent a reputable villa in the countryside or a stay at one of the numerous resorts and exceptional hotels in the area.

If you want a total vacation in the area to combine with your wine exploration, and a place to bring the whole family, try **Terre Blanche Hotel Spa Golf Resort**. This golf, spa, and family destination is perfectly situated in the wild and authentic countryside of Provence, while still remaining near the French Riviera. It is modeled after a Provencal village with cottage-esque accommodations, and the property abounds with forests and gardens. The resort has won yearly awards for “best spa and golf experience” in France and offers an outstanding Kids’ Club and pools, outdoor and nature activities designed for family time, and plenty of adult pleasures. Adults will love the relaxing spa with an indoor pool and large fitness room, as well as two 18-hole golf courses with exclusive, innovative learning facilities to improve your game, tennis courts, and a huge infinity pool. There are

four world-class restaurants under the supervision of Michelin-Star awardee Executive Chef Philippe Jourdin. Can you say “oh la la”?

*Exclusive Virtuoso benefits include: Upgrade on arrival, subject to availability, daily full breakfast for up to two in room guests, a bottle of red wine from Provence and assortment of regional fresh olives and variety of nuts, early check-in/late check-out subject to availability.*

### **In-the-Know Tips from the Locals**

Sommelier Alexandre Pauget: “To find biodynamic or organic wines from small growers, check out the **Cave Legrand Gourmet** in Antibes Juan les Pins.”

### **What to Do**

Provence is a large and varied region to explore, and it would take a stay of several weeks to see everything. However, your Travel Advisor could help hone a shorter visit to fit your interests.

**Town and City Touring:** There are so many beautiful towns to explore! Avignon, Arles, Aix-en-Provence, Nice ... and the list goes on.

**Shopping:** Provence is home to some renowned perfumeries. Take home your own scented memory in a bottle with a visit to one of these fine perfumeries:

- In Grasse the **Fragonnard** perfumery is located in the town center. This historical factory is one of the oldest in Grasse, and its name is a tribute to the famous painter Jean-Honoré Fragonard.
- Founded in 1849, **Molinard** offers a wide range of perfumes from Grasse. Combining modernity and tradition, Molinard offers unique scents and essential oils. Various activities are available, like sampling scents at the Fragrance Bar or touring the perfume factory.

In Biot you'll find a stunning **glassmaking** factory where each glass is a state-of-the-art creation designed for household use. Visit the Eco museum and admire masters of glassmaking at work.

For **antiques** shopping, the destination is L'Isle-sur-la-Sorgue near Avignon. Many shops are housed in old olive mills and factory buildings, and on Saturdays you can enjoy browsing through the flea market along the river's edge.

**Foodie Paradise:** Visit a market or take a food tour. The towns and cities of Provence host markets bursting with color and flavor, and the region abounds with fresh produce, tasty local recipes, and ingenious chefs.

**Crazy for Culture:** Get some culture at the art galleries that dot the region, many of which house incredible works from greats such as Chagall, Cezanne, and Van Gogh. The region continues to attract artists and artisans. Visit villages such as Gordes, a bustling town perched high on rocky crags that once were medieval defense positions for the peasantry. Now the town plays host to galleries, shops, hotels, and bars on winding stone streets that pass under arcade passageways.

**Immerse in History:** Avignon boasts well-preserved art and architecture, including the Papal Palace, home to several displaced popes in the 14<sup>th</sup> century—it's the largest Gothic palace in the world! Take a picnic sourced at a market and a bottle of wine to enjoy on the beautiful grounds. Chateauneuf-du-Pape is a medieval village that hosts the summer home of the Avignon popes and is surrounded by vineyards of the same name.

Provence has the greatest abundance of Roman structures outside of Rome. In the area you'll find Roman arenas, amphitheaters, aqueducts, triumphal arches, baths, villas temples, and entire lost towns.

**Go to the Sea:** The Cote d'Azur and the French Riviera beckon you to sample the delights of the deep blue Mediterranean. Drive along the coast for stunning views of the sea and craggy hills; the Corniche-des-Maures is the most scenic stretch that goes up through the woodland highlands and down again. Or head uphill to Eze, a charming village where you can walk the stone streets under canopies of bright pink bougainvillea, have lunch with a vista of the sparkling sea below, stroll through the art galleries, and shop in local perfumeries. Cannes is perfect for shopping or a walk on the mythical Croisette. Saint Tropez was a former fishermen village and now welcomes the jet-set from all over the world—my

favorite summer sandals have the iconic French seaside look and are made here at K. Jacques and Rondini. Marseilles has overcome much of its rough-and-tumble grittiness and is now a beautiful seaside port city—it's the perfect spot for relaxing by the sea and enjoying the area's unparalleled seafood. Want to get away from it all? Go to the island of Porquerolles to hike through creeks, woodlands, and some pretty beaches. The best part? No cars are allowed on the island!

**Enjoy Nature and the Outdoors:** The outdoors adventures in Provence are practically endless: visit the Carmargue salt marshes habitat of wild horses and flamingos, sail to a national park located on a coastal island, hike or drive in the Gorges du Verdon, and road bike or mountain bike all throughout the region. For water lovers, a trip to St. Cassion Lake offers up aquatic activities like paddle boating or kayaking. And finally, animal lovers will adore the Arc National Mercantour. Close to the Italian border, this area encompasses a wildlife habitat filled with ibex, chamois, birds of prey, hoopoes, ptarmigan, and many more species.

**SPAIN****Rioja**

Spain's greatest wine region, Rioja, boasts centuries of winemaking history and offers the traveler Iberian history, stunning scenery, proprietary cuisine, brilliant wines, and a unique meshing of old and new. Drive through this area, just north of Madrid, and you'll encounter a deep blue open sky along gently curving well-kept roads, set to a backdrop of verdant vineyards and golden fields. The wine culture here dates back to Roman times, and your route will be dotted with old stone villages, monasteries, and churches.

But despite Rioja's sleepy countryside appearances, innovation seems to have always been a part of the culture here. This wine region gained prominence in the 19<sup>th</sup> century when the French were losing their vines to phylloxera, and Bordeaux producers began looking elsewhere for their wine fix. Aristocrats and vineyard

owners worked together to create Rioja—talk about necessity being the mother of invention!

Not only rooted in the past, the region is also known for stunning contemporary architecture. Barrio de la Estacion in Haro was the epicenter of the creation of Rioja. And though Barrio de la Estacion was founded way back in 1877, above the old cellars you can spy a modern, super sleek tasting pavilion designed by award-winning architect Zaha Hadid. The cellar of another historic estate was designed in 1890 by the cutting-edge architect of the time, Gustav Eiffel (perhaps you've heard of his work in France?). Avant garde architects still contribute today to this region's forward-thinking aesthetic: Frank Gehry designed the dramatic Marques de Riscal hotel for the Marques de Riscal estate in the medieval village of Elciego. A curvaceous, flowing roof of titanium and asymmetrical walls provides contrast with the older wine cellar, designed in 1858 by Ricardo Bellsola. Rioja, it seems, is always willing to blend the ideas of artistic greats—with often stunning results.

Naturally, the food here, fresh and inventive, is equally rooted in the land. Although the Gehry-designed hotel has a Michelin-starred restaurant, the area is best known for unpretentious *casas de comidas* (eating houses) where local, hearty fare is prepared. The area is influenced by its historical mix of Roman, Moorish, and Christian cultures, as well as a bit of German and French influences thanks to pilgrims that passed through from Northern Europe. All culinary traditions are blended here. And now, young chefs are starting to impart their takes on the cuisine; Rioja will not remain long hidden as a sleepy drive from Madrid into the Basque region.

### **Major Wines of the Region**

The Tempranillo grape is king here. It is indigenous to the area and is often blended with Garnacha to add fruitiness, alcohol content, and color. Other reds planted in Rioja include Mazuelo, Graciano, and Maura Tinta, all of which help to stabilize and support the Tempranillo.

