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The Most Romantic Vineyards Around the World



Some of the world's most spectacular sceneries also produce the most magnificent wines. Where to tour, taste and even propose with a toast.

By: Becca Hensley

The Champagne Region, France



Photo courtesy of Les Crayères

Even the quaint villages have inebrious names in France's Champagne region: Bouzy, Dizy and such. The countryside that begins about an hour northeast of Paris and stretches nearly to Belgium's border bubbles with crumbling monasteries, towering church spires, imposing chateaus and hills flecked with chunky gray stone. Vignerons (small, family owned champagne makers) abound, but you'll find some of the best-known champagne houses clustered in historic rivals Reims and Epernay. Beneath both cities, a honeycomb of caves, once Roman chalk mines, house some of the most revered champagne producers. In Reims, don't miss Pommery, where 101 steps lead to 120 linked caves, loaded with 25 million bottles. In Epernay, where Benedictine monk Dom Perignon invented champagne, a stellar cellar is Mercier, France's best-selling bubbly. Further afield, be sure to stop at Lanois Père & Fils in the tiny Le Misnil sur Oger, for its superior cellars and fascinating champagne memorabilia and antiques museum. Note: To tour most champagne houses, advance reservations are required. The outfitter OenoVasion offers on an off-road tasting tour by Land Rover, stopping at secret champagne houses along the way. Active types will want to hike Montagne de Reims' rise, an immense tree-speckled plateau punctuated with manicured rows of pinot noir and pinot meunier vines. Long trails rim then meander into fairy-tale forests. Save time to visit the myriad World War II battlefields in the Ardennes, including the site of the Battle of the Bulge. Troyes, a village composed of perfectly preserved Renaissance-era half-timbered houses and narrow, winding cobblestoned streets, boasts nine Gothic churches, artsy boutiques and alluring cafés.

Sleep: Splurge at **Les Crayères** — a palace hotel of 16 rooms — nestled in an English-style, chestnut tree-spiked park in the heart of Reims. Here, meals at the Michelin-starred restaurant can begin with any of 300 rare champagne vintages (room rates start at about \$460 a night; lescraieres.com) For a rural stay on the touristic wine road, try **Les Barbotines** in Bouzy, a stylish B & B ensconced in a 13th-century house of the Paul Clouet Champagne Estate. The maison's pinot noir-based champagnes are a must-try (room rates start at about \$130 a night and include breakfast; lesbarbotines.com).

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Eat: You can't get a bad meal in the Champagne region, but eating here can be expensive. Consider assembling a picnic from the food stalls at Boulingrin Market in Reims. Order oysters at one of the 12 tables in Lilliputan La Bocal, set in the rear of the market's fish shop La Poissonnerie des Halles.

Yarra Valley, Victoria, Australia



Photo courtesy of Tourism Victoria

Hey Joey! Is that a mob of kangaroos in my vineyard? That's right. Head to the Yarra Valley, just 38 miles east of Melbourne, and you may well see some marsupials among the grapes. Nearly two centuries old, this wine-growing enclave occupies undulating verdant landscapes. Thick forests patchwork the land, rivers and lakes mottle it, colorful kookaburras (tree king-fishers) balance on branches and butterflies caress a low-hanging sky with rainbow-hued wings. Seventy wineries, a plethora of restaurants, fruit orchards, vegetable gardens and farms occupy the area. And the valley, which also houses an art colony, has a bohemian vibe that stresses creativity. Some wineries are distinctly high-end while others — tin shacks and rustic ranches restored by independent growers — keep things simpler. A plethora of farm-to-table restaurants serve local organic products, celebrity chefs concoct masterpieces, family-owned boutiques and galleries showcase local talent and rows and rows of vineyards — thriving in volcanic, nutrient-loaded soil — sustain grapes for pinot noir, sauvignon blanc, shiraz and chardonnay. For intimate winery visits in a convertible take an excursion with Top Down Tours. In addition to cooking classes and wine tasting, this hilly valley invites guests to hike, bike, hot-air balloon, sky dive, fish and more. The Yarra Warra Museum, a private contemporary art collection, will thrill art buffs. And Melbourne, less than an hour away, infuses a dose of bustling urbanity.

