



Grape Escapes®

Grape Escapes

Short breaks and tours for wine lovers





Love Wine...? So do we!

Created by wine lovers for wine lovers, we are a small team of passionate and well-travelled people, who offer an inexhaustible selection of holidays to Europe's premium wine regions.

OUR MISSION: To provide high quality, good value holidays and tours in the premium wine regions of Europe by adopting a flexible, friendly and knowledgeable approach to the planning and delivery of every element of each trip.

From our Premium tours as part of a small group in the world-famous regions of Champagne and Bordeaux, to exclusive birthday celebrations in Tuscany, and mouth-watering gastronomy experiences in Porto, our expertise lies in creating your perfect wine tasting trip.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank our existing customers, for whom we have been delighted to arrange trips and whose feedback has been invaluable to us in perfecting the quality of our tours. A very large number of our customers return to us year on year and many more come through recommendations. The reason that we attract such loyalty from our customers is that not only do we provide an unforgettable trip; we also pride ourselves on giving superb customer service.

This brochure is designed to provide you with information regarding our featured destinations and the types of experiences that we can arrange. Detailed descriptions of the multitude of packages that we offer can be found on our web site, www.grapeescapes.net and our handy Tour Finder allows you to browse all of the tours and filter them by wine colour, grape variety, country, region, price and duration.

However, over half of the trips which we arrange are completely tailor-made to perfectly meet your requirements, therefore please call us on **+44 (0) 1920 46 86 66** or e-mail **info@grapeescapes.net**, and we would be thrilled to discuss your requirements with you and talk you through the near-endless possibilities.



Mark Hallett
Managing Director

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Without meaning to blow our own trumpet...

We're great at what we do! So much so, that our average customer satisfaction scores have remained at over 95% since we started in 2004, and almost all of our clients are happy to recommend us to their friends and family. Not only do we love creating memorable moments for our customers, there are many other benefits in travelling with Grape Escapes. See below for just a few reasons why you should let us arrange your perfect wine holiday. We can arrange your entire trip from your travel, your accommodation, your wine tours to your meals, leaving you to simply relax and enjoy yourself!

PERSONAL SERVICE

We believe that there is absolutely no substitute for individual knowledge and experience, which enables us to deliver a truly personal service to all of our customers. We specialise in a relatively limited range of destinations, so you can be sure that we have a deep and extensive knowledge of our featured regions.



QUALITY

We believe that you deserve the very best value and service, irrespective of whether you are spending £300 or £30,000 on your holiday. We keep our suppliers under constant review with regular inspections and assessments to ensure that the quality of service and welcome meets our high standards. We ask all customers to provide feedback, and this in turn enables us to consistently improve our offerings.

FLEXIBILITY AND CHOICE

We offer a very flexible range of holidays to suit all tastes and budgets, and the majority of our standard packages are available mid-week and weekends throughout the year. In addition, we are able to arrange completely tailor-made trips from scratch! Whatever your requirements, we promise to have a tour for you.

WONDERFUL WINERIES

With every Grape Escape, you will have the opportunity to visit a number of vineyards and wine-makers. We know from

personal experience and consistent feedback that the most enjoyable tours are not necessarily given by the big names, but often by our carefully selected smaller growers who are always excited to share their passion for their wines with our guests. We therefore organise visits to a range of both small and large wineries and on many occasions, you will enjoy the privilege of being welcomed by the wine-maker personally.

GREAT GASTRONOMY

An essential element of every Grape Escapes trip is the opportunity to enjoy the wines as the makers intended; alongside an excellent meal. We take the same care in selecting and recommending restaurants as we do with the rest of your trip. Meals arranged by Grape Escapes range from hearty and traditional as the guests of a winery to multi Michelin-starred tasting experiences; and everything in between.

ALWAYS ON HAND

In the unlikely event that you encounter any problems whilst you are travelling, our multi-lingual Duty Manager service is available to you 24/7 to resolve any issues.

LOWEST PRICE GUARANTEE

We specialise in sending a large numbers of customers to a small number of regions. As a result, we have a buying power across Europe that provides us access to the best rates and consequentially allows us to offer our customers a lowest price guarantee. If you believe that you have found a comparable package for less than the Grape Escapes price, we guarantee to match or even beat it.

FINANCIAL SECURITY

Grape Escapes is a fully bonded ABTA and ATOL tour operator, offering you 100% financial protection. Booking your trip as a package with a reputable bonded tour operator means that in the event of a problem after you have paid for your trip (for example a supplier becoming insolvent), your tour operator is required to make alternative arrangements for you and the payments you have made will be protected.



Tours for Every Taste!

At Grape Escapes, we are confident that we are the best people to come to when planning a trip to any of our featured destinations. We have in-depth knowledge and personal experience of the premium European wine regions, and our close relationships with the local providers enable us to offer fantastic value for money to our customers. We have combined our experience and partnerships to create a wide range of tour types, giving our customers a choice of ready packaged experiences to suit all tastes and budgets. These tours can also be combined to create a multi-region trip, or a more in-depth experience of a particular area. You will find descriptions of our different tour types below, to guide you in your perusal. Of course, you can always use one of our set tours as a departure point to create a more bespoke itinerary, should you wish.

BESPOKE

- A truly personal service, giving you the full benefit of our knowledge and experience.
- Tailored entirely to your specific requirements.
- We can prepare private, bespoke itineraries for any budget from £400 per person upwards.
- Ideal for those looking for a longer trip or to combine several regions.
- Particularly popular amongst honeymooners, guests celebrating a special occasion and those searching for something off the beaten track.

ESSENTIAL

- Designed to provide our guests with a great introduction to the region and its wines.
- Typically two to four days in duration, depending on the time you have available.
- Available over a wide range of dates, usually mid-week and weekends throughout the year.
- Based in city and town centres, these packages include



some transported tours and often some visits on foot.

- The itinerary can be customised by adding additional nights and further visits and tours as required.

EXCLUSIVE

- The ultimate luxury breaks in your wine region of choice, allowing you to sample Prestige Cuvées and superlative wines.
- Featured hotels are predominantly 5* properties.
- Offer wine lovers the opportunity to visit their favourite Châteaux and enjoy the region's finest cuisine, usually at Michelin-starred establishments.
- Available over a wide range of dates throughout the year, mid-week and weekends.
- Tours are conducted entirely privately with a specialist, bilingual guide and luxury transport.

EXTENSIVE

- Longer stays in a region to offer a more immersive experience of a single area and its wines.
- Typically five to seven days in duration.
- These tours tend to be change hotels at least once to experience a number of sub-regions within the geographic area.
- Available on a wide range of dates throughout the year.



HIDDEN GEMS

- These breaks are all about 'Location, location, location'!
- Hand-picked unique and characterful properties offer our guests a truly memorable experience.
- Usually rural and remote locations, so access to a vehicle is highly recommended for many of these trips.
- Relaxed itinerary allowing plenty of time to unwind and enjoy the beautiful surroundings.
- Tours and tastings arranged at contrasting estates for a firm understanding of the region and its wines.

WINE & BEYOND

- These breaks combine wine tasting with other memorable experiences and activities in your preferred region.
- The range includes golf, spa, gastronomy, and historical or cultural highlights.
- Trips are designed to complement the particularities of each region.
- Available across a wide-range of dates to fit with your own availability.
- Accommodation can be rural, so access to own vehicle is often useful.

ACTIVE

- Explore the beautiful countryside of your preferred region.
- In addition to the tours, tastings and meals, get closer to the vines as you enjoy a relaxed pace of life.
- Typical itineraries include cycling or hiking through the vineyards to visit the estates.
- Tours are graded to suit different abilities and preferences.
- Hassle-free arrangements, for example luggage transfers from hotel to hotel are included when required.

GROUPS

- Bespoke wine holidays created to suit your group's requirements and budget.
- Regular clients include wine clubs, rotary clubs, sports & social clubs, and car clubs, but also groups of friends and family, sometimes celebrating milestone birthdays or anniversaries, and even weddings.
- We have the contacts to ensure that each member of your group has an enjoyable break at an extremely competitive price.
- We take on all the hassle and stress of organising every last detail, so that you don't have to.
- Our Duty Manager is on call 24/7 to help you with any issues arising during the trip.

CORPORATES

- We have a wealth of experience in organising memorable corporate wine tasting events in Europe's premium wine regions.
- Conferences, incentive prizes, team-building trips, corporate hospitality events, product launches, gifts – whatever your requirements, we can create the perfect trip.
- We offer the services of an event management company combined with the expert knowledge of a destination management company.
- Each client benefits from our individual attention and support, from planning the trip through to 24/7 assistance whilst you are away.

Grape Expectations...

Unique and Authentic Activities

There are so many things to do on a Grape Escape! Here are some of the activities that we like to include as part of our wine tasting itineraries.

It's all about the Wine

SEE FIRST-HAND THE WINE-MAKING PROCESS AND MEET THE MAKER

The process of wine-making is a complex and specialist art, where the maker has the ability to vary the style of the wine to give different taste nuances. We believe that the best way to learn about how wine is made is to see the process from



start to finish; to meet the people making the wine and to allow them to explain their art to you. Particularly at family-run estates, you will have the opportunity to taste a vast selection of these estates' wines.

VISIT A WORLD-FAMOUS WINERY

Whilst visiting small wineries allows you to meet the maker and learn about the art of wine-making, a visit to a large, world-famous domain will give you an idea of the vast scale



of wine production. Here, you will see millions of bottles aging in vast cellars, many of which were excavated by the Romans. You will of course always have the opportunity to taste the estate's wines.



ADDITIONAL TASTINGS AND PRESTIGE CUVÉES

Following your tour at a prestigious estate, we can often arrange horizontal (several terroirs) and vertical (several vintages) tastings of other terroirs and different vintages from the estate's range. These additional wines can also include Prestige Cuvées, such as Moët and Chandon's Dom Pérignon, or vertical tastings, for example Paul Jaboulet's La Chapelle.



Great Gastronomy

CHEESE TASTING

Wine can be even more enjoyable when it is accompanied by cheese from its region. You can enjoy guided tours of local fromageries and chèvreries, which always conclude with an extensive cheese tasting session. For a more informal experience, local restaurants can also host our groups and provide an early-evening tutored cheese and wine tasting session.

