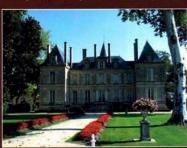
Wine Country Touring

A Passionate Journey





world of wine: France, Italy, Australia, South Africa, Chile, Argentina, and Hungary. Each country has a wealth of wine-making history and culture and offers a great variety of wines to discover during your travels.

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France is the Number One tourist destination in the world and a big part of the country's alture is its beautiful and historic wine country. From the majestic chateaux of Bordeaux to the languid Mediteranean charm of the Rhohe Valley, from the flowered villages of Alsace to the rolling hillsides of Champagne, France offers travelers an enchanting wine country experience. The American company French Wine Explorers (www.wine-tours-france.com) can give you an inside's view of the French wine country, on a scheduled or customized wine tour led by two professional, certified sommeliers who work in the French wine business.

business.

One of the most popular wine destinations in Europe is the sultry and lovely Tuscan wine country of Italy. You'll discover the famous wines of Chianti Classico and Brunello di Montalcino, as well as the newest "Super Tuscans" that are revolutionizing the Italian wine industry. Custom Tours of Tuscany (www.customioursintuscany.com), a Chicago-based company, arranges fully customized group wine lours of Tuscany, which also can include visits to important ant or historic sights in the area.

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Want a more exotic wine country adventure? Why not try South Africa, one of the world's most up-and-coming vineyards. Cape Winelands Tours (www.capewine-tours.com) is the only American company focusing exclusively on the Winelands, the dramatically beautiful wine-producing region of South Africa. Or try Australia's rugged wine country, which offers great wines and the quirty fun of the "land down under" culture. The Wine and Travel Company (www.thewineandfravelo.com), Company (www.thewineandtravelco.com), based in Toronto, offers customized wine tours of Australia, and can also take you to the wine country of Hungary, Spain, New

Zealand or Canada (yes, there is a wine country in Canada!).

If you're a serious wine enthusians, make sure that the wine tour you sign up for is worthy of the name. Many wine tours are nothing more than a sightseeing tour with a few brief winery visits thrown in (and not very good wineries at that), led by guides who have no particular wine training or experience. Look for companies that feature top-quality wineries, at least two winery visits per day, and opportunities for more wine tasting at local resturants serving finely-prepared regional cusine. Group size should be small, so each person can have the opportunity to have his questions answered and have a personal contact with the winternaker. Many of the best small wineries simply do not accept groups larger than 15 people.

Ask about the qualifications of the person who will be leading your tour. The guide should be bilingual and have extensive knowledge of the region to be visited, its wines, and its culture. Expert wine tour guides are either working wine professionals or have completed professional-level wine studies.

For those who prefer a less intensive wine vacation, many companies offer tours with equal portions of sightseeing and wine touring. Again, best to go with a specialized wine tour operator who can ensure that the wine part of your program is of the highest quality. Some companies have tours that include cooking classes or visits to befese or olive oil producers, great for travelers who are as passionate about food as they are about wine.



Cuisine Tours • Chicago Edition • 31

A good alternative to signing up for a scheduled wine tour is having a customized, private wine tour designed for you and your travel companions. Most good wine tour companies offer customized tours and families, groups of friends, corporations and their cleines, and wine clubas are among the groups that find this to be an ideal option. The tour company will tailor the titinerary to your group for all or part of your trip.

If you decide to travel on your own, the Internet can be a great information resource. Many wineries now have web sites, and remail makes it easy to request a tasting for your upcoming trip. The wine-growing regions often have promotional organizations that publish extensive information on touring the wine country, like the web site for the Interprofessional Committee of the Rhône Valley (www.vins-rhone.com/ANGLAIS/indez.2 ltm).

Amazon com features a wonderful series of books edited by the illustrious winery, restaurant and hotel suggestions, as well as extensive information on the region and its wines.

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