The whites of the region—less appreciated in the U.S.—are Viura, Malvasia, Garnacha Blanca, and Turrintes, with the newer Tempranillo Blanca arriving on

the scene as an up-and-comer. If you can, seek out a complex white Rioja that actually deepens in character as it warms in the glass—I was introduced to this beauty by Sommelier Laura Maniec, owner of [Cork Buzz](#) in New York City.

Rioja is divided into three subregions: Rioja Alavesa, Alta, and Baja. It's worth noting that although the wine is traditionally a blend from all three, there is some movement toward individual terroir distinctions.

### **When to Go**

Spring and fall are the most popular times for a visit, especially for the fall harvest festivals. Harvest time is usually in September. If you go in early October you can revel in the deep purple-blue color of the Tempranillo grape on the vine.

### **Where to Taste**

Hint: Have your Travel Advisor arrange private tastings of top wines at the wineries and private estates so you will be privy to tasting some of their upper value wines not available on public tastings.

**Cune (CVNE):** Founded in 1877, this winery is located in Haro's historic region. It only uses grapes that it produces in the Rioja Alta subregion. To try their best wines, make sure your private tour guide knows you want to taste the Reserva and Gran Reserva (not available on a regular tour and tasting). Surprise: there is a sparkling white that's also a must-try, called Monopole.

**Lopez de Heredia:** This bodega is the oldest in Haro and is one of the few remaining family-run bodegas with a Denominacion de Origen Calificada-DOC (Appellation region) designation in Rioja.

**Marques de Riscal:** An old bodega established in 1858, this estate was one of the first to collaborate in the French tradition. In fact, the original bodega structure resembles a Medac Chateaux in stone. And more recently, Paul Pontallier of Chateaux Margaux has been advising.

**Muga:** The winery, a blending—by marriage—of two family endeavors in the 1930s, is known for its traditional winemaking techniques and artisanal use of

new oak aging that elevates the wine taste and depth. It even has its own cooperage for barrel making from French and American oak.

Insider tip: There is a comparative tasting at the Hotel Marques de Riscal that's worth a try, since it compares their wines to others around the world. Generally, hotels and wine bars offer an excellent selection to compare and contrast different labels.

### **Where to Dine**

**Real Fortuna** in the center of Elciego is a 16<sup>th</sup>-century house that serves traditional regional fare. Think grilled steak and lamb and red beans in various dishes.

**El Portal** in Hotel Echaurren in the town of Ezcaray, a two-Michelin-starred restaurant, prepares experimental cuisine made from local ingredients. There is a tasting menu available. The hotel's other restaurant serves more traditional fare while a third family-owned restaurant, El Comilon, sits adjacent to the hotel. The hotel has been in the same family for five generations.

**Venta Moncalvilla** in Daroca de Rioja is known for its use of high-quality local ingredients in its new twist on traditional fare, served in an elegant rustic dining room. For the ultimate Date Night, the establishment also has a bar for before- and after-dinner drinks, as well as a small lounge to enjoy dessert.

**Asador Alameda** is located in the intriguing town of Fuenmayor, a village of palaces and mansions that is the birthplace of the wine regulating commission. The establishment has two dining rooms, one more upscale and the other more traditional.

For more casual dining, mingle with the locals on the bustling streets of Laurel, San Agustín, and San Juan in central Logroño to feast on regional tapas like *morros* (pork cheek) and *patatas bravas* (fried potatoes with spicy tomato sauce) accompanied by glasses of local wine.



## Where to Stay

There are good four-star properties, boutique hotels in small villages, three-star no-frill options, or even accommodations with pools if you are traveling with children. It is best to work with a Travel Advisor with knowledge of and experts in the area to find comfortable vetted options for you.

Stay and sleep in luxury at the five-star **Hotel Marques de Riscal**, designed by Frank O. Geary. Guests are guaranteed a reservation for the highly-in-demand Marqués de Riscal winery tour, which begins with a welcome bottle of wine in your room. The Caudalie Vinothérapie® Spa is the backbone of the leisure facilities at the resort, offering an indoor swimming pool, hammam, fitness center, and a wide variety of massages and treatments featuring "wine therapy."

Additional leisure activities near the resort include two golf courses within 35 km, tours of the surrounding nature and hills by foot, bike, or horse, and "Ruta de Vino," an established tour that explores the Rioja wine region by car. If visiting during the winter months, the Valdezarray ski resort is only 50 km away.

*All 2015 Virtuoso guests enjoy: Upgrade on arrival subject to availability, daily buffet breakfast for up to two people in a room, early check-in/check-out subject to availability, and a \$100 spa credit (not combinable and with no cash value).*

## In-the-Know Tips from the Locals

Marcy Forman, Spain travel expert: "Don't miss the Dinastia Vivanco Wine Culture Museum, even if their wine is nothing special. We also enjoy visiting what we have dubbed the 'anti-winery'—El Fabulista in the pretty village of Laguardia. El Fabulista has a fascinating history about the wine grown in this region for centuries, as well as all of the secret tunnels and underground wineries under the village ... visit to learn about the history and taste the way they used to make wine, using stems and all! Buy a mohair scarf in Ezcaray from the same small producer that makes these for Loewe. Don't miss the Church of Santa Maria in Laguardia, with its incredible portico and of course the views overlooking the countryside of vineyards."

## What to Do

**Trip to Haro:** Visit Haro on the Ebro River. The town dates to back to the 10<sup>th</sup> century and its old quarter is a maze of stone streets lined with red tile-roofed houses filigreed with wrought iron balconies from which flowers burst with color. Gothic churches stand watch over small plazas where locals meet and socialize. If you visit in June be prepared to witness—or participate in—the *batalla del vino* (the Wine Battle). Naturally for Spain, the celebration starts with marching bands, singing and dancing to honor a saint, and a Mass. Afterwards the fun begins as white-clad revelers hurl wine on each other with buckets, water guns, and wineskins.

**Festival Fever:** Festivals abound throughout the region. Logroño hosts two yearly festivals, and you can harvest and stomp grapes in San Mateo.

**Religious Masterpieces:** In the town of Briones you'll find one of the area's loveliest churches with beautiful art and the tomb of Pedro de Hircio, who accompanied Hernan Cortes during the conquest of Mexico.

A visit to the monasteries of Yuso and Suso in San Millán de la Cogolla offers a compelling look into the time of the Moors.

**Eat, Drink, and Be Merry:** Many towns are perfect for roaming around and enjoying *pinchos* (tapas). Given the area's great food traditions, your palate will thank you.

**Pretty Pilgrimage:** You can visit a portion of the Camino de Santiago trail—the pilgrimage route to Santiago de Compostela—in Logroño, which was an official stop more than a thousand years ago. Follow the clam-shaped signs that dot a cobbled street in the historic quarter to stay on the trail.

**Oh, the Art; Oh, the Food!:** From this area it's an easy day trip to Bilbao, home of the Guggenheim Museum. Or travel a bit farther to San Sebastian, renowned for its tapas culture (and some of the best food in Spain), plus you'll be treated to breathtaking vistas of rocky cliffs overlooking sandy Atlantic beaches.

## California



### Napa Valley

Napa, of course, is a renowned wine destination, but also come for the fun, beauty, food culture, the Great Outdoors, and shopping.

### Major Wines of the Region

While you'll find lots of great varietals here, Napa Valley is most known for Cabernet Sauvignon, Zinfandel, and Chardonnay.

### When to Go

Carl Johnson, a Napa wine guide, says: "Summertime is always the most popular time to visit with more guaranteed perfect weather. It's therefore a little more challenging to get reservations at hotels and wineries, so book early! There's lots of green vineyards with grapes still on the vines that you can sample. Other times of the year are great to go for different reasons. During winter you'll get the best

package deals on lodging, and the Flavor Napa Valley festival, now in its fifth year, is held Nov 19th-23rd. This is an amazing five-day festival presented by food and wine experts featuring tastings, cooking demos, and food pairings. It is held at multiple venues including the Culinary Institute of America, City Winery, and Silverado Resort.”

