

Through the grapevine

Wine tourism is on the rise so, let it add sparkle to your sales, writes Laura French

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A glass of vino rarely goes amiss, but it's even better paired with spectacular scenery, glorious sunshine, local culture and good food. In fact, what's not to love about wine tourism?

It's little wonder the sector is doing so well right now, with wine cruises, vineyard stays and tittle-themed tours filling every brochure and providing a boost to the verdant, rural regions of Europe and beyond.

These holidays are growing in interest, according to Clare Tobin, chief commercial officer at Olympic Holidays. "Wine tourism is increasingly popular, and a visit to a winery or exploring a nearby wine route can really add to a holiday," she says.

A wine-themed break doesn't have to mean the full shebang though; whether clients are looking for a multi-country trip with the occasional tasting, a river cruise with a viticultural twist, or an in-depth stay at a vineyard, they'll find their match – and you'll find your hook to help sell a destination with a fresh approach that no self-respecting wine fan could resist.

▶ STOP: VINEYARD VISITS

Vineyards are a common feature of many escorted tours, stopping off for a tasting or a talk with the vintner – and with someone else to do the driving, guests need not worry about having their glass refilled more than once.

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Vineyard stays and tittle-themed tours provide a boost to the verdant, rural regions of Europe

Specialist operators such as Arblaster & Clarke will plot out a route that takes in the best wine experiences in the region, ranging from Europe and Australia to South America and South Africa. But many mainstream operators put food and drink at the heart of their tours too: the likes of Insight Vacations' slower-paced Country

Roads holidays or Back-Roads Touring's southern Europe and the Med trips are bursting with scenic vineyard stops promising fine wine, tasty nibbles and all-round easy living.

For those shorter on time, suggest a wine-focused excursion instead – they can still pick up a few bottles at cellar-door prices to relive the experience at home. And where better to sip a sultry malbec than in the heart of the Argentinian capital, Buenos Aires?

Urban Adventures has an evening tour around the city that focuses on the edgier side of Argentinian viticulture, stopping everywhere from an art gallery to a vintner store

➔ for unique tasting experiences in unusual locations (Malbec Trail of Palermo, from £86).

Booking those add-ons means boosting commission, of course, so don't stop there. In California, a number of providers offer day tours around the Napa Valley. Funway Holidays has an excursion on the restored, Pullman-suite Wine Train, where a four-course meal is served against a backdrop of rolling vineyards, quaint farmhouses and blooming valleys, with prices from £67 per person.

Combining the Napa Valley with the Sonoma Valley - known as the birthplace of Californian wine, and home to some of the country's oldest vineyards - Attraction World's Redwoods & Wine Country Escape takes in three wineries, which range from a family-owned boutique to a large-scale production plant.

For the best experience, Funway's product manager Malcolm Davies recommends visiting in autumn when it's harvest season and the cabernet, chardonnay and pinot grapes are in production. "Encourage clients to pre-book," he adds. "Popular wineries can reach maximum capacity during busy times."

Closer to home there's plenty going on too, but for something



ABOVE: Napa Valley, California

LEFT: Cape Winelands, South Africa



ASK THE EXPERT

“ Louise Heatley, head of product and contracting, Great Rail Journeys

Tours that include visits to vineyards and wine tastings are always popular. As our tours attract a lot of single travellers, wine tastings are a great way for these customers to relax and get to know each other. And wine regions are ubiquitous with beautiful scenery, making them some of our most picturesque tours.

TOP TIP
Win a case of wine with Fred Olsen Cruise Lines new all-inclusive drinks upgrade. comp.travelweekly.co.uk/FredWine

a little different suggest Croatia. The Dalmatian Coast lays claim to some of the country's best produce, and TravelCube's Dubrovnik, Korcula and Peljesac Tour delves into the heart of it, meandering through the picturesque vineyards and rocky slopes of the Peljesac peninsula before moving on to the island of Korcula, birthplace of explorer Marco Polo, in a day-long trip from the capital with wine tasting included (from £51).

Even more offbeat is Slovakia, worth recommending to those after an alternative, with a budding wine scene peeping out from medieval castles and historic villages. Do Something Different's Small Carpathian Wine Tour from Bratislava takes in its highlights, not least the Red Stone Castle, an ancient fortress and home to historic wine cellars that provide an insight into the viticulture of yesteryear (from £124).

▶ **STAY: WAKE UP TO WINELANDS**

If you've got more hardcore connoisseurs on your hands though, suggest lingering on

a little with an overnight stay. South Africa's Cape Winelands are an ideal option for doing just that, with a handful of boutique hotels scattered among its many vineyards.

"The country sells well for wine tourism for lots of reasons," says John Parker, South Africa product manager for Premier Holidays. "A wide variety of wine estates, from the modern to the traditional, can be discovered here, and it also offers excellent value for money."