DISTILLERIES

Distilleries can often be found in and near to the premium wine regions, and tours of these properties can be a different and interesting experience. Here, you will discover the maker's secrets and taste a different style of beverage.

GOURMET PICNICS AND BARBECUES

During the warmer months, gourmet picnics or barbecues can be arranged, where you can dine al fresco and enjoy stunning views. Quite often, these meals take place in the vineyards themselves or in picturesque riverside spots that can only be reached by boat or 4x4.

MICHELIN-STARRED DINING

A true gastronomy tour would not be complete without a grand dinner prepared by a Michelin-starred Chef. Many of

HORIZONTAL TASTING LUNCHES AND DINNERS

We arrange grand tasting lunches and dinners with many of our premium partners, where the focus is on the wine that accompanies the meal. During these meals, you will have the opportunity to horizontally taste Premier and Grand Cru wines from a single producer and of the same vintage. The grapes will have been harvested from different vineyards that are often just metres apart, allowing our guests to discover for themselves whether the notion of terroir really exists.

TASTING MASTERCLASSES

For those who would like to discover the real intricacies of wine tasting, many of our partners offer tasting masterclasses. Here, a specialist will present a selection of wines to you and assist you in fine tuning your tasting skills.

TUTORED TASTING SESSIONS

These usually take place in convivial, friendly wine bars in the city centres, where a charismatic and knowledgeable host will guide you through a more informal but very informative tasting session of a range of wines from the region that you are visiting. The wines are usually accompanied by tasters of local delicacies, cheeses and meats.





our partner Michelin-starred establishments provide exclusive menus for Grape Escapes, where our guests will have the opportunity to sample the finest cuisine in the region, perfectly paired with local wines.

Bucket List Ideas

SABRAGE

Whilst in Champagne, we can arrange for you to learn Sabrage – the Napoleonic art of opening a bottle of Champagne with a Sabre! This fun experience will provide you with an impressive party trick to take home with you and you will also learn about the history and culture surrounding it.



COOKERY CLASSES

Each region has its own gourmet specialties, and the secrets of the recipes can be taught to you by a local Chef. You might be taken to scour the local food market first of all, to find the freshest and most flavoursome produce. After preparing a traditional meal, you will then be seated in the dining room to relax and taste the fruits of your labour.

BLENDING WORKSHOPS

Have you ever wondered if you have what it takes to make it as a wine-maker? Under the guidance of the estate's cellar master, you will learn to create your own wine and choose your individual blend. After personalising your wine label and naming your Cuvée, you will then be able to take your wine home with you as a souvenir, or have it shipped to you after maturation in the estate's cellar.

HORSE-DRAWN CARRIAGE TOURS IN THE VINEYARDS

Horses were historically invaluable to vineyard work, and we offer the opportunity to enjoy a relaxing guided tour in a Horse-drawn carriage. Your guide will regale you with fascinating anecdotes about the region and its wine, and a glass or two of wine can also be enjoyed during the ride.



GET YOUR HANDS (OR FEET!) DIRTY!

There are always things to see or do in the vineyards, such as tasting the grapes, helping with the harvest, or seeing the different techniques of pruning - or in the Houses themselves, pressing (including the traditional treading with feet), the first fermentation, management of the new and reserve wines, blending, the second fermentation and bottling. Our tours are designed to be as hands-on as possible, subject to the season.





HOT AIR BALLOON AND HELICOPTER TOURS

Yet another way to explore the vineyards, you can enjoy a glass of wine up in the sky! Some of our partner wine estates and hotels have helipads and guests can enjoy a truly VIP experience, arriving in style at these destinations.

VINEYARD HIKES AND CYCLE RIDES

For a more active experience, you could hike through the vineyards with an experienced guide. Your guide will not only show you wonderful scenery and breath-taking views, they will also explain the influence the landscape, combined with the weather, has on the quality of the grapes. They will explain where and why certain grape varieties are grown, and the overall influence and contribution every element has on the wine itself. Cycling tours are also possible.



Other Activities

GRAPE ESCAPES GUIDES

All of the tours at the Châteaux and estates will be conducted in English. However, if you would like to know more about the history and cultural particularities of the region, we can provide an English-speaking guide who will be happy to accompany you throughout the day.

SPA SESSIONS

Vinotherapy has become particularly popular with groups who are spending more than three nights on a trip, and spa afternoons are a great way to relax and be pampered during your trip. These experiences include extensive use of the spa's Jacuzzi, sauna and hammam facilities, followed by a luxurious face or body treatment.

SPORTS ACTIVITIES

Grape Escapes can arrange many sports activities, such as golf, horse riding, quad-biking, go-karting, bungee jumping, tyrolean circuits, high ropes, water-skiing, canoeing and white-water rafting.

RIVER CRUISES

Taking in the sights on a river cruise is a popular activity and allows guests to discover the region in a different way. You could even enjoy a glass of wine or Champagne along the way.

SHOP WITH THE EXPERTS

We can arrange for a local expert to help you find hidden treasures at fantastic prices, whether you are searching for authentic produce at a food market, beautiful keepsakes at a Christmas market, or the latest fashion at a designer boutique or a top department store.

CULTURE AND ARCHITECTURE

Discover the historical and cultural riches of our many destinations with a guided walking tour, exploring different aspects of the location with the benefit of a knowledgeable and fascinating qualified guide.

MUSEUM VISITS

As well as specialist wine-making museums, we can also arrange for you to visit a wide range of other museums and galleries, catering to your personal interests, and either appreciating the exhibits at your own pace, or with the expertise of a tour guide.



Great Wines, Great Destinations

France

Ranked as the number one tourist destination in the world, France has 37 UNESCO World Heritage sites, and features medieval towns, cities of high cultural interest, beaches, and rural regions that many enjoy for their beauty and tranquillity. Many French artists have been among the most renowned of their time, and France is still recognised throughout the world for its rich cultural tradition.

France is one of the most geographically diverse countries in Europe, containing areas as different from each other as urban chic Paris, the sunny French Riviera, long Atlantic beaches, the Châteaux of the Loire Valley, and the historian's dream that is Normandy. France is a country of rich emotions and turbulent political history, but also a place of rational thinking and enlightenment treasures. Above all, it is renowned for its cuisine, culture and history. Wine and food are closely interlinked; both are part of France's strong cultural and gastronomic inheritance.

Since Roman times, France has proved itself to be the most important wine-producing country in the world, topping the charts in both wine production and consumption. The classic wines of Bordeaux, Burgundy, the Rhône and Champagne in particular have influenced wine producers all over the world, and set international standards. The world's passion for discovering French wine is such that in 2016, France received ten million wine tourists.



Champagne

The delightful Champagne region remains our most popular destination, partly due to its easy access from both Paris and the UK, but most of all because Champagne is synonymous with festivity and celebration. It is the wine of Kings and the King of wines.

Reims is home to no less than four UNESCO World Heritage sites, including one of the finest gothic Cathedrals in northern Europe, where 25 kings of France were crowned. It was on the front line in both the first and second World Wars, and is where the formal surrender was signed at the end of World War II. Reims also boasts four Michelin-starred restaurants.

Epernay is a quaint, historical town and the self-proclaimed capital of Champagne. It is home to one of the most famous addresses in the world, the “Avenue de Champagne”. As you stroll along the avenue admiring the stunning architecture of the Champagne Houses, underneath your feet lie more than a hundred kilometres of tunnels, where millions of bottles of Champagne are ageing.

Near Epernay is the famous hill-top village of Hautvillers, also known as the “cradle of Champagne”, where the iconic monk Dom Pérignon discovered the value of blending wines to create the very best Champagne.

Champagne is the most famous of all sparkling wines. Blended from base wines using up to three different grape varieties (Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Meunier), the best Champagne Houses use as many as 100 different base wines to ensure the consistency of their non-vintage Champagne each year. The Blanc de Blancs Champagnes (made from

100% Chardonnay) are clean and elegant with great ageing potential, while the addition of Pinot Noir adds backbone, body and structure. Meunier adds floral overtones and fruitiness.

The best Champagnes, classed as Grand Cru, are made from grapes grown in just 17 of the 320 Champagne villages. The next level down are the Premier Cru Champagnes, and there are just 43 Premier Cru villages.

Champagne is made using the ‘Méthode Champenoise’, which is strictly regulated by various laws set down by the Comité Interprofessionnel du Vin de Champagne. What makes Champagne unique is the second fermentation and the long ageing in bottle (a minimum of 15 months for a non-vintage and three years for a vintage, but many are aged far longer).

Typical Champagne Houses that are visited on our Champagne tasting tours include world-famous estates such as Veuve Clicquot, Moët & Chandon, Mumm, Taittinger and Billecart-Salmon, and no trip to Champagne would be complete without visiting at least one of our carefully-selected boutique Champagne Houses, which offer an authentic, behind-the-scenes experience. We especially recommend learning Sabrage, the Napoleonic art of opening a Champagne bottle with a sabre.



Bordeaux

For many people, the very name ‘Bordeaux’ conjures up images of grand Châteaux and equally grand wines. Whilst wines from around the world have improved in quality over recent years, the top Châteaux of Bordeaux still set the standards against which the very best wines are measured.

The rich history of Bordeaux is divided between France and England. In the 12th century, Bordeaux became part of the English kingdom, when Eleanor of Aquitaine married King Henry II of England, and remained so for the following three centuries. The area became the biggest wine supplier to England (especially of red ‘claret’), and the wine trade played an important role in the development of the city. The cultural heritage of Bordeaux is impressive, and the 18th century architecture of its buildings is absolutely stunning. Bordeaux is a vibrant, dynamic and cosmopolitan city, officially classified a “City of Art and History”, and was selected Best European Destination in 2015.

The Bordeaux wine region boasts 50 different appellations. The wines are produced from a blend of the 13 grape varieties permitted under the Bordeaux AOC regulations. The majority of Bordeaux wine is red, with red wine production outnumbering white wine production six to one. Having been praised for centuries, the Bordeaux Châteaux are able to sell their wines for exalted prices. This means that they can be ruthlessly selective when it comes to choosing the best grapes from which to make their wines, and that no expense is spared in the wine-making process.