Peter Viviani, a Napa destination specialist, says: “High season is July though October as there is always something going on and it's harvest season. Although my favorite time to visit is February through May, as everything is beautiful and green and there's less traffic—plus, the weather has been beautiful this time of the year.”

### **Where to Taste**

Try iconic **Robert Mondavi** and **Beringer** wineries where you can try estate wines and reserves that will be very different from the wines you're most familiar with that come from these labels. There are small family-owned vineyards as well, like **David Fulton** or **Crane Family Vineyards**. Peter and Carl have some winery tour tips as well:

Carl Johnson: “Some of my favorites for mountain views are **Kuleto Estate** and **Cade Winery** up on Howell Mountain on the east side of the valley, or try **Stony Hill Vineyard** and **Schweiger Vineyards** on the west side's Spring Mountain.”

Peter Viviani: “Some of the top spots in Napa are **Vineyard 29**, **Gandona**, **Caldwell**, **Robert Biale**, and **Palmaz**.”

### **Where to Dine**

Napa is steeped in such an incredible, storied foodie culture that I went right back to the experts to ask for their personal favorites:

Carl Johnson: “I've always loved **Mustard's Grill** where, since 1985, I have enjoyed their salmon, duck, rabbit, and even venison. At **Rutherford Grill** my go-to is the ahi-tuna salad and the French dip. If you're in Calistoga the premier choice is **Solbar**. In Rutherford, you might like **Auberge Bistro** for four-star dining and a view of the valley. In Yountville? If you can't get into **French Laundry** then try Tom

Keller's **Bouchon** or **Ad Hoc** or **Michael Chiorello's Bottega** for Italian. In Napa try **Celadon** for classic California cuisine, **Angele** for French, or **The Thomas**. In short, Napa Valley is the home of some of the finest dining in America.”

Peter Viviani: “In Napa, my favorite spots are **Morimoto, La Toque, Redd, Meadowood, and Cook.**”

## Where to Stay

There are lots of hotels, resorts, B&Bs and inns in the area. Work with your Travel Advisor to find the accommodations that best suit you, your travel style, and what you want to get out of the trip for yourself and others with whom you are traveling. Some suggestions:

**Meadowood**, a cottage accommodations estate owned by vintners, showcases Napa wines and has a three-Michelin-star-rated restaurant, among other choices. A Resident Sommelier can help with excursions advice and food and wine pairings. The resort features a golf course, tennis courts, a heated lap pool, and a family pool. There is plenty of room on its 250 acres for biking, running, and hiking.

*2015 Virtuoso amenities include: Upgrade on arrival, subject to availability, a \$50.00 credit towards daily breakfast in The Grill or via room service for up to 2 in-room guests, \$100 Spa Services credit, to be utilized during stay, a box of 9 handmade chocolate truffles made by a chocolatier in Yountville utilizing ingredients from Meadowood, early check-in/late check-out, subject to availability.*

**Carneros Inn**, a village-style relaxing retreat complete with four restaurants, gym pools and spa.

*Virtuoso amenities for 2015: Upgrade on arrival, subject to availability, Continental breakfast daily for up to two in room guests, early check-in/late check-out, subject to availability, and a \$100 Spa Services credit (tip: Have your Travel Advisor make your reservations in advance of your arrival).*

**Calistoga Ranch**, a 157-acre luxury lodge resort that’s 6.3 miles from the Old Faithful Geyser of California and 14 miles from the Petrified Forest and Robert Louis Stevenson State Park, is also a wonderful stay.

*Virtuoso amenities for 2015: Upgrade on arrival, subject to availability, daily full breakfast, for up to two in room guests, an Estate Tasting and complimentary take home gift, early check-in/late check-out, subject to availability.*

### **In the Know Tips from the Locals**

Carl Johnson: “Check out Mango on Main in Downtown Napa for some great Thai food presented by a very conscientious owner and family. Locals like to hike up to Westwood Hills Park for exercise and to get a great 360-degree view of Southern Napa Valley, Sonoma, and up valley to Rutherford. Locals know where to shop: The local Napa markets are Browns Valley and Valergas. Check their wine wall; you'll see plenty of the local wineries represented. If you're looking for unusual varietals, two little planted varieties, the Carmenere (most famous in Chile) and Roussanne (originating in the Rhone region of France), can be had at Caldwell and Truchard, respectively. At Caldwell, you can actually find Carmenere as a bottle, not just a blend.”

Peter Viviani: “If you're going out for a day of wine tasting, definitely hire a local driver from a small company. They will direct you to the best fit for your day. Three stops in one day is the magic number, ideally with a lunch included on property at a winery that's the second stop of the day.”

### **What to Do**

**Delightful Activities Abound:** Visit micro-breweries, tour an olive mill for an olive oil tasting, go hot air ballooning, kayak down the Napa River, or hike at Bothe Park in Calistoga on over 10 miles of hiking trails that twist through redwoods, maples, oaks, and madrones. Don't forget to bring a picnic lunch and a bottle of your newly-found favorite wine to enjoy at the park. On hot summer days, bring a swimsuit and enjoy a dip in the park's spring-fed swimming pool.

## Sonoma Valley



Sonoma Valley is becoming a new “hot” destination in the world of wine and beyond. Bucolic and sleepy, the town piqued famed author Jack London’s interest when he visited in 1905. London declared: "All I wanted was a quiet place in the country to write and loaf in." Further afield, explore northern Sonoma County and the Healdsburg for great locally produced products, and save time for a pastoral drive through Russian Valley.

Augment your tours of great wineries with stops at cheese and olive oil factories, micro-breweries, and lots of other destinations that’ll entertain the whole family.

### **Major Wines**

In Sonoma the major wines are Pinot Noir and Chardonnay.

## When to Go

Napa Valley's "When to Go" recommendations apply to Sonoma Valley as well.

## Where to Taste

In Sonoma the best spots for incredible wine are **Donum, Kamen, Repris, Flanagan, B Wise,** and **Silver Cloud.**

## Where to Dine

**Harvest Moon Café** is located right in the downtown area of Sonoma. Ran by a husband-and-wife team, the café is known for its fresh food and laid-back atmosphere.

**Maya** is a good choice for authentic dishes that hail from the region of Yucatan in Mexico.

**El Dorado Kitchen** is a good spot for Cal-Mex food and has great patio dining. It is located in a downtown hotel by the same name.

**Girl & the Fig** serves country food with a French twist. It is a very popular restaurant that's well worth a visit.

## Where to Stay

The small inns and B&Bs that dot the valley are charming choices, while many small groups choose to rent houses. Ask your Travel Advisor for options that suit you best and for properties where you are afforded special pricing and value-added amenities.

**Fairmont Sonoma Mission Inn** is a best bet. An elegant Grand Dame, it is a blessed with a spa that harnesses the healing powers of natural geo-thermal mineral springs, a championship golf course, and the Michelin-starred Santé restaurant.

*Virtuoso amenities for 2015: Upgrade on arrival, subject to availability, daily full breakfast for up to two in room guests, early check-in/late check-out, subject to availability, and a \$100 Food and Beverage credit (no cash value if unredeemed).*



## What to Do

**Gastronomic Delights:** Sonoma offers some great “Farm to Table” experiences, since wine is not the only thing that grows well around here. There are local organic farms, cheese factories, and more to visit; you can explore on your own or hire a guide for the day to take you around.

**Drives with a View:** For unspoiled views that rival those at Big Sur, drive along the twisting path of Highway 1. More than 30 miles of rugged coastline are open to the public, all part of the Sonoma Coast State Beach, and except for the village of Bodega Bay and a few vacation homes, the shore is untouched.

**Bodega Bay Fun:** Go whale watching or hiking at Bodega Bay, which features beaches (though not swimmer-friendly waters), cliffside walks, and seafood festivals.

