

WINE ROUTES REINVENTED

Cheers to Experiential Travel at its Best

Wine tourism is experiencing an unprecedented boom, with the global market projected to more than triple from \$108.3 billion to a staggering \$358.6 billion over the next decade.

Alongside impressive growth, the global wine sector is undergoing a significant renaissance as wine routes around the world transform their traditional offerings - moving far beyond the conventional tasting room model.

"Gone are the days of simple cellar door tastings," says Antoinette Turner, GM of Flight Centre South Africa. "Today's estates are crafting experiences and excursions that blend adventure and appreciation. The result? A fierce competition to create the most unforgettable wine experiences on earth."

And wine lovers are paying attention. Here's a small selection of 2025's top wine experiences - in both iconic and off-the-beaten-track locations around the world.

MENDOZA, ARGENTINA

Argentina's Malbec trail takes wine tourism to astronomical heights - literally. In Mendoza's high-altitude vineyards, visitors can now combine Argentina's world-famous Malbec with some of the

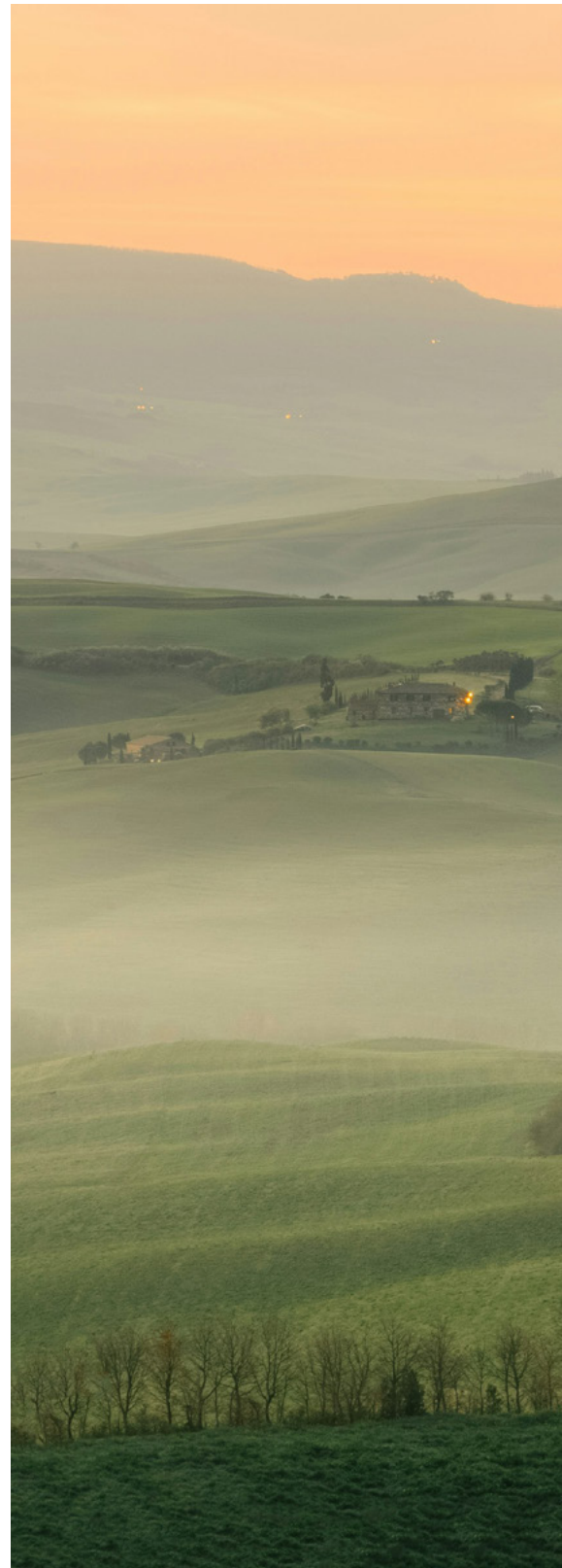
planet's clearest night skies. An exclusive wine and stargazing experience pairs private astronomy sessions with local experts alongside a moonlit tasting among the vines, complete with artisanal cheese platters and a canopy of stars.

Although there are no direct flights from South Africa to Argentina, SAA's new direct flights to São Paulo, Brazil, make onward connections to Buenos Aires fairly straightforward. With no visa required, wine enthusiasts can freely explore not just Mendoza, but also the historic regions of Salta and La Rioja, each boasting centuries of winemaking tradition across Argentina's stunning Andean landscapes.