Outside the city of Bordeaux, the premium wine regions spread out in almost all directions. Heading north towards the estuary of the Gironde is the Médoc, home to the most

famous Châteaux of Bordeaux including Margaux, Lafite, Latour and Mouton-Rothschild. To the east, heading upstream along the Dordogne river is the beautiful medieval town of Saint-Emilion (also classified as a UNESCO World Heritage site) and its vineyards, and the equally prestigious appellation of Pomerol. To the south of the city are the vineyards of Graves and beyond these, the rolling slopes of Sauternes (famous for its sweet wines, which gain their unique aromas and taste from noble rot.) The territory between the river Dordogne and the river Garonne is called the Entre-Deux-Mers which literally means “between two seas”.

Bordeaux is just 45 minutes from Arcachon Bay and its beautiful seaside and delicious seafood. The Basque Country, the Pyrenees and Spain are only two hours away.



Burgundy

Norman abbeys, Châteaux with their glazed rooftops, ducal towns and charming villages make Burgundy a historic region with a glorious heritage. It is a land of rolling hills, waterways, world-renowned gastronomy, and of course, vineyards.

Dijon is the historical capital of Burgundy: first a Roman settlement, then home to the Dukes of Burgundy from the early 11th century until the late 1400's, it was a place of great wealth and power. The city centre is one of the best preserved in France and half of the buildings are over 200 years old. Dijon's architecture is epitomised by the Burgundian roofs, which are glazed with geometric terracotta tiles in green, yellow and black patterns.

Beaune is considered to be the wine capital of Burgundy. It is famous for the Hospices de Beaune, founded in 1443, one of the country's most glorious historic buildings. Every year, a charity auction sale is organised at the Hospices, where a large proportion of the wines produced in the Hospices vineyards are sold. The money is then used to improve, preserve and restore this amazing building.

The most famous Burgundy wines, known as "Burgundies" are red wines made from Pinot Noir grapes, and white wines made from Chardonnay grapes. The top wines of Burgundy come from the Côte d'Or, which is further subdivided into 25 different villages or communes across two main subregions. The Côte de Nuits is home to the majority of Burgundy's red Grand Crus and the wines here are reputed to be majestic, intense and firm. The Côte de Beaune is where most of Burgundy's white Grand Crus can be found. The wines

produced here are some of the world's longest lived, most complex and stylish white wines.

The number of AOCs (specific, legally defined subareas producing premium wines) in terroir-conscious Burgundy is higher than any other French region. In contrast to Bordeaux, where classifications are awarded to particular Châteaux, Burgundy classifications focus on geography rather than the producer. Burgundy is famous for its 'climats' (small parcels of vines with unique terroirs) which have recently been classified as UNESCO World Heritage Sites. Burgundy wines are highly acclaimed, and the region is home to some of the most expensive wines in the world. Wine merchant Harry Waugh once famously said, "The first duty of wine is to be red... the second is to be a Burgundy," a sentiment echoed by many who have visited this beautiful region!



Chablis

Although Chablis belongs to the Burgundy wine-growing area of France, it is an isolated region away to the north-west of the main stretch of vineyards, closer to Champagne than to the rest of Burgundy.

Monks from the Abbey of Pontigny were the first to plant Chardonnay grapes here on the slopes surrounding the River Serein, realising the potential of the soil and the microclimate in this area. Chablis is known as the ‘Golden Gate of Burgundy’, and there is evidence of its lasting prosperity all around this quiet, medieval stone town with its beautiful timbered houses.

The typical wine of the area is a dry, full-flavoured white wine, greeny-yellow in colour, made exclusively from Chardonnay grapes. It is characterised by high acidity, due to the northern climate of the region, and mineral nuances, derived from the chalky limestone soils. Most of the entry-level Chablis is unoaked, and vinified in stainless steel tanks, while some of the Premier and Grand Cru wines are sensitively aged in oak to complement the intense minerality of the soils.



Sancerre

Located to the east of the main block of Loire appellations, in the exact geographical centre of France, Sancerre is a stunningly beautiful medieval hilltop village.

Not only does it boast breath-taking views across the surrounding vineyards, it also produces perhaps the most highly-regarded Sauvignon Blancs in the world. The village is situated on the west bank of the Loire River, facing the equally renowned Pouilly-Fumé on the opposite bank.

Tucked in amongst the picturesque cobbled streets is the Maison des Sancerre, a wine exhibition located in a 14th Century house. As well as its wine, the area is known for its goat's cheese, especially the Crottin de Chavignol from the neighbouring village of Chavignol.

Sauvignon Blanc grapes grown on the chalky and flinty river banks produce crisp, dry, mineral white wines, whilst Pinot Noir grapes are used to make small quantities of light-bodied, cherry flavoured red and rosé wines. The northern, continental climate of this part of the Loire valley makes for delicate and tangy rather than powerful flavours.



The Loire Valley

The Loire Valley is a lush green land on gently undulating countryside, interspersed with charming towns and magnificent Châteaux. The region boasts some of the most famous historic Châteaux in France: Amboise, Chinon, Chambord, Azay-le-Rideau, Villandry and Chenonceau to name but a few. The region's Châteaux and cultural monuments illustrate exceptionally the ideals of the Renaissance and of the Age of Enlightenment. The rivers Loire, Cher, Indre and Vienne meander gracefully through the region, which is also known as 'the Garden of France'.

Angers is the historical capital of Anjou; a lively, verdant city with a rich cultural life. The quaint medieval centre is absolutely lovely. Here, you will find the Château of the Plantagenets as well as one of the biggest medieval tapestry ensembles in the world.

Saumur is renowned for its National School of Horse Riding, the "Cadre Noir", and for its annual horse shows. The beautiful Château of Saumur overlooks the pretty town, and was built almost exclusively from the gorgeous but fragile Tuffeau stone.

Tours, the capital of Touraine, is the largest city in central France and is an old but lively university city with a quaint medieval quarter and a 900 year old Cathedral. Tours is also the original home of the French language.

The Loire Valley offers a broader range of wines than any other small wine-growing region, and boasts over 70 appellations. It is the home of Chenin Blanc, it is the only region in the world to specialise in Cabernet Franc and it also produces superb botrytised dessert wines. White, rosé, red, still, sparkling, dry and sweet wines are all made within 40 miles of Tours.

Loire Valley white wines have rich, fruity aromas and a refreshing acidity which is ideal with food. Primary grape varieties are Melon de Bourgogne, Sauvignon Blanc and Chardonnay, as well as the characteristic Chenin Blanc. The grapes used for rosé Loire Valley wines are Cabernet Franc, Grolleau and Pinot Gris. Red wines tend to be fresh, fruity and comparatively light. They are produced from Gamay, Cabernet Franc, Malbec and Pinot Noir. The Loire Valley also offers a great range of elegant sparkling wines.



Alsace

Located in the eastern part of France, along the German border, Alsace is the smallest region in metropolitan France; however, it is a region packed with history, culture, gastronomic delights, and of course, vineyards. The region offers a blend of modern French customs and traditional Germanic cuisine and architecture. The local Alsatian winstubs (wine bistros) are friendly and authentic places, ideal for trying a glass of Alsatian wine, and the area boasts some fabulous Michelin-starred establishments.

The region is particularly famous for its picturesque villages and its large number of churches and castles, which have miraculously survived five centuries of wars between France and Germany. It is also famous for wine-making, with 170km of vineyards spanning the Route des Vins d'Alsace, and the stunning forests and lakes of the Vosges Mountains provide a breath-taking backdrop. Strasbourg is the region's capital and the seat of several prestigious European institutions. Its historic centre, 'Petite France', situated on an island in the middle of the river Ill, is a classified UNESCO World Heritage site, and is lined with timbered houses dating from the 16th and 17th Centuries. Other places worth a visit or even a stopover are Colmar, a lively town with a rich and varied architectural heritage, and Riquewihr, a charming village virtually unchanged since the 16th Century. During the winter, festive lights and Christmas markets throughout the region create a truly magical atmosphere.

The wines of Alsace are largely white and display strong Germanic influences - it is the only region in France to produce mostly single varietal wines, typically from similar grapes to those used in German wines. The wine-makers of Alsace have even adopted the German practice of naming their wines according to the grape variety. Lovers

of Alsace wine are most familiar with the four "noble" varieties: Riesling, Pinot Gris, Muscat and Gewürztraminer. Other wines, made from the Pinot Noir grape, are pale red and occasionally rosé. Sparkling wines, known as Crémant d'Alsace, are also produced in the region. The drier climate in the region allows the grapes to stay on the vines further into the autumn, which results in the grapes becoming riper before they are harvested. Hence, the region is famed for its Late Harvest wines, but also for its botrytised dessert wines. Almost all production in Alsace is of AOC wine, as Alsace is not covered by a Vin de Pays region.



The Rhône Valley

The Rhône Valley became a prestigious wine region following the arrival of the Romans in 125 BC. The wine growing areas within the Rhône region cover approximately 200km, from Vienne in the north to Avignon in the south. For the ultimate Rhône Valley wine experience, we offer an unforgettable six day Rhône by Rail break.

The Northern Rhône's climate is controlled by the mistral wind, which defines its harsh winters and warm summers, and the region boasts many prestigious wine-making villages such as Hérimitage and Condrieu. Lyon, the third biggest metropolis in France, is the capital of the region. A major centre of business with a reputation as the French capital of gastronomy, the city is famed for its historical and architectural landmarks, and is a UNESCO World Heritage site.

The History of the Southern Rhône is rich and varied. The towns of Orange and Vaison la Romaine have significant Roman heritage; the theatre in Orange is in fact the best preserved example in Europe. The capital of the department is Avignon, which was the seat of the papacy from 1309 to 1377: the Pope's Palace dates from this period. It was at this time that the whole of the region was acquired by the Catholic Church and many of its vineyards were planted. In addition, the city is famous for the Saint-Bénézet bridge (Pont d'Avignon), of which just four of the original 22 arches remain.

Once outside the towns, the region boasts some spectacular scenery and attractive villages. The Dentelles rise up behind the villages of Gigondas, Vacqueyras and Beaumes de Venise, whilst the Mont Ventoux provides an even more spectacular backdrop to the region. In addition to the vineyards on

the slopes, this area is home to 45% of the lavender that is grown in France, and almost $\frac{3}{4}$ of all French truffles.