**State Parks Worth a Stop:** Walk among redwoods at Armstrong Redwoods State Reserve, or visit Jack London’s ranch, now the 800-acre Jack London State Historic Park. Hike along the paths that are thick with oaks and Douglas firs, wildflowers and wildlife, and visit the author's grave and the ruins of Wolf House.

## ITALY

What can one say about wine travel in Italy? Touring wineries all throughout Italy is such a wonderful and picturesque experience—which makes it very difficult to only pick two regions to showcase! Nonetheless, I have reined in my enthusiasm to present two gems, which do showcase the best wines Italy has to offer—Barolo and Brunello.

### The Val d'Orcia



In a beautifully landscaped area based on renaissance farming principles, this UNESCO World Heritage Site is surprisingly under-touristed (shhh, don't tell everybody). With a quintessentially Italian rolling landscape broken up by spiky cypress trees and stone farmhouses, this is the Italy of posters and dreams. You can explore its hill towns of Montapulciano, Pienza, San Quirico, and Montalcino, wander along portions of the Via Francigena pilgrim route that ran from France to Rome, and visit ancient monasteries where the hours are still chanted by monks.

## Major Wines of the Region

**Brunello di Montalcino** is found in the area surrounding the lovely medieval hill town of Montalcino. It was awarded Denominazione di Origine Controllata e Garantita status in 1980 and is produced from 100% Sangiovese grapes. The location of the vines plays a role in the flavor of the wine; those planted on the cooler slopes that receive less sunlight ripen slower and produce more aromatic wines. Those grown on the southern and western slopes are exposed to more sunlight and maritime winds from the Mediterranean, so these wines are bolder and more complex. Traditionally the wine is aged for three years in *botte*, large older oak casks that impart little oak flavor, although storage for a short term in a small French oak barrel can add to the flavor. This area also produces the Rosso di Montalcino, which is aged for less time in the barrel, and other area-specific DOCs as well as the “super Tuscan” IGTs, which showcase a vintner’s artistry through blending together disparate grapes such as Cabernet Sauvignon or Merlot.

**Nobile di Montepulciano** is the name of the refined wine from the region that surrounds its eponymous hill town. It is made primarily from the Sangiovese grape and is blended with small amounts of Canaiolo Nero and even smaller amounts of local varieties such as Mammolo. It is aged for at least two years, mostly in the barrel, or three years for a riserva. There is a Rosso di Montepulciano from this area as well, which is aged one year in the barrel.

## When to Go

This beautiful valley made up of gently rolling hills and enchanting small villages offers its best in autumn, not only because of the amazing colors of the vineyards, but also because a variety of harvest festivals take place. Spring can afford the traveler warm sunshine and green fields in this agriculturally-rich area. The area’s farms are especially attractive because land use here is based upon Renaissance principles of harmony and symmetry. The fields, which undulate with the land’s rolling features, mimic an almost quilt-like pattern. The summer turns the fields to yellow and gold, providing a beautiful contrast to the verdant vineyards with rose bushes planted at the end of the rows.

## Where to Taste

Located along relatively unmarked dirt roads and often requiring advanced scheduling, touring in this area of Italy is best arranged with a guide/driver.

**Brunello:** Tastings of the pride of the region—the Brunello wine—can be done in shops in Montalcino and at the museum in the town’s tower. This pedestrian-only town sits high on a hill with commanding views over the valley—and what is better than collecting your glass at a shop’s counter and pouring your comparative tasting from a tap? ! I dream of installing something like this is my home one day.

The area has many producers, from small producers using the biodynamic methods to larger world-famous estates. Some of the more memorable wineries are hidden away and can only be accessed by a knowledgeable guide. Most are off unmarked dirt roads.

**Biondi Santi** is the historic original production site of Brunello and is home to one of the original founders of the foundation that designated the regulations of Brunello production to DOCG status.

**Siro Pacenti, Altesino, Fuligni, Sesta, Uccelliera, Poggio di Sopra, and Lisini** are nice choices to taste the area differences within the region. A good guide can take you off the beaten path even further to family operations and boutiques.

Nobile di Montepulciano:

Definitely a tourist favorite for those just visiting the hill town, **Contucci**, located in the corner of the main square, is a fun and entertaining stop—particularly if you can engage with the owner! The local wine consortium also operates a showroom and tasting center.

Many vineyards age their wines within the caverns carved into the tufa walls of this fortified hill town, so access to these areas is a fascinating descent into the town’s history and architecture. For an arresting look at an “underground city,” **Ercolani** has lengthy cellars that feature an Etruscan tomb and a collection of medieval weapons and household implements. In the valley below this hill town,

there are many *cantines* where you can try wines as well as the scrumptious local fare, including pecorino cheese, salamis, olive oil, and honey. Hours can be erratic, so definitely make sure you are booked ahead.

To try the quality wines of the region stop off at **Poliziano, Salcheto, Avignonesi, Boscarelli, Icario, or Redi.**

## Where to Stay

There are dozens of charming *agritourismos*—accommodations on working farms—in the area and small hotels as well; ask a travel expert to choose the best one for you.

**Castiglion del Bosco** in Montalcino is a beautiful Rosewood Hotels & Resorts estate village owned by Massimo and Chiara Ferragamo; it's also one of the largest Brunello wine producers. With eight centuries of history behind it, the property is surrounded by rolling wooded hills and vineyards and offers an unbeatable view of Montalcino sitting on its hilltop. Your stay in the renovated estate building is one of pure relaxation and refined elegance; it's a place where you can completely immerse yourself in the Tuscan lifestyle. The property features many activities for all interests, as well as a spa and a golf course.

*Along with special rates, in 2015 Virtuoso guests will enjoy an upgrade on arrival, subject to availability, Tuscan or American breakfast for up to two in room guests, early check-in/late check-out, subject to availability, and a \$100 resort (no cash value if unredeemed). Guest who choose to stay in a villa enjoy a ready-to-eat dinner on their arrival day.*

My tip: Visit **Bagno Vignoni** in the heart of this hilltop thermal resort town, where famous religious persons and members of the nobility came to take the waters for centuries. The spa hotel and natural springs in the area are worth a visit!

## Where to Dine

**Boccon Divino** in Montalcino is a well-known, family-run place that's frequented by tourists and locals alike; it is not unusual for a family ranging from *bambini* to *nonni* to show up at nine for dinner.

**Il Leccio:** You'll find this restaurant in Sant'Angelo in Colle, an enchanting ancient hill town off the tourist beaten path. At times the town is seemingly empty, but its inhabitants, a mixture of people who have lived there all their lives and newer

arrivals renovating interior spaces, do socialize in the evenings along narrow streets and in small piazzas.

**Latte di Luna** is the perfect place to stop for reasonably priced fare in a small cozy setting—although it is still popular enough to need reservations, even in off-season.

**La Grotta** in san Biagio serves up fine gourmet dining in 16<sup>th</sup>-century vaulted rooms next to the renaissance church San Biagia, down the hill from Montepulciano.

In San Quirico D'Orcia, head to the **Caffe-Enoteca Il Pozzo** and **Ristorante degli Archi** for locally-sourced food prepared in the traditions of the region. The owners also take in guests in their 300-year-old *agritourismo* in the valley and host a music festival each fall.

## What to Do

**Scrumptious Tastings and Tours:** Don't miss a visit to a Pecorino (sheep's milk) farm for a tasting, or if you are short on time, walk the main street of Pienza and have samples at the shops that line it. Pienza is a "new" city in the Val D'Orcia—it was commissioned in the Renaissance style by order of Pope Pius II. You might recognize it today as a filming location for *The English Patient*. An olive oil tour with a tasting from the many groves in the area is also in order, or you may stop in a roadside shop in the region for some local bottles.

**Get Outdoors:** Hot air ballooning over the area is becoming increasingly popular and is a scenic way of viewing the rustic landscape. Hiking and biking lets you enjoy the area to its fullest, and you may meet both farmers and hunters along your way.

