

TRAVEL

WINE

From sun-kissed regions in Croatia and Georgia, Alpine slopes above shimmering Swiss lakes, the rolling Downs of England to the shadow of Mount Fuji, the Chinese mountains and a tiny island in New Zealand, lie little known wine regions that are redefining what it means to drink artisanal wines. Shying away from popular wine destinations in Italy, France, South Africa and the United States, some of these under the radar places go back centuries, making wine with indigenous grape varieties, while others are young wine regions making their presence felt with exquisite reds and whites. Think wine tastings in family-run cellars that still use ancient methods, historic vineyard stays and picturesque landscapes that are as alluring as the wine you sip.

# Haute Whispers off the Grapevine

**Trip out with Spice to some of the less-travelled wine regions**

**Pallavi Pasricha**

## **Lavaux, Switzerland**

Visitors to this Alpine country envision chocolates and cheese—after all when a country sits between wine giants like Italy and France, it's easy for its own bottles to be overshadowed. But Switzerland's local wine may well be its best kept secret. Along the shimmering Lake Geneva, the little known Chasselas grapes hang heavy in vineyards, producing exceptional fresh and fruity white wine. Head to Lavaux in the canton of Vaud, located between the towns of Lausanne and Vevey where terraced vineyards built along high mountain slopes over centuries by monks have won UNESCO World Heritage status. In this incredibly scenic setting, meander along walking trails that take you to gorgeous villages. Sip history in a glass of wine in small alleys in villages like Cully, where some winemakers still manually press the grapes in a wooden presser producing wine that has more delicate aromas.

**Wine tasting** Domaine Potterat

<https://www.vins-potterat.ch/> and [Domaine Bovy https://domainebovy.ch/](https://domainebovy.ch/)

**Closest airport** Geneva International Airport

Photo Courtesy:  
Switzerland Tourism

Lavaux, a UNESCO World  
Heritage Site, features  
terraced vineyards  
framed by Lake Geneva

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**Istria, Croatia**

This sunny peninsula located in the northern tip of the country, has earned the nickname, ‘The New Tuscany.’ No surprises there. Previously a part of Italy, its verdant rolling hills tucked between the Adriatic Sea and the Alps are dotted with reclusive villages and lush vineyards that go back hundreds of years. Indigenous grape varieties that have won over wine enthusiasts produce Malvazija, a crisp and floral white wine and Teran, a bold red wine. Head to Motovun, a medieval-era 14th century hilltop town with cobbled streets, stone homes, incredible views and family-run wineries, where tastings come with stories of how it all began. Roxanich Winery & Design Hotel is not just a luxurious boutique stay option, it has an impressive wine cellar and a tasting room.

**Wine tasting** Tomaz Winery  
<https://vina-tomaz.hr/> and  
 Roxanich Winery & Design Hotel  
<https://www.roxanich.com/>

**Closest airport** Pula

**Ningxia, China**

Wine from China might be a confusing thought, but just a sip of the bold red may change the perception. In Ningxia in the northwest, one of the world’s youngest wine regions has sprung up in the foothills of the Helan Mountains, winning the once rugged area the title ‘Bordeaux of the East.’ Most vineyards are just three decades old. While they make a number of wines, the signatures come from the Cabernet Gernischt grapes, which yield a ruby red, fruity wine with notes of red berries and green



pepper and Marselan grapes, which produce red wines with aromas of red berries, lychee and raspberry. Make Yinchuan, the capital of Ningxia, your base to explore the vineyards. Perched at 1200 metres, Silver Heights, is a boutique winery that produces vintages that have been served to visiting dignitaries in Beijing.  
**Wine tasting** Silver Heights  
<https://www.silverheights.com.cn/>  
**Closest airport** Yinchuan Hedong International Airport



Roxanich Winery & Design Hotel sits amid rolling vineyards (Above); Ningxia is one of the world’s youngest wine regions, and is gaining attention through wineries like Silver Heights (Top right)

**Yamanashi, Japan**

If the rice wine, sake, is your only association with a traditional Japanese alcoholic beverage, then take a train from Tokyo to Yamanashi, where expansive vineyards lying in the shadow of Mount Fuji, grow the native Koshu grape. About 150 years ago winemakers began turning this pale pink coloured grape, which came to Japan centuries ago via the Silk Road, into a subtle, light and crisp white wine that has recently caught the attention of oenophiles. With notes of yuzu, lemongrass, and nashi pear, it is the perfect accompaniment to Japanese cuisine—be it sushi or sashimi. Less than two hours by train from Tokyo, Yamanashi is perfect for a day visit. Wine tasting rooms with local winemakers like Marufuji Winery or Chateau Mercian come with views of Mount Fuji. And if you have time, take a dip in the hot springs in this stunningly scenic region.