The red wines of the Northern Rhône can be identified by green olive and smoky bacon aromas; the Syrah grape is the only red grape variety permitted in red AOC wines of this area. The white wines of the Northern Rhône are generally blends of Marsanne and Rousanne or pure Viognier.

The Southern Rhône is most famous for its big red wines; in particular, the wines of Châteauneuf-du-Pape can be superb. However, the villages surrounding the Dentelles offer some very attractive, less famous wines at a fraction of the price. In particular, some of the wine-makers in the villages of Gigondas, Vacqueras and Rasteau are producing some excellent wines



Provence

Sun, sea and fabulous wines- what more could a wine lover want in a holiday destination?

Home to some of the most beautiful villages in the country, this stunning region is characterised by bright and picturesque scenery, breathtakingly beautiful beaches and mouth-watering, flavoursome cuisine. From exclusive luxury resorts for jet setters along the Côte d'Azur (such as Saint-Tropez and Cannes) to unspoilt, rustic countryside for adventure enthusiasts, Provence really does have something for everyone!

Provence is located in south-eastern France, on the Mediterranean coast and close to Italy. It is a popular holiday destination amongst French nationals as well as international travellers due to its sunny weather, colourful countryside, wine, gastronomy and its culture rooted in tradition. This vast and beautiful region merits a long trip and many of our guests enjoy combining several of our Essential and Hidden Gem breaks to fully discover the wines. The *joie de vivre* attitude here is contagious, and Grape Escapes customers particularly enjoy sipping pale rosé in quaint local cafés and picnicking in the pretty vineyards during their Provence wine tours.

The Provence region's capital, Marseille, is the second largest city in France, and boasts an impressive 300 days of sunshine per year. Its large port has always played an important role in the wine trade. Our favourite activities include savouring a delicious bouillabaisse straight from the port, and marvelling at the amazing Calanques (narrow, steep-walled inlets along the coast) on a cruise along the coastline.

Wine-making in Provence began 2,600 years ago, when the Greeks founded the city of Marseille. The climate of the region is ideal for vine-growing; it enjoys warm summers with long hours of sunshine and rather mild winters with little rain. Soil types tend to vary a lot and the wind plays a key role in the quality of the wine.

Today, the region is famed for fresh, summery rosé wines and these wines account for over half of the region's production. With 600 producers, Provence is the largest producer of rosé wines in the country. The Côtes de Provence is Provence's largest AOC followed by the Côteaux d'Aix-en-Provence. The best wines of Provence remain their reds, and the Bandol AOC is perhaps the most famed internationally, producing particularly superb spicy and full-flavoured wines. The white wines of Cassis are also highly-regarded. The main grape variety that you will find in Provence wines is Mourvèdre and it is often blended with Grenache and Cinsault. The region is also famous for Pastis, its traditional liqueur flavoured with anise.



Languedoc-Roussillon

Sunny and varied Languedoc-Roussillon is the southernmost region of mainland France, along the Mediterranean coast. It boasts the medieval walled city of Carcassonne, a UNESCO World Heritage site, famous for its Roman and medieval fortifications, and the lively and charming city of Perpignan, which has been both a French and a Spanish city at different times in its history. Other attractions in the Languedoc-Roussillon include the huge sea resorts of Cap d'Agde, Palavas-les-Flots and le Grau-de-Roi and of course, we mustn't forget the Canal du Midi for boating, walking and cycling holidays.

The Languedoc-Roussillon is one of the largest vineyard area in the world. It has been enjoying a renaissance over recent years, due to vast improvements in the quality of the wines.

Beaujolais

Beaujolais is in the southern district of Burgundy in eastern France, an area of pretty villages and sloping vineyards planted almost exclusively with Gamay grapes.

Beaujolais wines are made by semi-carbonic maceration (fermentation without oxygen), which results in a light, low-tannin, brightly coloured and fruity-flavoured wine. The most notorious is the Beaujolais Nouveau, which is released on the third Thursday of November after the harvest every year. But the better wines are delicious, mature Beaujolais wines made in its ten cru villages and often aged for up to seven years.



Italy

A trip to Italy is a feast for the mind, body and soul. Bursting with history, culture, art, natural beauty, gastronomy, and of course wine, Italy embodies 'la dolce vita'. Italy was not only the centre of the Roman Empire, but also the birthplace of the Renaissance, source of countless great works of visual art, sculpture, architecture, monuments, literature, music, opera, science, humanism and exploration.

As a reflection of its cultural wealth, Italy is home to 53 World Heritage Sites, the most in the world, and is the fifth most visited country. Italy is globally one of the most important centres for fashion and design, boasting many of the greatest fashion houses in the world. The cuisine is simple and healthy, yet richly varied and inventive. Local cheeses, cold cuts, breads, truffles, olive oil, pasta, pizza, risotto, seafood, desserts, gelatos and coffee are just a few of the gastronomic highlights.

The second largest wine-producing country in the world, Italy has the most extensive variety of individual wine styles, differing local climates and indigenous grapes in the world. Italian viticulture, dating back over 3000 years, is a mix of fierce tradition and sophisticated modern methods.



Tuscany

Located in central Italy, Tuscany is widely considered to be the true birthplace of the Italian Renaissance. Home to some of the world's most influential and artistic minds such as Da Vinci, Botticelli and Dante, not only is the region famed for its superb wines, Tuscany also boasts beautiful landscapes, a prestigious artistic and academic culture and unique gastronomic traditions. The fascinating museums, impressive number of World Heritage sites and magnificent nature reserves make it an extremely popular tourist destination, attracting millions of tourists each year. Some of the world's most precious works of art, such as Botticelli's Birth of Venus and Michelangelo's David are to be found in this region.

Tuscany's capital, Florence, lies on the river Arno and was one of the wealthiest cities in medieval times. A UNESCO World Heritage site, it is regarded as one of the most beautiful cities in the world, with its elegant piazzas, Renaissance palaces, academies, parks, churches and monasteries. Some of the most famous landmarks include the Pitti Palace, the Ponte Vecchio and the Duomo. Other UNESCO World Heritage sites in this region include the historic city of Siena, and the charming medieval town of San Gimignano.

Wine has been produced in Tuscany since the 8th Century BC. The region has a long and rich history deeply linked to wine production. Tuscany is Italy's third most planted region, however, the soil is poor here and producers focus on low yields to produce higher quality wine. It is home to some of the world's most notable wines, and 80% of the wine produced here is red. The Sangiovese grape is Tuscany's most prominent grape, used in Chianti, Brunello di Montalcino and Vino Nobile di Montepulciano. Other widely planted red grape varieties are Canaiolo, Colorino, Malvasia Nera and Mammolo. For white wines, the Trebbiano grape is the most prominent, followed by Malvasia, Vermentino and

Vernaccia. The prestigious wine area of Chianti has been producing wine since the 13th Century, and is known as the 'Bordeaux of Italy'. Tuscany is also famed for its sweet dessert wine, Vin Santo (meaning Holy Wine).

The region has more recently become famous for its "Super Tuscan" wines, an unofficial category gathering top quality wines produced with Tuscan and international grapes but not following the rules of the DOCG (Controlled designation of origin) category. Initially born as a movement promoting innovation, the Super Tuscans led to the creation of the IGP (Indicazione geografica protetta – protected designation of origin) category.



Piedmont

Piedmont, which literally means “the foot of the mountain”, is the second biggest region of Italy. Piedmont is famous for having inspired the great authors Stendhal, Dickens, Flaubert and Hemingway, who were bewitched by the beautiful countryside, the iconic river Po, and such sights as the magical mirrored waters of Lakes Maggiore and Orta.

The region has remained attached to its rural culture and traditions. It is renowned for its quaint vineyards and its delicious local products, such as wine, cheese, and truffles amongst others. Most wineries are family-run and welcome visitors for tours and tastings in a friendly atmosphere.

Gastronomy lovers will delight in Piedmont’s superb cuisine, which boasts a symphony of tastes, unique flavours and a rich culinary heritage. The king of the region’s gastronomy is the White Alba Truffle, which is rare and precious and is characterised by an intense aroma and a taste that is unrivalled. Cheese lovers will be spoilt for choice here as well as those with a sweet tooth, who will without a doubt savour the exquisite tastes of the famous Gianduiotti chocolates.

Turin is the capital of the area, and is famous for its diverse architecture and animated cultural life. The breath-taking Turin Cathedral is the major Romantic church of the city, and houses the famous Turin Shroud. South of Turin, Bra is the birthplace of the Slow Food Movement, which promotes traditional and regional cuisine and encourages sustainable farming. Ideally located in the heart of the Piedmont vineyards, Alba is famous for its wines, its white truffles and its annual truffle festival. The seat of the confectionery group Ferrero is also based in Alba, and Nutella was invented here after the Second World War.

The main grape varieties of the region include Nebbiolo, Moscato, Barbera and Dolcetto. For wine lovers, Piedmont is well-known for its fine red wines, with Barolo being the jewel of the crown. To be at its best, this robust and velvety wine should undergo a long period of ageing, similar to another of the region’s great wines, Barbaresco. Those who prefer white wines will be able to satisfy their palates with Arneis and Gavi or with Erbaluce di Caluso and Cortse. We must not forget Asti Spumante (a sparkling wine, originally produced using the méthode champenoise) and Moscato d’Asti (a still wine), which often accompanies desserts. The Piedmont vineyards of Asti were granted UNESCO World Heritage status in 2014.



Prosecco

Venice, the capital of the picturesque Veneto region, oozes romance. Built on more than 100 small islands, the city appears to rise out of the water. There are no cars or roads, making canals and boats the only way to travel to most areas of the city. Famed for its impressive Grand Canal, its unique setting and its breath-taking architecture, “must-sees” include the Piazza San Marco and its Basilica, the Ducal Palace and the Bridge of Sighs, and no trip to Venice would be complete without a ride in a traditional gondola.

The vineyards surrounding the tiny towns of Valdobbiadene and Vittorio Veneto make up the rural home of Prosecco. Picturesque and tranquil, we can arrange wine tours based in quaint, family-run boutique hotels and on-site at some of the region’s wineries.