**Hands-On Adventures:** Take a photography journey of this region. There is so much to capture, from beautiful rolling fields, driveways to dwellings lined with iconic trees, ancient stone streets in quiet villages, and views from fortified walls. Artists will enjoy taking painting classes while immersed in the nature, while budding chefs can learn the cooking techniques needed to create the hearty fare of the area in cooking classes with local chefs. Visit Bagno Vignoni or San Casciano

dei Bagni for thermal spa treatments—or find one of the many natural springs in the area for a dip.

**Historic Dwellings:** Visit palazzos in the area; La Foce has a beautiful formal garden and hosts a music festival each year. Visit abbeys and monasteries for their art, architecture, and monks' chants.

My Tip: There are so many hill towns to explore! For a more complete guide to one of my favorite areas, you can read the featured FREE guide on my website, “7 Places to Celebrate Life Moments”, at [www.enlightenedjourneystravel.com](http://www.enlightenedjourneystravel.com).

## Piedmont (or Piemonte)



This northern Italian area borders Switzerland and France—which makes the Piemonte truly a land at “the foot of the mountains,” as the Alps hug it on three sides. The “Slow Food” movement started in Bra, and its festival is held yearly in Turin. Moving down away from the Alps and towards the sea is the wine region of

Langhe; the main wine towns here are Alba and Asti. This hilly area is also famous for the white truffle of Alba and its cheeses and yummy risotto. The vineyards of the Piemonte are set among ancient hilltop villages and frame vistas of the Alps in the distance, and castles and towers dot the landscape as testament to its rich history of settlement and warfare. Now the area is peaceful and almost sleepy—except in the fall during the truffle season and festivals.

### Major Wines of the Region

The red wines: From the grape Nebbiolo comes two famous wines of the region, **Barolo**, “the king of wines,” and **Barbaresco**.

The only vineyards with Barolo DOG status are those on southern-facing hills in the southwest of the city of Alba. The wine is aged at least 18 months in the barrel and is released for sale after three or more years. The *Riserva* are aged for a minimum of five years, and the older a Barolo is, the better—so look for bottles over 10 years old if you want to taste the best. Of course, there are micro-regions in the Barolo area with lighter Barolos born from limestone-based soils and bolder varieties from the sandstone soil of Castiglione Falletto, Serralunga d’Alba, and Monforte d’Alba.

Barbaresco hails from vineyards northeast of Alba; the best-tasting Barbaresco wines also come from grapes grown on south-facing hills. The climate here produces grapes that ripen soon and have thinner skins than Barolo, so the end product has less tannin, color, and aroma compounds. They are lighter tasting and less tannic than Barolo.

Other Nebbiolo wines are produced in the region, which are lighter and more like Pinot Noir—and also cost much less!

**Barbera** is the most planted grape in Piemonte; barbera wines are dark in color and taste of black cherry, among other things. The robust wine pairs with almost anything. Two DOCG areas are Barbera d’Asti and Barbera del Monferrato Superiore, and a superior is regulated to include longer aging and a higher alcohol content.



**Dolcetto** is a red that, despite its name, is neither sweet nor “little”—in fact, the wine is a bold offering that’s not meant to age long.

**Malvasia** is a slightly sparkling red that is just a bit sweet and aromatic. It’s not a dessert wine, but it is wonderful as an aperitif.

The white wines:

**Moscato d’Asti** comes from the same region as Barolo. The Moscato Bianco produces Asti Spumante and Moscato d’Asti. Cortese produces the wine called **Gavi** from the town of the same name. These are dry whites that are citrusy and refreshing like Pinot Grigio or Chablis. Arneis produces **Roero** DOCG, a medium-bodied wine similar to Sauvignon Blanc.

## When to Go

Autumn is beautiful, although this is a heavily visited time due to the truffle hunts and festivals occurring throughout the season. Summer is a choice time to combine wine tasting with regional touring, including outdoor pursuits around Lake Maggiore and in the southern Alpine region.

## Where to Taste

Have your Travel Advisor put you in the hands of a local expert to provide guided tastings (and a driver!) in the region. Since this area is less touristy, you will need an English-speaking guide to pave your way.

Noted wineries of the region include:

- Elio Altare – La Morra
- Mauro Veglio – La Morra
- Massolino or Cappellano – Serralunga d’Alba
- Paolo Scavino – Castiglione Falletto
- Barale – Barolo
- Ceretto – Cantina Bricco Rocche in Castiglione Falletto
- Pelissero – Treiso
- Bruno Rocca - Barbaresco

## Where to Stay

This lesser-known (by Americans) corner of Italy has a variety of options for your stay, from five-star luxury accommodations to farm *agritourismos* to properties featuring great gastronomy. Ask your Travel Advisor for suggestions and special rates with your dreams and interests in mind.

## Where to Dine

Local native and guide **Sandro**, who works exclusively for a private travel company, suggests: **La Ciau del Tornavento** in Treiso, **Da Guido** in Santo Stefano Belbo, **Piazza Duomo** in Alba, **Locanda nel Borgo Antico** in Barolo, **Osteria La Cantinella** in Barolo, **Bovio** in La Morra, and **Da Felicin** in Monforte d'Alba.

## What to Do

**Eat Your Way Through Italy:** Apart from the many variations on the theme of wine tours with wine experts, it is possible to arrange truffle hunting experiences, truffle sensorial analysis lectures, cooking shows, and other hands-on gastronomic activities in this area. Try chocolate or hazelnut tastings, cheese tastings with the shepherds, and local market and garden food tours.

**Out and About:** Aside from all the local food offerings, you can immerse yourself in local culture through visits to the area's castles, bike tours, horseback riding excursions, and other pursuits both here and further north in the Alps.

**Immerse in Culture:** You can also link your trip to a music festival, a palio, or regional contest.

**Car Enthusiasts:** For the ultimate driving machine, your Travel Advisor can arrange in advance for a tour of the Ferrari factory.

## New Zealand

### Otago Valley



The Central Otago Valley features a stunning landscape of soaring, snow-tipped mountains, rivers flowing into ravines, and an all-around pristine environment. Queenstown on the South Island is a vibrant town bustling with bars, restaurants, and shops. Originally a mining town home to gold rushers, Queenstown has blossomed into the home of adventure sports and the ultimate base camp for visitors to relax in their incredible natural playground. From Queenstown, a drive around the Lake Wakatipu will take you to gold mining towns of yore and past stunning mountain peaks to quiet shore towns, which are the picture-perfect place to take a walk and have a picnic lunch.

## Major Wines of the Region

New Zealand wines are known for their intense, pure flavors due to the long growing period the grapes enjoy in the moderate maritime climate and long days of sunshine.

Pinot Noir is the top grape planted in the Central Otago Valley. Aromatic whites such as Pinot Gris, Riesling, and Gewurztraminer are prominent, followed by Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc.

The subregions of the valley include Wanaka, Gibbston, Bannockburn, Alexandra, Bendigo, and Cromwell/Lowburn/Pisa.

## When To Go

Although wine tastings are available in touristy areas throughout the year, harvest time for the vineyards typically starts in February, with some late-harvest grape varieties being picked as late as June in the Otago area.

Stop by the Queenstown Gardens in March to celebrate the annual Wine and Food Festival. A small entry fee to the day-long event includes three tasting tokens and a souvenir glass, and you may purchase additional wine by the glass or the bottle to take with you. As you wander the stalls, you get to meet the winemakers and learn more about the varietals of the region. Master classes are offered for more in-depth learning about pairing food and wine. Food stalls feature some of the top food purveyors in the area, and live music wafts through the festival stalls throughout the day.

Speaking of music, every summer Gibbston Valley hosts Queenstown's largest music event featuring an epic line-up of legendary rock bands at an outdoor concert venue located next to a winery. More than 15,000 participants come to enjoy sun and fun against the stunning natural backdrop.