KOTOR, MONTENEGRO

Increasingly, more South Africans are discovering the wonders of Montenegro. Located on Europe's beautiful Balkan Peninsula, Montenegro offers a more tranquil and budget-friendly experience compared to Croatia.

"Montenegro is known for its stunning coastline, warm water, charming villages,





Tuscany, Italy



food, history and culture,” says Turner. “If you’re looking for a European summer holiday – minus the price tag – Montenegro needs to be on your list.”

And if you’re looking for a very different wine experience, head to Kotor, where Montenegro’s first and only underwater wine cellar began ageing wines on the seabed in 2021. The underwater ageing process accelerates wine maturation, gives the bottles a distinctive appearance (as marine life attaches to them during their time on the ocean floor), and gives visitors a relaxed afternoon on a floating wine bar – complete with fresh fish and impromptu dips in the Adriatic Sea!

TUSCANY, ITALY

Tenuta Torciano, near San Gimignano, offers a magical pairing of wine and truffles. Perfect for foodies,

the estate offers an authentic truffle hunting experience (think truffle dogs, olive groves, vineyards and rolling countryside) followed by a wine tasting – where visitors learn more about ancient truffle-hunting traditions and winemaking while enjoying the fruits of their labour! In fact, Tenuta Torciano offers 45 different experiences, which means you can choose from horse-riding adventures to pasta-making classes – all accompanied by a glass of Tuscany’s best.

NAPA VALLEY, CALIFORNIA, UNITED STATES

Much like Franschhoek’s famous Wine Tram, the Napa Valley’s Wine Trolley trundles between a selection of the valley’s award-winning wineries. Scenic views from the open-sided trolley (a repurposed San Francisco

cable car), commentary from a guide, and a gourmet picnic lunch top off the experience, which also includes a visit to Castello di Amorosa, giving serious 4th-century Tuscan castle vibes in the heart of California’s wine country. This is Napa on a plate, and lucky travellers get to taste the region’s wines, olive oil and other artisanal products along the way!

SWAN VALLEY, WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Australia’s wine regions are legendary: Barossa Valley, Margaret River, McLaren Vale, Clare Valley, Hunter Valley, Adelaide Hills, Coonawarra, and Yarra Valley, to name a few.

But not only is Swan Valley (about 30 minutes northeast of Perth) WA’s oldest wine region, it’s also the only place you can enjoy a “Bush Tucker Tasting” – learning

Napa Valley, California



Vineyard in Mendoza, Argentina

about local Indigenous food and culture with Noongar Elder, Dale Tilbrook. It's wine paired with storytelling, paired with local ingredients foraged on Noongar land.

"Qantas launches a brand-new direct route between Johannesburg and Perth in December," says Turner. "And with South African Airways already flying non-stop five times a week, travelling 'down under' is easier than ever before."

BONNIEVALE, SOUTH AFRICA

Chardonnay lovers, take note: Weltevrede Wine Estate's two-hour guided chardonnay walk takes you deep underground to experience the estate's history, art and wine on a candlelit cellar tour like no other. This unforgettable tasting journey explores the region's unique terroir – and why Weltevrede is dedicated to producing world-class chardonnay. It's perfect for both Chardonnay devotees (you'll get to sample three of the estate's extraordinary wines, Place of Rocks, Calcrete and Poet's Prayer) and curious wine lovers wanting to understand why this grape variety has captured hearts and palates worldwide. And for those looking for something completely different, why not try your hand at creating, corking and labelling your bottle of Cap Classique? Made from the farm's famous chardonnay grapes, of course!

When it comes to wine tourism, Turner believes that South Africa more than holds its own against the likes of Argentina, Chile, France, Georgia, Germany, Italy, Portugal, Spain and the US.

"South Africa is most famous for the Western Cape's Winelands, stretching from Constantia all the way up the Garden Route, but we have incredible estates in the Northern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal too," says Turner. "Domestic travellers need to discover Bezalel Wine & Brandy Estate between the Green Kalahari towns of Upington and Keimoes, or Highgate Wine Estate, Abingdon Wine Estate and Cathedral Peak Wine Estate in KZN – all producing wine in the shadow of the Drakensberg!" 🇿🇦

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