Fantastically fruity and fizzy, Prosecco sales have boomed astonishingly over the past few years. This Italian sparkling wine is both light and refreshing, and its simplicity is perhaps what makes it such a popular choice for aperitifs, celebrations and just about any other occasion.

Unlike Champagne, only one grape variety, Glera is used in the production of Prosecco and again unlike Champagne, the wine is not aged in the bottle. Instead, the second fermentation takes place in huge tanks, and the resultant wine is intended to be enjoyed young. A less expensive alternative to Champagne, Prosecco drinkers are particularly fond of its light and easy-to-drink style.

Slightly lower in alcohol than other sparkling wines, most Proseccos are characterised by a softer, sweeter taste and notes of white peaches, pears and apples. The “fizz factor” in Prosecco can either be foamy Spumante, which can be

compared to Champagne, or the less-expensive, lightly sparkling Frizzante.

The most prestigious and sought-after Proseccos are the Valdobbiadene Superiore di Cartizze, which are the true jewels in the Italian sparkling crown. The small cru, Cartizze, produces a high quality sparkling wine with an intense, semi-sweet taste, and the wines make a perfect accompaniment to desserts and sweet pastries as well as salty and mildly spicy dishes.

Overtaking Champagne in popularity, over 30 million litres of Prosecco were consumed in the UK last year and this figure is set to continue to rise. There have been a few rumours circulating on the “grape vine” that the unprecedented demand for Prosecco will result in an eventual shortage, so we recommend travelling sooner rather than later, just in case!



Valpolicella

Valpolicella can be found in north-eastern Italy, to the east of Lake Garda, surrounding the city of Verona. This combination alone makes for an ideal holiday: the sunshine and delicious food of Italy, Lake Garda with its stunning lakeside resorts, water sports and picturesque castles and fortified towns (such as Sirmione); and Verona (UNESCO World Heritage site), home of Romeo and Juliet, with its historic city centre, Roman amphitheatre and world-famous opera festival, and its chic and fashionable shopping streets.

Valpolicella produces more red wine than any other region in Italy apart from Chianti. The light, fruity red wines are made mostly from Corvina, Rondinella and Molinara grapes. Recioto and Amarone della Valpolicella use grapes partly dried in the sun to increase the flavours and alcohol content. Valpolicella Superiore is made by the practise known as 'ripasso': a Valpolicella wine is re-fermented over the pressed dried grape skins left over from the production of an Amarone or a Recioto. So many different types of wine to try!

Sicily

Sicily, an island to the south of the Italian mainland, boasts a hot climate and a long wine-making tradition. It retains the visible remnants of more civilisations than most destinations, boasting Greek temples, Roman mosaics, Crusader castles, Moorish churches and Baroque monuments. And let's not forget Mount Etna, Europe's largest active volcano!

Because of its perfect climate and robust indigenous grapes, Sicily is the largest area under vine in Italy's provinces, producing more grapes than Bordeaux. The north-east, in the foothills of the Peloritani mountains, is home to the delicate red Faro wine. The mountainous region around Etna gives rise to some quality red wines. South-east of the island, the Scirocco wind batters the hardy Nero d'Avola grape, used to produce Etna wine. Around Vittoria in the South, red Frapato grapes produce Cerasuolo di Vittoria wine. Sweet, fortified Marsala wine is also produced in Sicily, using the solera system established for sherry. On the smaller islands just off Sicily, the dessert wines Moscato (or Passito) di Pantelleria and Malvasia delle Lipari are made by drying the grapes out in the sun and wind before fermenting them.



Amalfi Coast

Campania is a large wine-producing area on the south-west coast of Italy, the Amalfi Coast, around the cities of Naples and Sorrento, and Mount Vesuvius. Deemed an outstanding example of a Mediterranean landscape by UNESCO, the Amalfi Coast is a popular holiday destination. The area is rich in history, architecture and art, especially the canvases of Caravaggio, and the Royal Palace of Caserta. You can visit the apocalyptic ruins of Pompeii in the shadow of Mount Vesuvius, and relax in the mineral-rich thermal waters from the volcano. Sample the musical treats of the Ravello Festival, and the chic luxury of Capri; eat pizza and spaghetti in their birthplace of Naples, and drink Limoncello made from the lemons grown in the area.

Campanian vineyards benefit from the mineral-rich soil around the volcano. All types of wine are produced in the area, including the famous Lacryma Christi, which is available as red, white, sparkling, dessert and fortified wines! Further inland from Vesuvius, Aglianico grapes produce southern Italy's only red DOCG in Taurasi.

Puglia

Flat and sun-scorched, this is the eastern-most area of the 'Mezzogiorno' (South Italy), including the heel-shaped peninsula of Salento and the Adriatic port of Bari. Where the north of Puglia is slightly hillier and more connected to the customs and wine-making practices of central Italy, the south is almost entirely flat and retains a strong connection with its Greco-Roman past. Apulia is one of the richest archaeological regions in Italy, boasting enough *castelli*, *cattedrali* and *palazzi* to keep even the most demanding of history buffs content, as well as sandy beaches, nature reserves, dramatic caves, medieval quarters and several hundred miles of coastline to enjoy.

Huge volumes of grapes are grown in Puglia: more than the whole of north-west Italy, because of the warm climate and vigorous local grape varieties, and 14% of the nation's wine is produced here, both red and white. Another local speciality is the dessert wine Aleatico di Puglia, made in the passito style, where the wine is given a second fermentation over fermented sun-dried grapes.



Spain

The climate of Spain, its geographic location, popular coastlines, diverse landscapes, historical legacy, vibrant culture and relaxed lifestyle have made Spain's international tourist industry the third largest in the world. The lush staccato of the flamenco musicians and dancers, the roar and drama of a bullfight, the friendly buzz of the tapas bars: these are the most popular images of Spain.

They may well be clichés, but that makes them no less true. All these pulse with a rhythm that is uniquely Spanish. Spain also boasts no less than 45 UNESCO World Heritage sites, and plenty of incomparable art and architecture. And don't forget the culinary specialities of Spain: chorizo, iberico ham, manchego cheese, olive oil, Galician seafood...

Spain is Western Europe's second oldest wine producing country, and has more land devoted to vineyards than any

other country in the world (22% of Europe's wine growing area). The majority of Spain's finest wines come from the north, where the mountainous landscape keeps the vines protected from the intense heat of the summer. Spanish wine-makers today combine the finest characteristics of tradition with progressive modern techniques.



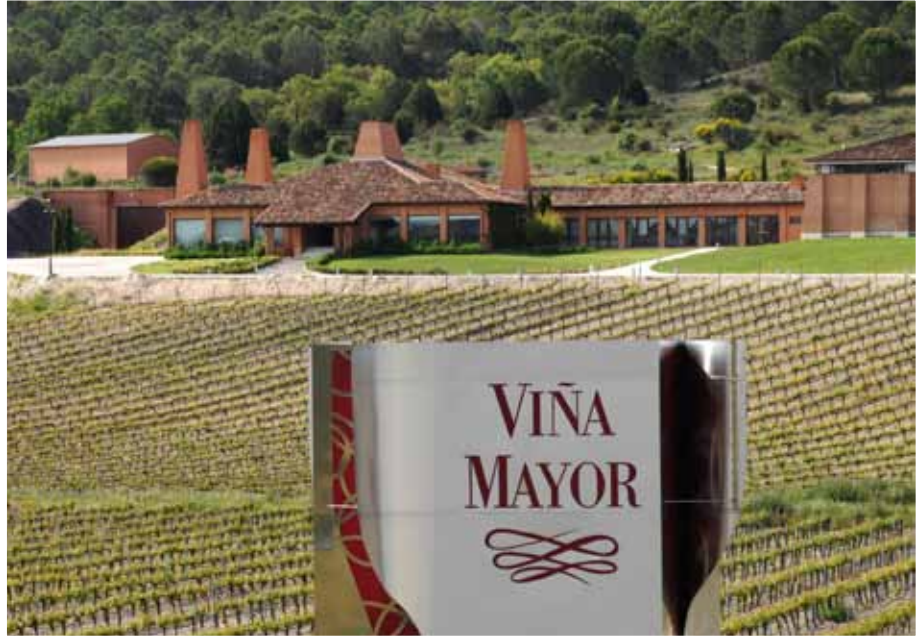
Rioja

La Rioja, located in northern Spain, is a wine-making province which is bordered by the Basque country, Navarre, Aragón, and finally, Castilla y León. It is named after the river Oja, which flows through the region with the river Ebro. Formerly known as Logroño, due to the fortified site around which it was developed, it is the second smallest autonomous community in Spain and has the smallest population. Although the region has changed its name, the capital is still known as Logroño. The Mediterranean climate provides hot, dry summers and cool, wet winters. Like its wine, the gastronomy of La Rioja makes it a notable Spanish region. Riojan cuisine is characterised by the astonishing abundance of local produce. The higher areas produce primarily pork products such as chorizo, black pudding and cured Serrano ham, and dishes such as chuletilas al sarmiento (lamb chops on vine cuttings) and freshwater Riojan trout can be tasted in the region's traditional restaurants.

Rioja is well-known for its hilltop medieval towns, impressive mountains and huge monasteries. The capital, Logroño was an old Roman settlement and was the main seat of the Basque witch trials, part of the Spanish Inquisition in 1609. It is filled with beautiful plazas and parks, such as Carmen Park, which possesses a large quantity of flora and fauna, and the Town Square, which has hosted numerous public events and concerts over the years. The town of Haro is extremely important in terms of the region's wine culture, as the coveted Haro Wine festival is held here each year. It is home to many of La Rioja's great bodegas (wineries) and is known, in particular, for its fine red wines.

DOC Rioja wines are made from grapes grown in parts of Navarre and the Basque province of Álava, as well as in La Rioja itself. The three wine regions of Rioja are Rioja Alta, known for its "old world" style of wine, Rioja Alavesa, producing wines with a fuller body and higher acidity and Rioja Baja, whose wines are deeply coloured and often

highly alcoholic. La Rioja produces red, white and rosé wines which are usually a blend of various grape varieties. The most widely-used grape variety in La Rioja's red wines is Tempranillo, which contributes the main flavours and ageing potential. Other popular grape varieties include Garnacha Tinta, Graciano and Mazuelo. For the region's white wines, Viura is the most prominent grape and is typically blended with Malvasía and Garnacha Blanca.