## Where to Taste

**Gibbston Valley Winery** is a large establishment with caves, multiple restaurants, and walking trails that snake through the property. The winery boasts the largest

wine cave in New Zealand. It hosts the yearly Summer Concert Series featuring classic rock bands. You can also rents bikes to take advantage of lovely trails beside the vineyards.

**Amisfield Winery** hosted Prince William and Kate during their recent visit. In addition to wine tastings, a popular activity at the café is the “Trust the Chef” set menu where you share seasonal dishes at a communal table that are based on what is fresh that day.

**Mt. Difficulty Estate** winery has some of the oldest Pinto Noir vines in the region, having been planted in the 1990s. The Cellar Door also has a café, which has become a destination in itself.

### **Where to Eat**

Top choices include **Amisfield Restaurant**, **Botswana Butchery**, and **Rata Dining**.

### **Where to Stay**

I recommend staying at New Zealand’s Luxury Lodges for the best of local ambience and special accommodations.

**Matakauri Lodge**, an alpine lakeside retreat nestled in one of the world's most serenely beautiful landscapes, is spectacularly situated on Lake Wakatipu and is only seven minutes from Queenstown.

**Eichardt’s Private Hotel** is located in the heart of Queenstown’s café and restaurant precinct on a premium lakefront setting.

**Blanket Bay Lodge** is elegant yet rustic, surrounded by majestic alpine scenery and nestled amidst rugged snowcapped peaks of the Southern Alps on the shores of Lake Wakatipu.

**Minaret Station** serves as the perfect base for helicopter touring and other outdoorsy adventures.

*As a New Zealand Specialist and Virtuoso Travel Advisor, I work in special partnership with these and other accommodations and experts in the area. I am happy to provide value-added amenities and open private doors for my clients.*

## **In-the-Know Tips from the Locals**

Local Expert Petra Stringfellow suggests going behind the scenes to meet the wine makers and owners themselves while visiting their private cellars and tasting exclusive vintage wines. For a special memory of New Zealand, Petra says: “a Milford Sound Helicopter Excursion with Glacier Landing and a picnic on a peak with Champagne is a must!” She also suggests a visit to Amisfield for a long lunch.

## **What to Do**

**The Great Outdoors:** New Zealand, particularly the South Island, is a hub of outdoor and adventure activity. But start your visit on the North Island to explore the culture of the Maori, visit geothermal sites, and enjoy miles of beautiful coastline while exploring island sanctuaries. A stay in the Hawkes’ Bay wine area is highly recommended.

On the South Island, you can also visit refined Christchurch, where you can marvel at its gardens and parks.

Queenstown is an adventure capital, and you can partake in extreme adventure activities such as bungee jumping, skydiving, whitewater rafting, river surfing, canyon swinging, and rock climbing.

If you would like something a little less intense that still gets the adrenaline pumping, try a jet boat ride, a Four-Wheel-Drive trek, an Alpine hike, or river “sledging,” which involves riding down rapids in crafts that look like—yes—sleds.

Other memorable outdoor experiences include cruising or kayaking in the lake, the sounds, or the rivers, or a helicopter excursion with glacier landing. Try a round of golf at The Hills Private Golf Course or relive favorite Hollywood moments on the Lord of the Rings tour. Head to the peaceful quiet of the backcountry on a four-wheel-drive ride, ride the Skyline gondola to take in the scenery from above Queenstown, or simply bike or walk along the lake’s shores.

New Zealand is a perfect destination for the whole family, from grandparents to grandchildren; not only are the wineries and festivals family-friendly, but the activities are so varied that there is something that will thrill everyone.

## PORTUGAL



Is Portugal not yet on your radar as a travel destination? It should be—and it should be right now, before its rising popularity creates the kinds of crowds faced by travelers to other more well-known European countries. But boasting 3,000 hours of sunshine per year, Portugal is a favorite vacation spot for many Europeans, so they are aware of the draw of this tiny neighbor. In fact, Portugal's been racking up the recognitions; Portugal was named the best country to visit in 2014 by the Spanish edition of Conde Nast Traveler magazine, was featured in Virtuoso Life magazine as a hot destination to visit now, and selected as "Best Value Destination" in 2014 by Rough Guides. Why go? Maybe culture, history of the Old and New Worlds, food, wine, beaches, golf, the breathtaking natural landscape, and—most importantly—the friendliness of the people will be enough to convince you!



Portugal is a gem on the southwest Atlantic coast of Europe and also includes the archipelagos Madeira and the Azores. Make no mistake, Portugal is NOT an extension of Spain; it has its own deep heritage and unique cultural aesthetic. Traveling up the Algarve coast between Portugal's great cities of Lisbon and Porto, visiting the beach resort towns of Estoril and Cascais, viewing a fairytale castle in Sitra, going inland to monasteries, delving into the history of the great Portuguese explorers, witnessing an entire way of life in Fado ... the list of "must-dos" is actually enormous for such a small country. And Portugal has several well-developed wine routes to boot.

To the north is the DOC **Vino Verde** region where the light white wines are delightful served chilled as an aperitif with salads or snacks; the wines also pair perfectly with fish and seafood cooked without heavy sauces. The vineyards cover the region from the Duoro River to the Galicia border of Spain, and south to the UNESCO World Heritage city of Guimaraes. This city is a study in the development of architecture using traditional building materials and techniques of the 15<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

**Douro**, located in the northeast of the country, is mostly famous for Port Wine (also known as Vinho do Porto) whose grapes grow on vines along the city's riverbanks—but Douro has also been winning awards recently for table wines. Port is fortified and often served as a dessert wine. It is usually sweet, but also come in dry, semi-dry, and even white varieties.

Douro is the oldest Demarcated Wine Region in the world, recognized since 1756. Although fortified wines are made elsewhere in the world, only those from the Duoro can be called Port. The Duoro valley, a designated UNESCO World Heritage region, runs along a river gorge through a portion with mountains acting as weather barriers for the vines that grow here. Planted since the time of the Romans, this area is developing now into a major tourist stop with new restaurants opening frequently and many historic *quintas*, old farmsteads or wine-producing estates, being turned into wine resorts.

**Alentejo** in the south is sparsely populated and features huge vineyards that cover an entire third of this small country. The region produces great quality red wines that are rich and fruity; the wines are served in many Lisbon restaurants

and cafes. This area can be easily reached from Lisbon and the Algarve region, another small wine region where you can mix beach time and golf into your vacation.

### **Major Wines of the Regions**

NOTE for all Portuguese wines: most of the wines are blends of two to six different grape varieties.

**The North:** Most *Vino Verde* is made from a blend, though sometimes the wines are crafted from a single grape. Some typical grapes used are Loureiro, Arinto, Trajadura, Avesso, and Azal. The grape Alvarinho is also grown in the region, but the eponymous wine is not a *Vino Verde*. A *Vino Verde* can be still or slightly fizzy, and it's very refreshing on a hot summer day!

**Douro:** Tinta Roza and Tourigo Nacional are the grapes used to make Port Wine—the most famous of which are Sandeman and Ferreira—and table wines Quinta do Crasto.

**Alentejo:** This region is famous for blends, mostly reds. Although there are good white wines from this region as well, the red grape Aragonez (called “Tempranillo” in Spain) is the most widely planted, and it's often blended with the Alicante Bouschet grape. Alfrocheiro, Castelao, and Trincadeira also can also be used, as can Moreto, Tinta Caiada and Tinta Grossa in lesser amounts.

### **When To Go**

Portugal is almost always sunny, except for a rainier season from November to February. The summers are very popular with European travelers and temperatures are quite warm inland. In the spring the weather is lovely (some compare the weather in Portugal to that of California). During spring, wildflowers bloom in profusion throughout May, and in April the garden island of Madeira hosts a yearly Festival of Flowers, a week-long celebration of parades, flower carpets, and community events. Autumn provides another riot of colorful landscape—and the grape harvest, of course.