Sleep: At **Balgownie Estate Vineyard Resort and Spa**, 69 rooms cascade into corridors of vines, making this large, rural resort feel intimate. Fully appointed with tennis courts, a pool and a knockout spa, this is a stylish stay with its own fine wines — you'll flip over the reds (room rates start at about \$275 a night; balgownieestate.com.au). For a stay that matches the funky mood of the valley, check into the **Valley Farm Vineyard Cottages**, where structures are derived from a former satellite tracking station and composed of a plethora of recycled materials. Fun, with a quirky chi-chi spirit, the adults-only hotel is comprised of self-contained cottages (two with wood-burning fireplaces). An alpaca paddock and the Trellis Winery sit nearby; eateries, shops and other activities are just five minutes away (room rates start at about \$152 a night; valleyfarm.com.au).

Eat: Local cheese makers, bakers, chocolatiers, coffee roasters, beer brewers and gardeners offer their products throughout this beautiful valley. Cafés, cellar doors (the spots where you actually purchase wines), tasting rooms and food stands are ubiquitous, all drawing from the local landscape. But De Bortoli's Locale, at the heart of an eponymous wine estate, defines the region. Family owned, the estate offers handcrafted pasta, bread and gelato, served up with site-grown vegetables, herbs and fruit, and of course, their own wine. An evolving menu offers everything from house-made charcuterie and mozzarella to pumpkin ravioli and free-range duck breast with garden beans. If not stopping for a meal, do visit the cheese room or the cellar door for a wine tasting.

Mendoza Province, Argentina

Plum, cherry and peach orchards waft their fragrance into brisk mountain air. Olive groves rustle like people chatting

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at cocktail parties. Ancient canals made by native cultures purvey melting glacial water from snowcapped peaks. A temperate valley unfolds against an immense, ever-cobalt sky. And everywhere, there are vineyards — most of them presenting plump grapes in striking scarlet hues. This is **Cujo** in the Argentine Mendoza province, home to — among other prodigious grapes — the mighty malbec. Located in the eastern foothills of the Andes, near the colonial city of Mendoza, more than 600 miles west of Buenos Aires, this region accounts for 80% of Argentina's wine. Here, countless state-of-the-art wineries dot a pastoral, still-rustic landscape. Divine Tours offers a six-day, five-night bike tour that takes you down the back roads for tastings and meals at intimate bodegas. Mendoza's mountain setting ensures much to do besides imbibe. You can ride horses, whitewater raft, trek, fish, paraglide or play golf. Close by, Aconcagua, the highest mountain in the Americas, sets the extreme athlete's heart aflutter.

Sleep: Stay in urban Mendoza, a city defined by myriad fountains and plazas, shaded avenues, tile floors, low-rise buildings with soaring ceilings and a Spanish-influenced lifestyle that still takes advantage of the afternoon siesta. Be regal at the **Park Hyatt Mendoza** where sleek, contemporary guest rooms and a restored 19th-century, pillared facade meld modernity with the past. The Kaua Club Spa's Mendoza Wine Body Glow treatment provides an alternate way to ingest your favorite vintage (room rates start at about \$147 a night; parkhyatt.com). At **Cavas Wine Lodge**, near the mountain wine village of Lujan de Cuyo, relish terraces with vineyard views, in-suite fireplaces, a Moorish-themed spa and gastronomic meals. A private dinner in the house wine cellar is unforgettable (room rates start at \$375 a night and include breakfast; cavaswinelodge.com).



Photo courtesy of Courtesy of Park Hyatt Hotels

Eat: Known for his grilling techniques, celebrity chef Francis Mallmann brings indigenous Argentine cooking methods to the new age. He puts clay ovens, spits and pits in the kitchen of an historic building and matches all the meals with local wine. To be immersed in the Italian culture of the area, explore the menu at Francesco Barbara Restaurant, complete with an Italian grandma cooking in the kitchen.

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