Ribera del Duero

Located in Spain's northern plateau, and stretching 115km along the banks of the river Duero, Ribera del Duero is approximately ninety minutes from Madrid by road. With its Romanesque architecture and natural beauty, the region has become increasingly popular as a wine tourism destination. There is even a museum dedicated to Spanish wine-making in the impressive Moorish castle in Peñafiel, designated an official national monument. The region also boasts the 16th Century Catedral de Burgos, which became a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1984, and the 11th Century Ermita de San Baudelio, declared a national monument in 1917. Over the last few decades, the region has become a premier source of world-class red wine. The region is characterised by its flat, rocky terrain, and its most famous vineyards can be found around Peñafiel and Aranda del Duero. It benefits greatly from soils deposited by the river Duero and the terrain provides ideal growing conditions for the Tempranillo grape, known locally as "Tinto Fino".

Wine-making in this region goes back over 2,000 years to the monks from the Burgundy region of France, but Ribera del Duero wasn't officially designated a D.O. region until 1982, when an organisation of wine growers aspired to promote their wines. Since then, the area has been transformed through the replanting of vineyards and the investment in modern winemaking techniques by both small, family-run wineries and large corporations. The region's 240 vineyards occupy around 120 square kilometres, and Ribera del Duero is also home to arguably Spain's most prestigious wine, Vega Sicilia.

The appellation's terroir and the native Tempranillo grape are combined to create bold and expressive red wines that are characterised by their complexity, intensity and powerful fruit flavours. The Albillo grape is the only white variety that can be found in the region, but this wine is primarily distributed locally. Wines from Ribera del Duero are delicious when they are young, but in common with the wines of

La Rioja, they also have the capacity to age magnificently. Ribera del Duero wines are becoming increasingly popular, producing 60 million litres of wine annually.

On a Grape Escapes trip to Ribera del Duero, you can expect to enjoy traditional meals in convivial settings, discover innovative and modern wineries, and marvel at the awesome sight of Cathedral-style cellars stacked high with barrels.



Cava

Spreading west from the buzzing city of Barcelona, in the north-east corner of the Iberian Peninsula, Penedès in Catalonia is the heart of Cava country. Proud of its own identity and language, Catalonia is one of Spain's richest regions, and also one of the most independent-minded. Catalonia is in fact a showcase of European landscapes on a small scale, so whatever your favourite surroundings, you can be sure to find them here.

Barcelona itself is surrounded by beaches on one side, and mountains on the other, and offers a huge selection of cultural and architectural delights, most notably Antoni Gaudí's Sagrada Família Cathedral. Penedès is located on a huge plateau 600 metres high, and surrounded by even higher mountain ranges, where the climate ranges from Mediterranean to Pyrenean. Also in Catalonia you can find the lively beach resorts of Costa Brava and Costa Dorado, as well as the rugged Pyrenees Mountains, which are an ideal terrain for hikers.

If you can, try and watch a demonstration of 'castells': human towers up to ten persons high, which have been recognised by UNESCO as a 'Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity'. Also worth a visit near Montserrat is the Benedictine monastery, Santa Maria de Montserrat, with its world-famous Escolania boys' choir. And of course, whilst in Spain, be sure to indulge in plenty of delicious tapas and paella!

Cava (which literally means underground cave or cellar) has been made by the *méthode champenoise* (locally called the *Método Tradicional*) since the 1860's, which is what creates the famous effervescence. It must be aged for at least nine months, although the best Gran Reserva will be aged for at least 30 months. In 2001, it overtook Champagne to

become the world's best-selling sparkling wine.

The town of Sant Sadurni d'Anoia in Penedès is the source of about 90% of Spain's Cava production, but the grapes are grown all over Catalunya, because, unlike other Spanish wine DO classifications, Cava is not confined to one geographical area. The main three grapes used to make Cava are the native Spanish grapes Parellada, Macabeo and Xarel·lo, although, more recently, some Cavas can be up to 100% Chardonnay. Red grapes Garnacha, Monastrell and Trepat can also be used, or Pinot Noir introduced to give a rosé Cava.



Rueda and Toro

Castilla y León, to the north-west of Madrid, is the ancient heartland of Castilian Spain; a land of Cathedrals, monuments and castles. The area covers a fifth of Spain, and is sheltered from the extremes of the Atlantic climate by the Leon mountains. The Duero river crosses it from east to west, and beyond the valley, the area is characterised by wild, flat, high plains. There are many beautiful medieval towns in this region full of history and culture, such as Toro, Valladolid, Salamanca and Segovia.

Rueda is best-known for its dry, aromatic white-wines produced from Verdejo and Viura grapes, and more recently, Sauvignon Blanc. There is also a sweet fortified wine similar to sherry made in Rueda, called Palido for the pale, fino style, and Dorado for the darker, nuttier style. Toro produces fruity and robust red wines especially from the Tempranillo grapes, known locally as Tinta de Toro.

Galicia

Spain's Galician coast is currently fairly undiscovered by tourists, and we suggest that you visit before the secret gets out! The landscape of secluded coastal coves, granite peaks, deep river valleys and primeval forests is beautiful and unspoilt, the local traditions and culture are Celtic, and the native language is closer to Portuguese than Catalan Spanish. Galicia claims to have the best seafood in Spain, and is also the home of Santiago de Compostela Cathedral, visited by millions of pilgrims following the Camina through Europe.

Galicia's best-known wines are far from the Spanish stereotype: they are delicate and aromatic whites. There are five DO's in Galicia: Monterrei, Rías Baixas, Ribeira Sacra, Riberio and Valdeorras. The crisp, white Albariño wines from the Rias Baixas area have become especially popular in recent years. Because of the steep slopes of the Sil and Mino river canyons, often 45 degrees or more, the grapes usually have to be harvested and carried to the top of the slopes by hand, earning the official title of 'heroic viticulture'.



Priorat

Located in the Catalonia region of north-eastern Spain, west of Barcelona, Priorat is a land of steep vineyards, harsh cliffs and imposing rock-faces. The region was occupied by the Muslims until the 12th Century, and there are many Moorish remains, such as the fortress of Siurana. The Carthusian Monastery of Scala Dei is the area's most prized monument, founded by monks from Provence in the 12th Century. More recent landmarks can be found in the Modernist or Art Nouveau architecture of the wineries built by Cèsar Martinell, friend and follower of Antoni Gaudí.

Priorat is the second smallest DO in Catalonia, yet it boasts one of the best reputations. It is one of only two wine regions in Spain to qualify as DOCa, the highest qualification level for a wine region according to Spanish wine regulations. The wines produced here are mostly full-bodied red wines from Grenache and Carignan grapes. The flavour of these wines is greatly influenced by the 'llicorella', a dark brown slate full of quartzite, where the vines grow.

Jerez

Jerez is located in Andalucia, south-western Spain, between Cadiz, Seville, and the beaches of the Costa de la Luz. The city of Jerez de la Frontera is where Flamenco singing and dancing began; where the Cartujana breed of fine horses was created (which can be admired at the Royal Andalusian School of Equestrian Art) and where the Grand Prix motorcycle race is held every May. Jerez' 11th Century Moorish fortress, or Alcazaba, has been partially restored, showing the Muslim inheritance of the region.

Sherry has been produced for more than 2000 years within the triangle of the three sherry towns: Jerez de la Frontera in the centre, and Puerta de Santa Maria and Sanlucar de Barrameda on the coast. Sherry is Spain's most labour-intensive and complex wine, made by a unique process of fractional blending of old and new wines in a network of barrels known as the Solera system. It is made from Palomino grapes, grown in chalky soils, and fortified with grape spirit.



Portugal

Perched on the South-west edge of continental Europe, Portugal has the oldest borders in Europe, and an exceptional range of stunning landscapes, lively cities and a unique cultural heritage, where tradition and modernity blend together in perfect harmony. Its superb cuisine, fine wines and hospitable people make this a tourist paradise of the highest quality. Portugal boasts more bacalhau (dry cod) recipes than there are days in the year, and is also renowned for its many cheeses, pastries and sweet dishes.

Portugal is the fifth largest European wine producer, and dedicates the highest percentage of its agricultural land to viticulture. The indigenous grape varieties grown in Portugal are very different from those found elsewhere in Europe. Alongside its many white, red and rosé wines, Portugal is also famous for creating port, a sweet fortified wine produced in the Douro Valley (where the terraced vines are classified a UNESCO World Heritage site) and shipped around the world

from the city of Porto. This is one of the few places in the world where foot treading of the grapes is still practiced. Portugal was the birthplace of one of the first demarcated wine regions in the world, in 1756, and is also the world's most important source of cork.



Porto and the Douro Valley

Located along the Douro river estuary in northern Portugal, Porto (also known as Oporto) is Portugal's second largest city. It is also one of Europe's oldest centres, founded as an outpost of the Roman Empire. With over 150 classified monuments, Porto was registered as a World Heritage site by UNESCO in 1996. You will discover an astonishing number of historical sites around this fascinating city; from Visigothic and Celtic villages, Roman roads, bridges and Castros, to Romanesque and Gothic Churches and Cathedrals that were built during Medieval times. However, the city also boasts many contemporary and artistic features, and is easy to explore due to its compact nature.

Visitors enjoy taking picturesque walks to the world-famous wine lodges in Gaia, taking in their beautiful surroundings on a scenic river cruise in a traditional Rabelo boat, or travelling further afield to visit other styles of wineries in the Douro region, such as Vinho Verde (literally 'green wine', but actually meaning 'young wine', often slightly effervescent).

The Douro Valley is home to some of the world's oldest vineyards, with production here dating back two thousand years. In fact, the Douro vineyards were the first in the world to be classified in 1756, with some of the oldest vineyards carrying the acclaimed title of UNESCO World Heritage Site. The region's unique terroir is an unrivalled home to the mainly indigenous grape varieties grown in the steep and rocky hillsides of the mountainous eastern reaches.