Porto Wine Festival, or the “Essencia Do Vinho,” held in February is Portugal's

largest and most important wine festival. If you go, perhaps your visit can be timed with the Carnavale season—Madeira has a particularly lovely tradition, and most cities in Portugal will host some kind of event.

### **Where to Taste**

It is best to make prior arrangements for tastings and winery tours, so work with your Travel Advisor and local expert for your arrangements. Each region has a well-marked wine route. In Duoro it is even possible to take short river cruises on authentic boats specific to the region, and the area is also toured now by larger river cruise lines.

The North:

The VINO Verde wine estate **Casa da Torre** has transformed its old winery into a modern stunner. Built of wood with a unique “timber screen” to filter light, it was designed by architects Castanheira & Bastai and has been cited on Architecture Daily’s website.

Duoro Valley:

If you want to learn about the history of Port wine, try Ports at **Taylor’s**, which is the largest shipper of Port. Private tours can be customized for those just being introduced to the wine as well as Port enthusiasts, and you can also participate in a blending class.

**Quinta do Crasto** sits in a commanding post on the river in a place once fortified by the Romans.

**Quinta Do Vallado** still belongs to the descendents of Dona Antonia Adelaide Ferreira, a 19<sup>th</sup>-century businesswoman, leader, and innovator in winemaking and the cultivation of port. While the winery uses modern machinery now and grapes are fermented in steel vats, the traditional method is preserved—a small portion of the grapes are still crushed by foot in granite tubs.

Other wineries rounding out a consortium of top quality producers include **Niepoort, Quinta Vale d. Maria, and Quinta vale Meao.**

To Taste Alentejo Wines:

Order a selection in **Lisbon** at any good restaurant.

If you aim to visit an estate, I recommend **Quinta do Casal Branco**, a privately owned estate an hour from Lisbon with some great wines that's steeped in tradition. Falcoaria is one of its well-known wines; it is named for the art of falconry, as the grounds were, until the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the largest royal falcon hunting grounds. The property also features a stud farm and training center for the indigenous Iberian peninsula Lusitano horse breed, a relation to the Spanish Andalusian, trained for the bullring (in Portugal neither the horse nor bull are injured), dressage, and sports.

## Where to Dine

Porto:

**DOP** is definitely the hottest seat in the region, with local dishes created by talented chef and hometown boy Rui Paula. The restaurant is located in the city center. For a special treat, indulge in the six- or seven-course tasting meal.

At **Pedro Lemos's** restaurant you may choose from options on a three-, five- or seven-course meal. In 2015 this restaurant was awarded its first Michelin star.

**The Yeatman** is another Michelin-starred choice in Porto.

Douro Valley:

**DOC** is chef Rui Paula's sister restaurant to DOP. It is based on the D.O.C. concept in wine classification—wines regulated in a defined region and under defined conditions—and the cuisine is crafted from the best traditions and certified products of the region. Because of this, you can expect the menu to be seasonal. DOC was voted as having the best regional wine list as well, featuring 600 wines, 40 of which may be ordered by the glass.

Lisbon:

**Mini Bar** is one of five restaurants that its chef Jose Avillez has opened in Lisbon. This one is based on the small-plate tradition that one might find in Spain, particularly in Barcelona, where Jose worked for Ferran Adria at El Bulli. Reasonably priced with creative offerings, it is easy here to taste great food without breaking the budget; the generous portions run from five Euros arranged in five “acts,” or you can taste 12 dishes for around 50 Euros.

**Belcanto** is an elite one-Michelin-star-rated restaurant, representing city dining at its best. Dine in elegant surroundings in this restaurant run by Jose Avillez, Portugal’s most celebrated chef.

**Eleven** is a one-Michelin-star-rated hotspot that features flavors from southern Europe. The kitchen is run by a Grand Relais & Chateaux chef, Joachim Koeper.

**Sea Me:** For this restaurant, it just comes down to one word: seafood!

Other places to eat:

**Time Out Mercado De Ribeira**, a fresh regional food emporium; **Cervejaria**, a fresh seafood place loved by both tourists and locals; or try Lisbon’s kiosks and churrascarias throughout the city for on-the-go grazing.

## Where to Stay

Porto:

**Palacio des Cardosas** offers accommodations in an 18<sup>th</sup>-century renovated palace in walking distance of all the city’s cultural highlights. Here, the hotel’s restaurant features an outdoor terrace and prepares Portuguese contemporary cuisine.

*Virtuoso guests enjoy an upgrade on arrival, subject to availability, daily full breakfast for up to two in room guests, early check-in/late check-out, subject to availability, and a complimentary lunch or dinner for two.*

## Douro:

Immerse yourself in the aristocratic history of the region in the Edwardian **Vidago Palace**. Lavish and elegant best describe this resort in a small spa town that's chock full of natural thermal springs in the north of Portugal. Now revitalized with modern amenities while still retaining the elegance of a bygone era, this leading Hotels of the World property features a golf course and three outdoor pools (one exclusively for children) as well as numerous restaurants and bars. Guests may rent bikes, play tennis, and, of course, go out and explore the wines of the Duoro Valley.

*Virtuoso guests, as always, enjoy the best rates, an upgrade on arrival, subject to availability, daily full breakfast for up to two in room guests, early check-in/late check-out, subject to availability, a complimentary 50-minute massage for two, a complimentary round of golf for 2, and a cooking class or wine tasting.*

## Lisbon:

**Four Seasons Hotel Ritz** is the classic great stay in the city, a landmark in itself near the city's Old Town. Or choose the royal life at **Olisippo Lapa Palace Hotel** set on a hill surrounded by its own gardens dotted with statuary in the embassy district of the city.

*Both properties offer Virtuoso guests upgrades and special check-in and check-out times and a \$100 resort credit. I am able to add more VIP amenities by virtue of having Ritz Stars status.*

## In-the-Know Tips from the Locals

Manuel Lobo Vasconcellos, wine maker for Quinta do Crasto: "Enjoy the sunset at Quinta do Crasto swimming pool with a glass of Vintage Port, along with a creamy Portuguese cheese called 'Queijo da Serra'."

## What to Do

For such a small country, the activities are boundless! Here is a sampling of highlights:

- Explore the Baixa district of Lisbon, where the oldest traditional shops are located.

- River cruise on the Douro River for amazing scenic views and relaxing swimming—just perfect!
- Discover Porto by bike; it's a fun way to explore the small town. Walk along the town's riverside on the Cais de Ribeira.
- Visit a palace, like Sitra's Palacio da Pena, which was a summer palace for a royal family. Spend time in the amazing Regaleira gardens in Sitra, which are full of tunnels, caves, and labyrinths.
- See the Alentejo wine region from the air in a hot air balloon.
- Relax on a beach in Algarve—it helps that there are also scenic towns and golf courses in the region.
- While taking in the Vino Verde wine route, shop for gold jewelry designed in a filigree style at the traditional workshops in Povoá do Lanhoso.
- Take in a “bloodless” bullfight, where the bull is not killed.
- Visit the 1290 University of Coimbra and the medieval town center, which appears frozen in time. Explore white-washed Obidos with its medieval fortified walls and Moorish castle, and come for its many religious and culinary festivals.
- Island hop to perpetually sunny Madeira and ride a wicker toboggan down the steep slope of Monte in Funchal.

**UNESCO sites abound:** See where many cultures merge—including that of the Romans, Moors, and Christians—in the arresting architecture of Renaissance fountains, Gothic turrets, and Moorish city planning in Evora. Visit Guimaraes for its medieval castle, Ducal Palace, and the Rua de Santa Maria.

## SOUTH AFRICA



It is easy to know where to go for the wine in South Africa: the **Cape Winelands**! A lush land of green set against a backdrop of picturesque mountains, the area boasts expansive vineyards, a long, winding wine route, and a distinct European influence in some regions that were settled by French Huguenots, the Dutch, and the Germans in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Visits to the towns of Stellenbosch, Paarl, and Franschhoek reveal streets lined with Dutch and Georgian houses, while the area wine estates boast manor homes. European influences are also reflected in the countryside farmsteads. The area is famous not only for its wines and brandies, but also for its cuisine, and it has a strong ecotourism and conservancy tradition.