For another authentic wine experience in the region, Gold Medal suggests staying at Leeu Estate's boutique hotel, Le Quartier Francais, in Franschoek. Guests can visit the estate's wine studio and family-run vineyard for an immersive, educational wine tasting experience with the pros, or enjoy a bottle over a gourmet dinner, and it's all easily accessible from Cape Town.

If it's more Old World wines that get your clients going though, suggest Italy. Veneto, Piedmont and Lombardy are all worthy contenders, but it's

Tuscany that remains the go-to for agro-tourism, according to Laura Mason, product manager for Citalia. Among the operator's best-selling properties here is the 38-room country hotel Borgo Tre Rose, set in a medieval building on a wine estate in Montepulciano, among the scenic Val di Chiana hills. "They produce their own wine and guests can do tastings and have tours of the vineyards," she says.

Down in Sicily, the operator has added two vineyard-based properties for 2018 in response to growing interest: Relais Santa Anastasia, a medieval abbey near Cefalu; and Capofaro, where guests get the chance to work on the vineyard (from pruning to harvesting) on the vine-covered island of Salina.

It's not the only place visitors can get involved with the harvest. Over in Portugal, the Six Senses Douro Valley, converted from a former 19th-century manor house, offers the chance for guests to try out planting, stomping and blending while learning how Douro wine is produced. There's also a



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RIGHT:
Relais Santa
Anastasia

BELOW:
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→ Wine Academy at the hotel, alongside excursions to the historic Quinta Nova and Quinta do Castro vineyards. The property even has its own mountain-top wine cellar nearby, where visitors can try aged port with a backdrop of lush, tumbling hills.

Seven nights' self-catering in a studio at the Nicholas and Maria Cottages, Anogyra, starts at £547 per person with Sunvil, including flights from Luton to Paphos and car hire. The price is based on two sharing, departing October 2. sunvil.co.uk

Avalon Waterways' 10-day Danube Dreams cruise costs from £2,137 per person including a private home pick-up service, return flights, two nights' bed and breakfast in Prague, a seven-night river cruise (on a full-board basis) and transfers. avalonwaterways.com

It's worth looking beyond the more obvious options too. Cyprus should be on the radar thanks to a developing viticulture scene that's moved away from the classic, centuries-old commandaria dessert wine towards more modern tastes, according to Noel Josephides, chairman of Sunvil. "The Cypriot wine industry has grown and matured," he says. "Wine tourism is definitely on the up here, and wineries are frequently the epitome of Cypriot hospitality."

Many vineyards are concentrated around the foothills of the Troodos Mountains. For those looking to explore in characterful surrounds, recommend the Nicholas and Maria Cottages in the village of Anogyra. It's a cluster of stone-built apartments set in a restored 300-year-old house, and makes a good base for exploring the many wine routes and hamlets that colour the area.

▶ SAIL: WINE CRUISES

Perhaps the biggest trend of the moment, though, is on the cruise front, with river and ocean lines getting in on the game. Among the former is Avalon Waterways, which offers dedicated wine-themed departures on several of its itineraries with onboard tastings, lectures and wine-pairing



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dinners led by experts in the field.

They're selling well, according to David Binns, head of product and commercial, with the French rivers and the Wachau Valley in Austria coming out strongest. For those looking to explore the latter, suggest the 10-day

Danube Dreams, which includes two nights in Prague alongside visits to Vienna, Deggendorf, Linz, Melk and Durnstein, with a wine appreciation departure on October 29, 2018.

Those into the deep reds might be more swayed by a meander through Bordeaux. For that, look to Viking River Cruises' eight-day Chateaux, Rivers and Wine trip, which takes passengers to Cadillac, Libourne, Bourg and beyond with excursions ranging from sampling sweet dessert wines in Sauternes to touring a traditional brandy house in Cognac, and dining at a historic chateau in Blaye.

It's not just river cruise lines homing in on the trend; ocean ships have long been known for serving fine wines, but Celebrity Cruises has stepped things up a gear thanks to its recent partnership with *The Wine Show*.

The link-up includes shore excursions curated by the TV show's team – from the renowned Torres Estate in Barcelona to the iconic Pallavicini family in Italy – alongside tastings and, on *Celebrity Eclipse*, an in-room interactive experience where guests tune in to a specially produced film as they sip from four selected wines.

Passengers will even have the opportunity to learn direct from the show's hosts, Joe Fatorrini and Amelia Singer, on selected departures (the next is on October 9, when Singer will be onboard the 11-night Best of Western Mediterranean trip).

Mingling with the stars over a glass or three at sea? That's the life.



PICTURE: ALASTAIR MILLER