

WINE TOURISM IN ARGENTINA

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Argentina has become one of the most favourite travel destinations for the travellers around the world. And while most visitors come through Buenos Aires, there's so much more to see in Argentina than just the beautiful neighbourhoods of Recoleta, Las Cañitas, Belgrano, San Telmo, and Downtown.

Tourism in Argentina is favoured by its ample and varied natural assets (made possible by its geographical extension) and by its cultural offerings. The devaluation of the Argentine peso in 2002 further fuelled the industry as production costs decreased and tourism significantly increased, giving way to a whole new concept of wine tourism in Argentina.

Wine tourism refers to tourism whose purpose is or includes tasting, consumption, or purchase of wine, often at or near the source. Wine tourism can consist of visits to wineries, vineyards, and restaurants known to offer unique vintages, as well as organized wine tours, wine festivals, or other special events.

In the dry, semi desert valleys and foothills of Mendoza, San Juan and San Rafael, the sun shines 300 days a year and pure mountain water from melting snow rushes down from the Andes, irrigating miles of land that produces 70% of Argentinean wine. The province of Mendoza, by far the most important wine-producing region, lies at the foot of the Andes at southern latitudes similar to the northern latitudes of the best vineyards of France, Italy and California. With 300,000 acres of vineyards, Mendoza alone produces 65% of the national wine. The rest comes from the northern provinces of Jujuy, Salta, Catamarca and La Rioja (where former President Menem's family owns a winery), and the southern province of Río Negro.

Argentina, with its 1,500 wineries, is the fourth-largest wine producer in the world, yet its fine malbecs, syrah, cabernets, chardonnays, and chenin blancs have seldom been seen on the shelves or wine lists in other countries. One reason is that Argentines have been the primary consumers of all they produced – only the French and the Italians drink more wine per capita, so there hasn't been much of a need to export. Secondly, cheap, hearty reds satisfied the beef-eating Argentines, and the white wines are sweet, which means that they haven't done well elsewhere. In 1970, for instance, Peñaflor exported an economical cabernet under the Trapiche label; though it was good enough for Argentines, it was not equal to what California was producing and it didn't impress American wine drinkers who were just beginning to consider California wines as an alternative to French or Italian vintages. Thirdly, collective marketing of Argentine wine went against the grain in these land stubborn individualists.

The bold, fruit-flavoured Malbec grape came to Argentina from France as a blending grape, thrived in Mendoza's soil and climate, and earned its right to be vinified as Argentinean signature red wine. Although Chardonnays and Chenin blancs are being improved and adjusted for export, Torrontés seems to be

Argentinean white wine. Some of the regional best vineyards are Bodegas Escorihuela, Bodega La Colina de Oro, Bodega La Rural and Villa Orfila, just outside of Mendoza; and Suter and Bodega Valentín Bianchi in San Rafael.

The Fiesta Nacional de la Vendimia is the most celebrated wine festival of the year. The event is centred in the town of Mendoza, but each of the province's 18 departments hosts its own celebration.

The festival begins with a blessing of the fruit event. During the first week in March, the town of Mendoza holds a parade, known as Via Blanca de las Reinas, which features beauty queens from throughout the region, attracting up to a quarter million spectators.

The Fiesta Nacional de la Vendimia draws winemakers and wine lovers from around the world and features a week of parties and wine tastings. The tradition began in the seventeenth century and ranks among the world's best harvest celebrations.

Argentina, and more specifically the province of Mendoza, was recently named to a list of the 10 best destinations for wine tourism in 2014 by the popular Wine Enthusiast Magazine. This is truly a great recognition for the country, and such a publication highlights the growing reputation of the Mendoza region for its Malbec production.

References

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