Port is a fortified wine that is produced exclusively in the Douro Valley. The wine received its name in the latter half of the 17th Century from the seaside city of Porto, where much of the product was brought to market or for export to other countries in Europe. Port is made by adding grape spirit (brandy) to the wine during fermentation. Adding brandy before the fermentation has finished means that the

wine retains some of the natural sweetness of the grape, creating a smooth, rich and round taste. There are many different styles of port available, and each one has its own characteristics. Reserves and Late Bottled Vintages tend to express intense berry fruit flavours, whereas Aged Tawnys boast a sublime rich mellowness. This vast range of different styles make Port ideal for food pairing dinners, although it is traditionally served at the end of a meal with cheese, or as a digestif. Port is also renowned for being one of the best wines to enjoy with chocolate or cigars.



Alentejo

Covering the south-eastern third of Portugal, Alentejo has recently become one of the hottest names on the Portuguese wine scene. The sun shines all year round on the breathtakingly vast plains, dotted with olive trees and cork oaks. Prehistoric dolmens exude mystery, whilst walled towns and medieval castles hint at an Arabian influence. The coast is rugged and ideal for surfing, and inland, the flat expanses make horse riding, cycling and hiking easy. This is the perfect place to slow down and enjoy nature. The UNESCO classified towns of Évora and Elvas boast impressive Roman and medieval architecture; Monsaraz and Marvão dazzle with their stunning hilltop locations, and the opulent buildings in Estremoz, Borba and Vila Viçosa showcase the marble that is quarried nearby.

As the area does not have a long tradition of wine-growing, it is excellent pioneer country, and experimentation has led to rapid improvements in the quality of the wines. The main grapes grown are Roupeiro for white wines, and Periquita for full-bodied red wines, and wines tend to be produced and bottled in co-operatives.



Wine and City Breaks

Paris

Endearingly known as the ‘City of Lights’ because of its reputation as the intellectual centre of the world during the Age of Enlightenment, and also because it was one of the first cities to adopt street lighting, Paris continues to justify this title with its beautifully illuminated monuments, streets and shops. The list of attractions to visit is endless, topped by the Eiffel Tower, the Louvre art museum (boasting Da Vinci’s Mona Lisa), the Musée d’Orsay (focusing on French impressionist painters), the Centre Georges Pompidou (for modern art), the Cathedral of Notre Dame and the Arc de Triomphe.

The historical district along the river Seine in the city centre is classified as a UNESCO Heritage site. Unlike many other of the world’s capitals, Paris has never been destroyed by

catastrophe or war, and so the city has preserved even its earliest history in its streets and architecture, some of which is over a thousand years old. Paris is overflowing with music, art, theatre, fashion and gastronomy to enjoy, or you can sit back and participate in its café culture, watching the chic Parisian world go by. Venturing outside of the city centre, you can visit Louis XIV’s wonderful palace of Versailles (also a UNESCO site), or for something slightly different, the two theme parks of Disneyland Paris. The Champagne area is only an hour and a half east of Paris, so visiting both in one trip is highly recommended. Experiences we can arrange for you in Paris include meals on the Eiffel Tower, river cruises along the Seine, picnics in one of the pretty parks, private VIP shopping or museum visits and dinner-shows at the Moulin Rouge or the Lido Cabaret.

Lyon

Lyon is the capital city of the region of Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes, situated at the point where the Rhône and the Saône rivers meet, and the third largest city in France.

The city is known for its gastronomy, and the best place to sample the local cuisine, for example the ‘mâchon’ (a brunch of mostly cold meats) is in a ‘bouchon’; a traditional Lyonnais restaurant. With Beaujolais and Burgundy directly to the North, and the Côtes du Rhône directly to the South, you will be spoilt for choice for local wines to accompany your meal! Lyon is also renowned for its historical and architectural landmarks; part of it is registered as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Its centre reflects 2,000 years of history from the Roman Amphithéâtre des Trois Gaules, medieval and Renaissance architecture in Vieux Lyon, to the modern Confluence district on the Presqu’île peninsula. A network of ‘traboules’, covered passageways through the middle of buildings, connect Vieux Lyon and La Croix-Rousse hill. The most emblematic monument of the city is the 19th century neo-Byzantine basilica Notre Dame de Fourvière. Two recently excavated Roman amphitheatres are now used for the annual Nuits de Fourvière music and theatre festival. Lyon played a significant role in the history of cinema: it is where Auguste and Louis Lumière invented the cinematographe. It is also known for its light festival, the Fête des Lumières, which begins every 8 December and



lasts for four days. Lyon is the French capital of the “trompe l’œil”, a very ancient tradition where paintings on the sides of buildings look so realistic as to ‘trick your eye’. A new attraction in town is the architecturally striking ‘Confluences’ museum of science and anthropology, full of interactive exhibits. The most accessible regions from Lyon are the Northern and Southern Rhône, Beaujolais and Burgundy.

Rome

The eternal city of Rome, Italy’s capital, is the birthplace of Western civilisation: a sprawling, cosmopolitan city with nearly 3,000 years of globally influential art, architecture and culture on display – the whole city is basically a giant open air museum!



Ancient ruins such as the Forum and the Colosseum evoke the power of the former Roman Empire, once the political and military capital of the world; whilst there are plenty of masterpieces testifying to the greatness of Rome in the Renaissance era, when it was second only to Florence as the artistic and cultural centre of the world. The historic centre of Rome is listed by UNESCO as a World Heritage site. But a trip to Rome is as much about lapping up the dolce vita lifestyle as gorging on art and culture. Idling around picturesque streets, whiling away hours at street side cafés, people-watching on pretty piazzas – these are all an integral part of the Roman experience. Within the boundaries of Rome, you can also find the independent state country of the Vatican City, headquarters of the Roman Catholic Church and home of the Pope, which houses Saint Peter’s Basilica and the Vatican Museums with their great masterpieces, such as Michelangelo’s Sistine Chapel frescoes. Florence, Piedmont and Veneto can be easily reached from Rome by car or train.



Venice

Venice, ‘La Serenissima’, rises out of the lagoon in all her faded grandeur, her palazzi and piazzi concealing many a mystery from bygone days, when Venice was the queen of the seas and centre of a wealthy republic, where both trade and the arts flourished. The city is made up of 118 islands, and has no roads, only canals, linked by over 400 bridges. The Grand Canal, which meanders through the centre of the city, is lined with opulent Renaissance and Gothic palaces, many of which are now art galleries or prestigious hotels. The grandest of these is the Doge’s palace on Saint Mark’s Square, beside the mosaic-covered Saint Mark’s Basilica. Saint Mark’s Square itself has been referred to as the world’s greatest open air theatre, and watching the world go by whilst listening to the string quartets at the various cafés is a form of entertainment in

itself. The highlight of any trip, however, must be a gondola ride through the maze of backwater canals, serenaded by your own gondolier. There is plenty more music to be heard, notably in the city’s many churches and the famous opera house ‘La Fenice’, which like its namesake has risen twice from the ashes; this was after all the home of Vivaldi and the Gabrielis. Lovers of art and film are thoroughly spoilt, especially with the Venice Film Festival and the Venice Biennale art exhibition, and the legendary Carnival of Venice has also been revived, giving a taste of history and mystery to all who take part. The delicious seafood from the lagoon pairs beautifully with the local Prosecco, to be rounded off by gelato or pasticcinis (sweet pastries). You might even catch a glass-blower or mask-maker at work, creating miniature works of art for you to take home. The closest vineyards to Venice are the Prosecco vineyards, and day tours from the city are very popular amongst Grape Escapes guests.

Madrid

Madrid is the geographical, historical, political, cultural and gastronomical centre of Spain. Madrid's landmarks include the 17th Century Royal Palace of Madrid (the largest royal palace in Western Europe); the Teatro Real with its restored 1850 Opera House; the El Retiro Park, founded in 1631, with its popular boating lake, and peopled with beautiful sculptures and fountains; and the



Golden Triangle of Art, located along the Paseo del Prado and comprising three art museums: the Prado Museum (artists from the 12th to 19th Century, such as Goya and Velázquez), the Reina Sofía Museum (for 20th Century art, including works by Dali, and Picasso's *Guernica*), and the Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum. Although Madrid is considered one of the top European destinations for art museums, fans of architecture are no less spoilt. Many of the historic buildings of Madrid date from the Spanish Golden Age, in the 16th and 17th Centuries. No evening in Madrid would be complete without sampling local delicacies in the tapas bars, or witnessing authentic flamenco music and dancing, or even zarzuela (traditional Spanish musical theatre). The Las Ventas bullring is the world centre for bull-fighting, with seating for 25,000 spectators, or you could even visit the home of the football team Real Madrid, the Santiago Bernabéu stadium! Ribera del Duero is two hours from Madrid by car, and the other Spanish wine regions can be easily accessed by train.

San Sebastián

San Sebastián (known as 'Donostia' in the Basque language) is a coastal city on the Bay of Biscay in Spain's mountainous Basque Country. It is best known for the Playa de la Concha and Playa de Ondarreta, beaches framed by a picturesque Belle Epoque bayfront promenade, and world-renowned restaurants helmed by innovative chefs. Playa de la Concha also boasts La Perla, recognised as one of the best spas in Europe. If surfing is what you are after, head to the Zurriola beach. In its cobblestoned old town (Parte Vieja), reminiscent of a smaller Paris, upscale shops sit alongside vibrant pintxo bars pairing local wines with bite-size regional specialties (the Basque version of tapas). Despite the city's small size, events such as the San Sebastián International Film Festival and San Saebastian's Jazz Festival (Jazzaldia), and its world-renowned concert halls, the Kursaal and the Victoria Eugenia Theatre, have given it an international dimension. The rich cultural offerings of the city were enhanced by its time as European Capital of Culture in 2016. San Sebastián and the surrounding area are home to a high concentration of restaurants boasting Michelin stars, it is in fact the city with the most Michelin stars per capita in Europe. If you want to gain a deeper insight into all things Basque, the San Telmo Museum in the Old Town was inaugurated in 1902, and is dedicated to Basque Culture and History. The building itself marries together a 16th century gothic / renaissance convent, and a contemporary vanguardist building. If you venture up Mount Urgull, you will find the 12th century Mota Castle, or you can take the funicular railway up Mount Igueldo and enjoy the magnificent views and the charming old amusement park, which opened in 1911. The Rioja region is just over an hour and a half from San Sebastián by car.





