

South Africa

Number of wineries: 400

Best region: Stellenbosch

Compared with France and Italy, South Africa all but rolls out a red carpet and does a tap dance for wine tourists. True, South Africa may not be the first place that jumps to mind when you think about wine, but the country has 400 wineries and a 300-year history of winemaking. More important, over the past 10 years, there's been an aggressive push to turn its vineyards—known as "wine farms"—into tourist destinations.

The country's best-known area is Stellenbosch, a fertile region a 40-minute drive from Cape Town that's seen an explosion in wine tourism: Five years ago there were roughly 40 wineries on its wine trail; now there are 120. And unlike many other wine-growing regions of the world, it isn't known for one type of wine. Vineyards

here produce the full gamut of wines, ranging from cabernet, shiraz and merlot to chardonnay.

Fans say South Africa could write the book on pleasing both veteran and newbie oenophiles. To start, there's a "wine desk," a fully manned information booth, smack in the middle of Cape Town's touristy waterfront. Partially funded by the vineyards themselves, the desk books tastings, as well as restaurant and hotel reservations; assists with shipping wine home; and offers a jump-on, jump-off bus that makes a continuous loop to five different wineries. Maps? The desk hands them out by the dozen, fully marked with color-coded subroutes.

As for the wineries themselves, most are open six days a week, and in addition to tasting rooms, many have full-scale restaurants. The Boschendal Estate near the region's Franschhoek Valley has three



separate dining options: a newly renovated restaurant, an outdoor cafe for lighter meals and a to-go operation that sells picnic lunches. Nearby, the Spier winery has added a hotel, golf course, conference center and three restaurants. Looking for one more advantage to traveling all that way (after all, South Africa is a 16-hour flight from the U.S.)? Even with recent shifts in value, the dollar still goes far against the South African rand.

IN ITALY, stick to well-traveled regions like Tuscany.

Package Deals? Many travelers taking wine-tour vacations sign up for special packages that combine hotel, tours of vineyards and sometimes airfare. But we decided to see if we could find ways to do the same thing on our own and beat the price.

COUNTRY/TOUR	COST	LENGTH	THE SMARTMONEY WAY*	COMMENT
Australia Barossa Experience Tours, Barossa Three Day Tour www.barossavalleytours.com	\$645	3 days	\$509	The tour package through Australia's Barossa Valley shuttles you to vineyards and promises B&B-level lodging. But just by using Travelocity, we picked our own B&B and got our own rental car to drive around. You won't have a personal guide, but Australian vineyards don't require appointments or introductions.
Italy La Dolce Vita Wine Tours, Land of Barolo www.dolcevitours.com	\$2,395 (includes airfare)	6 days	\$2,089 (includes airfare)	This package's selling point is lodging at private wine estates in Italy's Barolo region. But we found vineyards that doubled as hotels, including the Villa La Favorita, a historic villa set on a vineyard in Alba, for only \$150 a night.
France French Wine Explorers, Best of Bordeaux www.wine-tours-france.com	\$4,495	6 days	\$1,179	Using Web sites and travel agents, we created our own itinerary and saved more than \$3,000, our biggest savings by far. But since vineyards in France are so difficult to get into, this package may be worth it—especially for true oenophiles. It gets you into four of the five "first growth" vineyards, the best and most exclusive in the region.
Chile LatinWineries.com, Chile Wine Tasting Tour www.latinwineries.com	\$2,110 (includes airfare)	7 days	\$1,769 (includes airfare)	Using Travelocity again, you can take the same flight from Miami, where this tour originates, stay in the same hotel, the Plaza San Francisco, and take the tour yourself—and save \$330.
South Africa Happy Holiday, 4 Day Wine & Gourmet Tour www.happyholiday.co.za	\$576	4 days	\$615	The B&B package tour takes you to six different wine regions and will help you ship wine home. Our version costs a little bit more but includes accommodations at a similar B&B and a car, so you can visit the wine regions that interest you but also see the sights in Cape Town, where the wine desk will ship your wine home.

Unless noted, all flights from New York. Packages do not include airfare unless otherwise stated. *SmartMoney packages include a daily food budget of \$70.