Easy to reach from Cape Town, Cape Winelands is a wonderful destination either on its own or as a part of a southern Africa tour. You can combine a visit with city



touring in Cape Town, a coastal exploration to see wildlife at the ocean's edge, touring the paradise of the Garden Route, and of course, a safari. Hint: a lovely extension to your trip to South Africa and a safari is a visit to Victoria Falls. Your Travel Advisor can arrange the best itinerary that is suited to your interests and touring style.

### **Wines of the Region**

Regulated by the Wine of Origin Scheme, there are six regions in the area of the Western Cape, which are further divided into districts and wards.

South Africa is famous for its full-bodied red wines. Today, all major grape varieties are grown in the Winelands including Cabernet Franc, Cabernet Sauvignon, Malbec, Merlot, Pinot Noir and Syrah/Shiraz, among others.

The area was originally a white wine region, and many varieties from dry to sweet grow well here. Some major grapes include Cape Riesling and Rhine Riesling, Chardonnay, Chenin Blanc, Gewurztraminer, Muscadel, Pinot Gris, and Sauvignon Blanc, various Northern European grapes for dessert wines, and the Colombard grape for brandy production.

### **When to Go**

The best times to visit fall between September and April, although each season brings something special. Your visit will depend upon what other destinations you want to visit during your travels. A Travel Advisor with knowledge of and partners in the region is your best bet when it comes to planning your itinerary.

In the hot, dry summer months (November to March) you can spend your time in Cape Winelands exploring the area and dining al fresco with a cool glass of white wine. The trip can then continue on to the Garden Route and the coastline where you can spot penguins and experience great beach weather.

Autumn and spring bring splashes of color, either from the changing leaves or the bursts of newly-awakened wildflowers. Autumn (March to May) is ideal because it is the harvest time.

## Where to Taste

There are so many worthwhile vineyards in the region representing a plethora of wines that it might be worth your while to hone your tour selections to either 1) the vineyard experience or 2) the types of wines you would like to taste at the source. By no means comprehensive, here is a sampling of wineries I picked for their particular interesting features. Note that many activities can be great for kids as well:

**Vergelen** (Helderberg ward): This is an historical estate with extensive gardens (the rose garden in summer is particularly stunning). A cellar tour offers a flight of their consistently award-winning wines.

**Grangehurst** (Stellenbosch region) is an off-the-beaten path, small family-owned estate where the tasting room personnel are friendly and knowledgeable.

**Speir** (Stellenbosch Hills ward) is on the list of Top Ten Places to Visit in Cape Town, thanks to great marketing and a transformation of the estate from mere historic farmstead winery into a multi-activity campus. Here you can spy ferocious and fascinating animals through the estate's Cheetah Outreach and Raptor Rescue projects, shop til you drop at their flea market, play golf, or go for a horseback ride. If something more intimate and totally wine-focused is more your speed, **Meerlust** is one of South Africa's oldest estates and produces some of its top wines. For brandy tasting in the area, **Van Ryn** pairs brandy and chocolate in its tastings.

**De Trafford** (Stollenbosch Berg ward) has exceptionally good reds; its Shiraz has been awarded five stars in the South African wine guide, *John Platters*.

**Rustenburg** (Greater Simonsburg ward): If you only have one day to tour the Cape Winelands, consider making this your stop. Owned by the wealthy Barlow family, this centuries-old destination is even fun to get to, thanks to the spectacular scenery you'll pass on the drive there. The beautiful gardens there further enhance the experience, but it is the renowned top-end wines that are the centerpiece.

**Hartenburg** (Botterlary Ward) has a top-rated Stork and Gravel Hill Shirazes that won 90+ points in *Wine Spectator*. **Villiera** estate has a self-guided walking tour through its cellars, which is especially interesting during the harvest and crush. It also has a game drive through its property where you can spy populations of various antelope, zebra, and other small animals and birds.

In the Paarl and Wellington region there are several stops that will offer a rich sampling:

**Fairview** is a big and famous winery that does draw crowds, but is still worth a visit thanks to its innovative owner, Charles Buck. The estate is also famous for its goat cheeses (you can watch the goats play on site). Hint: for a better tasting experience, head through the main tasting room to a quiet room in the back where you can participate in the sommelier's tasting of the day paired with the farm's cheeses.

For a smaller rustic experience, go to **Joostenberg**, a family estate where you could, with advanced arrangements, have a cellar tour and tasting with the winemaker. On the farm is their deli and restaurant run by one of the daughters, who is married to a talented chef. They have light meals; the five-course tasting menu is highly recommended.

*My thanks to Pam McOnie who helped me narrow down these interesting selections.*

## **Where to Dine**

This is one of the world's best food regions, so this is a mere sampling of what is available!

One of South Africa's top restaurants, **Overture**, is located on Hidden Valley Estates winery. Note: a reservation is essential in the summer months.

**Bordega** on the Dornier wines estate is worth the visit for its unique design and impressive views.

**The Tasting Room** in Franschoek is the restaurant on the Relais & Chateaux property, Le Quartier Francais.

**Bable**, on the working farm **Babylonstoren**, is a farm-to-fork restaurant, and all food on the menu is either sourced on the farm itself or from a nearby neighbor.

**Terroir** at **Kleine Zalze Wine Farm** in Franschoek started the restaurant-on-estate movement. Its high-quality dishes, locally sourced, are deceptively simple. Hint: in winter, the restaurant offers pricing specials for two- and three-course meals.

### Where to Stay

**La Residence** in Franschoek is defined by its exclusivity for its guests and its French refinement, an homage to the town. It is a country retreat, so there are loads of outdoor activities on property and throughout the area.

*In addition to Virtuoso exclusive amenities, Virtuoso guests receive a Reserve bottle of wine, a private tasting of La residence wines from their vineyards, and 10% off spa treatments and products.*

Le Quartier Francais is a boutique resort with a restaurant that is consistently named among the top 50 in the world. The resort caters to all in the family, with exclusive gastronomic and wine experiences for the adults and VIK (Very Important Kids) activities for the children. The staff is dedicated to constructing a tailor-made experience just for you.

*Exclusive Virtuoso amenities, in addition to the upgrades, daily breakfast, and check-in/check-out special times, include a Le Quartier apron, an Exclusive Le Quaf Seasonal Surprise (chosen from a menu of private activities), OR: A donation to Isabella "Sharing is Caring" which supports with the feeding of 150 local toddlers.*

### In the Know Tips from the Locals

Pam McOnie, Cape Wineland expert: "Book a picnic in Verelen's camphor forest—it will be one of the most 'civilized' picnics you will ever attend. They set the tales randomly around the forest and you are served a picnic as the waiter brings the basket to your table and checks in periodically to refresh drinks."

## What to Do

In addition to wonderful wine tasting, this area offers many other delights. Franschhoek has excellent restaurants, galleries and antique shops, while Paarl boasts historical and architectural charms and is a base for cycling and nature trails. Visit Wellington for olive tasting and leather goods from its factories, or head to the garden town of Robertson to ogle its stud farms, home to some of the world's top racehorses. Learn more about the multicultural area at the Afrikaans Language Museum, or stop at The Spice Wine Estate to watch glassmakers create beautiful pieces at **Red Hot Glass**.

**Palette Pleasers:** A visitor may pursue the culinary treasures of cheese, dried fruits, and olives. The land's spectacular scenery attracts painters and photographers. Chocolate tastings, farmers' markets, breweries, and charcuterie shops are also worth a visit.

**Heart-Pumping Adventures:** The active traveler will enjoy hiking in the Alpine-like mountains, exploring the Paarl Mountain Natural Reserve, or cycling, walking, or horse trekking on the plains. Golfers will not be disappointed by the courses in the region, and Ernie Els has a winery in Stellenbosch.