

INTRODUCTION

We've all experienced it on our travels - whether watching a game of pétanque in Provence with a chilled rosé, or at a tapas bar in Andalucía with a dry and savoury Fino sherry - when a local wine could not be more perfectly suited to the moment.

Tasting wine in the place it was made can be a revelation. This book plots a course through 40 of Europe's greatest wine regions, with weekend-long itineraries in each. We encounter intense red wines in Friuli and crisp and fruity Rieslings produced on the banks of the Mosel and Rhine rivers. We venture into historic, world-famous wineries and cutting-edge cellar doors, and in Portugal's Alentejo and Georgia's Kakheti region we discover some unsung heroes. In each region, our expert writers - including Masters of Wine Caroline Gilby and Anne Krebiehl and critics and columnists Sarah Ahmed, Tara Q. Thomas and John Brunton - review the most rewarding wineries to visit and the most memorable wines to taste.

This is a book for casual quaffers; there's no impenetrable language about malolactic fermentation or scoring systems. Instead, we meet some of the world's most enthusiastic and knowledgeable winemakers and learn about each region's wines in their own words. It is this personal introduction to wine, in its home, that is at the heart of wine-touring's appeal.

© FreeProd33 | Shutterstock



CONTENTS

AUSTRIA

01 Vienna 8

BELGIUM & LUXEMBOURG

02 Belgium & Luxembourg 14

CROATIA

03 Istria 22

ENGLAND

04 South Downs 28

FRANCE

05 Alsace 34

06 Bordeaux 40

07 Burgundy 46

08 Champagne 54

09 The Jura 60

10 Languedoc 66

11 The Loire 72

12 Provence 78

13 The Rhône 86

GEORGIA

14 Kakheti 92

GERMANY

15 Mittelrhein 98

16 Mosel 104

17 Sachsen 112

GREECE

18 Naoussa 118

19 Santorini 124

HUNGARY

20 Tokaj 130

ITALY

21 Alto Adige 136

22 Friuli 144

23 Liguria 150

24 Piedmont 158

25 Puglia 164

26 Sardinia 170

27 Sicily 176

28 Tuscany 182

29 Veneto 190

PORTUGAL

30 Alentejo 196

31 Douro 202

ROMANIA

32 Drăgășani 210

SLOVENIA

33 Primorska 216

SPAIN

34 El Bierzo 222

35 Jerez 228

36 Mallorca 236

37 Priorat 242

38 Rias Baixas 248

39 Ribera del Duero 254

40 Rioja 260

INDEX 268



[Croatia]

ISTRIA

The green hills of Istria have produced wine for Roman emperors, Venetian nobles and Austrian royalty for centuries, and local families still keep the tradition alive.

The heart-shaped peninsula at the top of Croatia's achingly beautiful Adriatic coastline has long been lauded for its ancient buildings, pebbly beaches and fairy-tale hilltop towns, but its burgeoning reputation as an epicurean heaven is a relatively new development. In recent years, Istrian olive oils have won international acclaim, while the black and white truffles harvested from the region's enchanting forests have been working their magic, too. These pungent fungi enliven a cuisine deeply indebted to the many centuries when Istria was an integral part of La Serenissima, the once-great Venetian Republic.

It's no surprise that visiting gourmets have woken up to the excellence of Istrian wine as well. *Vino* has been produced in Croatia for millennia, and there's quite an array of highly localised indigenous grape varieties grown throughout the country. Istria's main viticultural treasure is Malvazija Istarska, a versatile white grape that lends itself to a range of styles: from lean and crisp to bold and oaked; dry or sweet; and sometimes even sparkling. On the red side of the ledger is Teran, which yields a rustic, richly hued wine that is best drunk young. Imported varietals that prosper in Istria include white Muscat (known locally as Muškati Momjanski, as it's mainly grown around the town of Momjan, near the Slovenian border), as well as Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay, Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot.

GET THERE

Dozens of airlines fly directly to Pula in summer; otherwise, transit via Zagreb. Catamarans from Venice to Poreč, Rovinj and Pula operate seasonally.

Most of Istria's wine producers are small, family-run affairs – and while they're welcoming of visitors, there isn't the same network of cellar-door tasting rooms that you'll find in the more established wine-touring regions. That's part of the charm: driving up to small vineyards where – perhaps with only a little English spoken – the family patriarch pulls up chairs around a barrel and pours out a sample of his beloved vintage. For more certainty, phone ahead.





[France]

BORDEAUX

Discover another, more accessible side to world-famous Bordeaux: in the saddle, in the trees or up in the air.

Premier Cru classé; Left Bank, Right Bank; €6000 cases of Château Margaux: the world of Bordeaux wine can seem an intimidating, confusing and, yes, expensive place. For one thing, France's largest *Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée* (AOC) comprises several subregions, each very different. On the Right Bank of the Dordogne River lie Saint-Émilion and Pomerol. On the Left Bank of the Garonne River, which flows through the city of Bordeaux and meets the Dordogne in the vast Gironde estuary, is the Médoc, home to Margaux and other hallowed names.