**Wine tasting** Chateau Mercian  
<https://www.chateaumercian.com/>  
 and Marufuji Winery  
<https://www.rubaiyat.jp/en/>  
**Closest airport** Tokyo Haneda Airport

**Kelowna, Canada**

Slowly climbing the popularity charts, British Columbia’s Okanagan Valley is making waves among wine connoisseurs, especially since the Mission Hill Family Estate Winery here was ranked No. 45 in World’s 50 Best Vineyards 2025. Set up base in the vibrant city of Kelowna to explore some of the 40 wineries that lie within a short driving distance. Sip cool-climate favourites such as Pinot Noir, Pinot Grigio, Pinot Blanc, Riesling and Chardonnay at vineyards that sprawl on the volcanic soils between rolling hills and the sparkling blue Okanagan Lake. When wine is not on the agenda, sun yourself at one of the lakeside benches, go kayaking, or paddleboarding on the lake. There’s even an Okanagan Wine & Orchard Museum where one can understand how the wine growing in this region made its mark.

**Wine tasting** Mission Hill Family Estate Winery  
<https://www.missionhillwinery.com/> and  
 Cedar Creek Estate Winery  
<https://www.cedarcreek.bc.ca/>  
**Closest airport** Kelowna International Airport



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● Cable Bay Vineyards on Waiheke Island, offer premium, hand-crafted wines (Above); Bolney Wine Estate is a popular winery in Sussex (Opposite page)

### Waiheke Island, New Zealand

Combine wine and adventure in this tiny island—this is one of the few places in the world where you can zipline to a beach facing wine tasting room. While New Zealand has extensive wine regions, Waiheke Island, just a 40 minute ferry ride from Auckland, oozes a special charm. Amid the low verdant hills, emerald landscape and walking trails lie 30 wineries and cellar doors. Thanks to the mild, coastal climate, it produces some really smooth red wines like syrah and cabernet blends that come from grapes that ripen in sunny climates. Established in the 1990s, Man O' War winery has a gorgeous

beachfront tasting room where one can sip local blends on the silver sand gazing at the blue Pacific. For an adrenaline rush before arriving here, zipline through the Kauri forest; it ends close to the tasting room.

**Wine tasting** Man O' War <https://www.manowar.co.nz/> and Cable Bay Vineyard <https://cablebay.nz/>

**Closest airport** Auckland International Airport

Image by: ©James Ratchford



### Sussex, England

After downing pints of beer at storied British pubs, change track and head out to sip some sparkling wines in the Sussex region, an emerging star in the world of bubbly. Around the 1970's, winemakers woke up to the potential of its rolling green countryside and chalky soil similar to France's Champagne region. Now the Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Pinot Meunier bottled here are winning accolades. Visit some of the pioneering wineries, like Bolney Wine Estate and Rathfinny Wine Estate tucked in the midst of the undulating Downs. Along with the wine tastings, indulge in local Sussex charcuterie and artisanal cheese, then meander along the long coast, hike up cliffs and explore charming English villages like Amberley, Rottingdean and Alfriston. Lying close to London, the Sussex wine region can either be a day trip or a leisurely weekend with Brighton as your base city.

**Wine tasting** Bolney Wine Estate <https://bolneywineestate.com/> and Rathfinny Wine Estate <https://rathfinnyestate.com/>  
**Closest airport** London Gatwick Airport

### Kakheti, Georgia

Take a scenic road trip from the capital, Tbilisi, into one of the world's oldest wine regions where wine that mellows underground in beeswax-lined clay vessels called kvevri produces an amber coloured liquid. This 8,000-year-old tradition in the Kakheti region of eastern Georgia is making a comeback as wine lovers toast the ancient technique. Vines here are laden with local grape varieties—sip whites that come from Rkatsiteli or reds made from Saperavi. Tastings are offered against the stunning backdrop of snow dusted Caucasian mountains, gorgeous valleys and old stone mansions. Do explore the Tsinandali Estate, a former princely estate and now a luxury hotel that has a wine cellar stocked with rare vintages. Don't miss visiting some of the beautiful monasteries such as Alaverdi that played a key role in shaping the region's wine culture.

**Wine tasting** Vazisubani Estate <https://vazisubaniestate.ge/> and Giuaani Winery <https://giuaani.ge/>

**Closest airport** Tbilisi International Airport