

Vacation to the Vine

Plan your next trip
around a visit to
the source of your
favourite wines

BY MARGARET SWAINE

Do you factor wineries into your travel itineraries? There are hundreds of travel opportunities for those who want to enjoy the sweet taste of a wine journey. I've spent decades visiting the wine regions of dozens of countries. Here are some of my favourites.



PHOTO COURTESY OF NAPA VALLEY VINTERS

The most glamorous celebration of wine

CALIFORNIA'S NAPA VALLEY NOT ONLY HAS AN IMPRESSIVE LINEUP of iconic wineries, it also hosts the most glamorous wine weekend: the annual Auction Napa Valley. The four-day-long weekend of wine-based festivities features vintner-hosted parties and the world's only single-case auction of 100 or more wine lots that includes tasting wine straight from the barrel with the winemakers. The final night, the grand Live Auction Celebration, held at the Meadowood Napa Valley Resort, features dinner, wines and a fast-paced live auction. Celebrities, business tycoons and other deep-pocketed folks try to outdo each other with bids of one hundred thousand (and more) for extraordinary prizes. All proceeds go to charities in the Valley. The 37th Auction runs from May 31 to June 3, 2018. — auctionnapavalley.org



PHOTO COURTESY OF MISSION HILL FAMILY ESTATE

Canada's most scenic region

SUNNY OKANAGAN IS THE CANADIAN VERSION OF A RIVIERA, with glittering lakes as a backdrop to ski hills, golf courses, cycling and hiking routes, and wine trails. The area has burgeoned into one of the largest Canadian wine regions with over 120 wineries. With 2,000-plus hours of sunshine a year, it's no surprise that the valley's fruit growing (which includes wine grapes) is world renowned. Many have excellent restaurants and some have great accommodations. A few of my picks for both are Hester Creek, Burrowing Owl and Spirit Ridge at Nk'Mip Resort. The latter, the first Aboriginal owned and operated winery resort in Canada, is where the Osoyoos Indian Band has created an unparalleled wine and cultural experience. — okanaganwines.ca/wineries

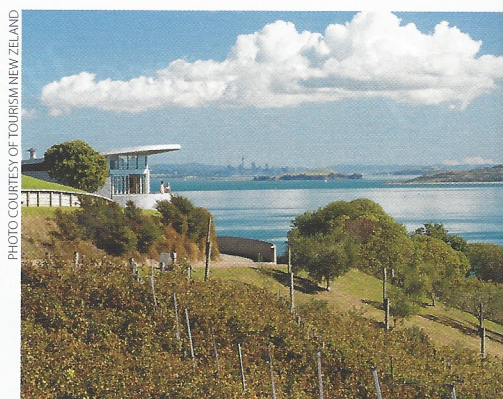


PHOTO COURTESY OF TOURISM NEW ZEALAND

New Zealand's island of wine

NEW ZEALAND'S WINE INDUSTRY HAS EXPANDED from barely existent 40 years ago, to nearly 700 producers today. Grapes are grown from the northlands to Central Otago in the far south, where the most southern vineyards in the world exist. Quality wines are the norm. Yet, it was one tiny island in the Hauraki Gulf east of Auckland that captivated my heart and palate. Waiheke is known as New Zealand's island of wine—it's home to about two dozen dedicated wine makers. Just a 40-minute ferry ride from the bustling metropolis of Auckland, the wines are great, the vistas stunning, and the food and accommodations captivating. — waihekewine.co.nz

PHOTO COURTESY OF SUSANA BALBO WINES



PHOTO COURTESY OF VINS CENTRE-LOIRE



Living the high life

BORDEAUX, FRANCE, IS HOME TO SOME OF THE MOST FAMOUS and most expensive wines in the world. A visit there can mean staying in a chateau surrounded by vineyards and eating in Michelin starred restaurants. There are now about 320 accredited châteaux that welcome guests. More are expected to open over the next few years. A top spot is Les Sources de Caudalie, located among the vineyards of Château Smith Haut-Lafitte in Martillac (about half an hour from the city of Bordeaux). The hotel has a two-star Michelin restaurant, La Grand'Vigne, a bistro called Restaurant La Table du Lavoir and the Le Spa Vinothérapie. At Château le Pape, an 18th century country house set in nine hectares of vineyards, breakfast, bike rentals and a tasting at Château Haut-Bailly is included in the price.

— sources-caudalie.com and chateaulpape.com

A quirky, fun event

VINEYARDS FOLLOW THE LENGTH OF THE 800-KILOMETRE LOIRE RIVER in France. To encourage visitors to the area, over 350 wine cellars have signed up to promote wine tourism. They have come up with ingenious schemes to expand the wine experience beyond the tasting rooms. The first weekend of September offers "Vignes, Vins, Randos," which are hikes through the vineyards and into the cellars of winemakers. In 2017, the 14th edition of this event, 15 different walks were available in different areas of the Loire. In Chinon, the winery of Pierre and Bertrand Couly offers an Escape Game "Oenologique," wherein participants are locked in a room with an hour to escape by unlocking a series of locks based on wine clues. At Ackerman, one of the oldest cellars in Saumur, visitors can wander through deep limestone tunnels to view spectacular art installations and ancient table games.

— loirevalleywine.com

The best winery dining

ARGENTINA HAS OVER 1,300 WINERIES, many featuring spectacular architecture. Even more exciting, according to locals, and I agree, is that the best restaurants are at the wineries. In Mendoza province, responsible for over 75 per cent of the country's wine production, Bodega Ruca Malen, just 25 minutes by highway from the city, was named best winery restaurant in the world in 2013. All the ingredients used in the kitchen are produced in Mendoza. Just one kilometre from Ruca Malen, Bodega Melipal offers a tasting menu of regional dishes designed to honour their wines. Dominio del Plata Winery, home to Argentina's most famous female winemaker, Susana Balbo, has the restaurant Osadia de Crear, which offers a full gourmet sit-down meal paired with Balbo's expressive wines. The architecturally innovative O. Fournier Winery in the Uco Valley (about 90 minutes from Mendoza) serves delicious tasting menus at Urban, their gorgeous modernist restaurant. — winesofargentina.org

PHOTO COURTESY OF SUSANA BALBO WINES