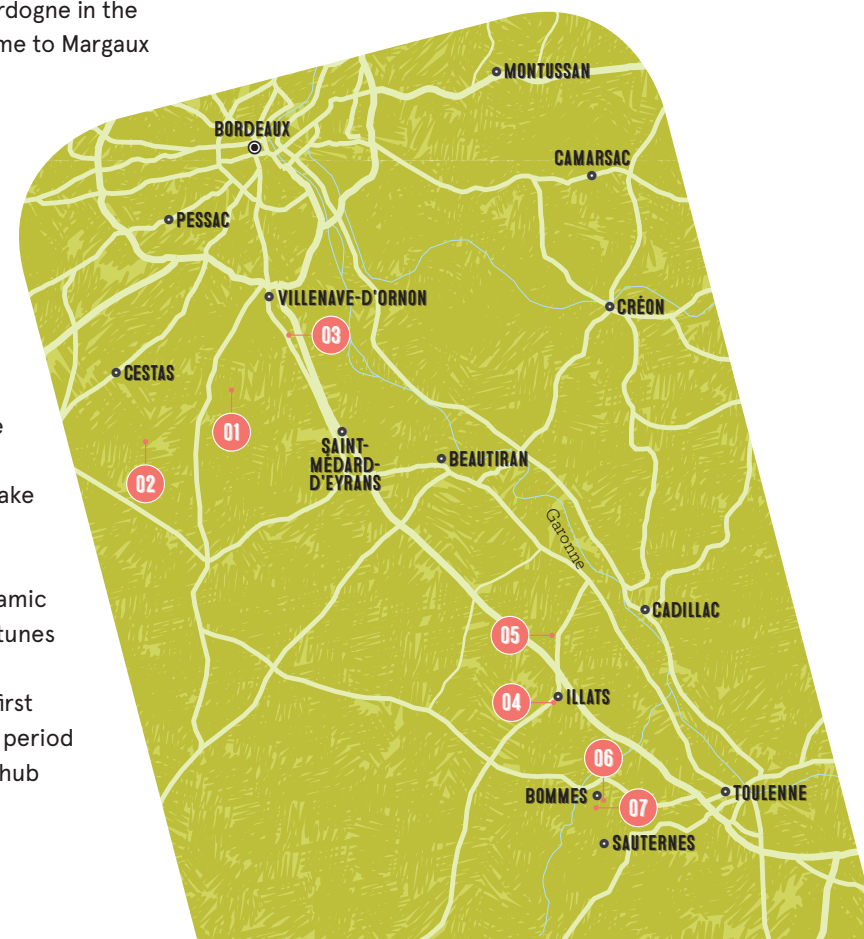
But one region of Bordeaux has made a special effort to be more accessible than its neighbours: Graves and Sauternes, upriver of Bordeaux on the Left (south) Bank of the Garonne. During the last ten years, wineries along the Graves and Sauternes wine route have introduced ever more novel ways of tasting and learning about the region and its unique wines: visitors can cycle to châteaux, go canoeing, take sightseeing flights from vineyards and taste wines in tree houses.

This trail begins and ends in the dynamic university city of Bordeaux, whose fortunes have ebbed and flowed like the broad Garonne that bisects it. Grapes were first grown here during the region's Roman period when Burdigala was an import/export hub

GET THERE

Bordeaux has an international airport on its outskirts (take bus 1 to the centre for €1) and is 2hr from Paris by train.

and there are still vineyards within the city limits. Come the 12th century, Eleanor of Aquitaine's marriage to Henry II in 1152 enabled Aquitaine to become England's sole supplier of wine. In the 16th century, the Dutch encouraged the Bordelais to expand. By the 18th century, wine merchant families such as the Lurons and the Bartons ushered in Bordeaux's next golden age, building many of its most beautiful châteaux.







[Georgia]

KAKHETI

In this ancient, mountainous land, a youthful spirit and world-class traditional wines reward grape-loving travellers with a taste for the unknown.

Vineyard-hopping in Georgia is a journey to wine's earliest origins. An 8000-year-old clay wine jar unearthed here in 2017 is the oldest-known relic of winemaking. Put another way, by the time the ancient Greeks were stomping their first grapes, the Georgians had been at it for millennia.

Traditional Georgian winemaking has changed surprisingly little since antiquity: grapes are harvested by hand and foot-pressed in *satsnakheli*, hollowed-out tree trunks. The juice flows into underground *kvevri* clay pots, where it ferments and matures with minimal intervention. The following spring, the wine is clear, aromatic and ready for clinking at *supras*, Georgian feasts known for their elaborate toasts. Kvevri wines are so laborious that they account for less than 10 per cent of the country's wine production, but a new generation of winemakers hopes to turn that ratio on its head.

The most storied Georgian wine region is Kakheti, two hours east of Tbilisi by car, where eighty percent of the country's wine originates. Its best 'whites' are prized for the grippy tannin and amber hue resulting from extended contact between grape juice and skins. But Kakhetian wines are far from homogeneous, thanks to the region's diverse terrain, distinctive grape varieties and innovative winemakers.

The Gombori mountains roughly split Kakheti into 'Inner' and 'Outer' zones. Perched on a Gombori escarpment, Signaghi is a popular base, with wineries lining its cobblestoned streets; out in the countryside, there are château-style resorts and countless guesthouses. But Kakheti's most thrilling wines are often found in villagers' backyards, not in sleek tasting rooms. Take time for leisurely meals, impromptu polyphonic singing, chats with winemakers and unsolicited shots of *chacha* (120-proof grape spirit).

GET THERE

Tbilisi International Airport, 100km (62 miles) from Signaghi, services the region. Car hire is available.