Barcelona

Barcelona, the capital city of Catalonia, is an absolute dream of a city for anyone to visit, no matter what your tastes or interests.

You can enjoy the warm Mediterranean sun whilst exploring the architecturally-stunning streets (featuring no less than eight UNESCO World Heritage sites), relaxing on the beautiful sandy beaches, walking in the luscious green parks and wooded hills, perusing the markets of Las Ramblas and La Boqueria for crafts, souvenirs and delicious fresh produce as well as the living statues and street artists, or sampling the Pintxos (local tapas) at the many lively bars. The most striking buildings

in the city are the ‘modernista’ and neo-Gothic creations designed by Gaudí, in particular the mesmerising, fairy-tale construction of the Sagrada Família Cathedral. The Gothic Quarter is at the very centre of the city, where many of the buildings date back to medieval times, and some even as far back as the Roman settlement. It is also gastronomically one of the most dynamic cities of Europe. Art lovers should note that Salvador Dalí, Joan Miró and Antoni Tàpies are all Catalanian, and Pablo Picasso created cubism whilst living in Barcelona in his youth. Works by all of these artists can be admired in the city’s many art galleries. Barcelona has great access to all of the Spanish wine regions by car or train, however the Penedès (Cava) region is the closest.

Bilbao

Bilbao is nowadays most famous for the iconic architecture (by Frank Gehry) and art collection of the Bilbao Guggenheim Museum, but in the past, it was the commercial hub of the Basque country and a busy port, exporting iron mined in the quarries around Biscay.



The old town (Casco Viejo) has buildings dating back to the 14th century, and is packed with fascinating shops, bars and cafés. The ‘Semana Grande’ festival in August (also known as the Aste Nagusia) includes a variety of typically Basque entertainments, including music, strongman games, and bullfighting. A recent addition to the city’s cultural offering is the Azkuna Zentro, an old wine warehouse redesigned by Philippe Starck, which now hosts a contemporary multicultural programme, with events and exhibitions to suit every taste. The complex also houses a cinema, a sports centre and a rooftop swimming pool with a transparent floor. You can catch a performance at the Palacio Euskalduna, the Teatro Arriaga, or the stunning Moorish Campos Eliseos Theatre, or watch the 100% Basque football team of Athletic Bilbao play at the Estadio San Mamés. There is a charming funicular railway that take you to the top of the hill of Artxanda to admire the panorama. Bilbao’s rich culinary offering ranges from pintxos (tapas) bars to Michelin-starred restaurants. You can also sample wines aged in the world’s first successful underwater cellar, Crusoe Treasure, which supplies wines to many of the Michelin-starred restaurants in town. Another unusual experience is crossing the world’s oldest transporter bridge: built in 1893, the Puente Colgante (hanging bridge) can be traversed either in a suspended gondola, or by walking across the 45 metre high walkway. Even the underground metro system in Bilbao is worth a visit, with its futuristic design by Sir Norman Foster. Bilbao is an hour and a half from Rioja by car.

Lisbon

The capital city of Portugal, and one of the oldest cities in the world, Lisbon overlooks the Atlantic Ocean, proudly guarded by the Belém Tower (wishing the Portuguese explorers of old a safe and prosperous journey) and the 9th Century Moorish São Jorge Castle (in the Arabic quarter on the hill above the city). Lisbon is bursting with culture and great places to eat, stay and party – and it also happens to be the cheapest city break destination in Western Europe. The city is rich in architecture (a patchwork of Romanesque, Gothic, Manueline, Baroque, Modern and Postmodern), but also art, fashion, film and music. The historic centre of the city can be best explored on foot, or by wooden tram. For culture vultures, the Gulbenkian encompasses two art museum, two auditoriums and beautiful landscaped gardens, or you could visit the stunning Museum of Art, Architecture and Technology. The seven hills surrounding Lisbon offer exciting hikes and stunning views, whilst the beaches around Lisbon are ideal for surfing, or simply relaxing and sampling the varied seafood. Further afield, the charming hill-top town of Sintra and the royal fishing town of Cascais are also worth a visit. The Douro Vineyards can be easily accessed by car or an hour-long picturesque train journey.





Spirit Tastings

Cognac

Located in South-western France on one of the pilgrimage routes to Santiago de Compostella, Cognac is a pretty town on the river Charente, whose fate has been closely linked to that of the Liqueur of the Gods ever since the 17th Century.

The Cognac vine-growing area is the largest white grape vineyard in France. At the start of the 17th Century, the Dutch invented the process of double distillation: the wine was distilled twice to create a brandy that was both very stable and highly concentrated, making it much cheaper to transport. During delays in loading the cargo, it was noticed that this brandy (eau-de-vie in French) seemed to get better as it aged in the barrels. And so Cognac was born.

Today, the flat-bottomed boats or 'gabares' that once carried barrels full of brandy now host cruises on the river. The region is delightful all year round, and its Tuscan feel, the passion and skill of the Cognac-makers and the prestige of the grand Cognac Houses make it an enticing destination.

Whisky

Scotland – land of unspoilt wilderness, mountains, lochs and islands; but also of bagpipes, haggis, golf and Celtic culture. The country is rich in legends, history, culture and festivals, which can all be found in great concentration in the incomparable city of Edinburgh.



A visit to Scotland would be incomplete without paying homage to Scotch (short for Scotch Whisky). The word Whisky is an anglicisation of the Classical Gaelic word *uisce*



(or uisge) meaning ‘water’. Distilled alcohol was known in Latin as aqua vitae (‘water of life’), which was translated to ‘uisge beatha’ in Scottish Gaelic.

Whisky is made from fermented grain mash, and distilled (usually twice, but sometimes up to twenty times) in a copper vat. Various grains (which may be malted) are used for different varieties of whisky, including barley, corn, rye, and wheat. Once distilled, whisky is aged for at least three years in wooden casks, generally made of charred white oak. Scotch whiskies are divided into five main regions: Highland, Lowland, Islay, Speyside and Campbeltown.



Gin

London – home to Buckingham Palace, the Tower of London, Big Ben, the Queen... and gin! Inseparable from British culture, gin derives its predominant flavour from juniper berries, blended with a variety of other botanical ingredients. It started life as a herbal medicine in the Middle Ages, and its popularity exploded in Great Britain in the 18th Century, whence it spread throughout the British Empire. In the 19th Century, gin re-connected with its medicinal roots when it was added to quinine-rich but unpalatable tonic water, to combat malaria. Today, it can be drunk neat, with tonic or as an ingredient in many classic cocktails, including most famously the Martini,

as drunk by that most quintessential of British gentlemen, James Bond.

There are two methods of creating gin: compounded gins are made by infusing botanical ingredients and natural extracts into a neutral spirit; whereas distilled gins are created by re-distilling spirits which have had botanical ingredients added to them. Common botanicals used, apart from juniper, are orris and angelica root, orange and lemon peel, liquorice, anise and cardamom, but producers are now using more and more exotic and unusual ingredients to create new flavours.



Multi-Region Holidays

Whilst the majority of our standard packages are three or four days in duration, we have found that a large number of our guests, particularly those arriving from outside of Europe, would like to spend more time in these wonderful locations, and visit more than one region on a single holiday. Discovering a larger number of destinations and tasting a wider variety of wines across one single trip sounds perfect to us! The team at Grape Escapes have travelled extensively in Europe, not just in the wine regions, and can therefore recommend and arrange tailor-made tour extensions to other regions or cities, for example Paris in France, or Bilbao in Spain.

Our three and four day tours (particularly our Essential and Exclusive Breaks) can easily be combined for a longer trip; however, to provide inspiration, we have put together a number of set Multi-Region breaks to areas that marry together perfectly, both oenologically and logistically! Either a hire car or rail travel between destinations will always be included.

If you cannot find the Multi-Region Break that you are looking for on our web site, please don't hesitate to contact us by telephone or e-mail, and a bespoke itinerary can be created to perfectly suit your requirements.

Our expertise in the European wine regions is unrivalled, and whilst most of the tours on our website feature just one region, these can be easily combined to provide a longer tour to offer a flavour of several regions.





Group Trips

If you want to have an unforgettable wine holiday with your group, but don't want the hassle of organising it, then why not let us help? Whether you are travelling together to celebrate a special occasion, to spend precious time together socialising, or to focus on learning more about wine and wine-making, Grape Escapes specialises in creating the ideal tour to match your group's requirements and budget (from £200 to over £2,000 per person!). Our trips can include non-wine-related activities as well, so we can offer something for those who do not wish to drink, as well as for the wine lovers. Your quote would include accommodation, meals, tour transport and activities, as well as travel to and from the region if you wish.

We have organised birthday trips, hen and stag weekends and trips for many other groups. From wine clubs to rotary clubs, from sports and social clubs to car clubs and even weddings, we can create a bespoke wine holiday to suit your group's individual requirements. Anything from a classic car rally in Champagne to a week touring the best wineries in several wine regions in France, we have the contacts to ensure that the whole of your group have an enjoyable break, as well as allowing us to offer fantastic value tours at extremely competitive prices. We will guide and advise you every step of the way, leaving you free to enjoy the trip.

Here are a few ideas to get you started:

Birthday parties and **Hen and Stag** groups travel to celebrate and these trips are all about having an enormous amount of fun. Centrally-located hotels are ideal for these groups, who will usually want to enjoy the city's night life. Festive activities such as Sabrage and gala dinners are also popular with these groups.

In comparison, **gastronomy** and **wine clubs** travel primarily to learn as much as possible during their trip and

experience vineyards and wine-making up close. They will generally want to visit a larger number of estates and taste a wide range of wines. Master classes, cookery schools and horizontal tasting meals are ideal for these groups.

For **car clubs**, it is all about the driving. As well as having a partly transported tour (so that the drivers can enjoy the extensive tastings), Grape Escapes can also arrange activities such as self-drive treasure hunts, which allow car club members to explore the region in their own cars and also offers them the chance to take souvenir photos of their cars in front of some fabulous buildings and backdrops.

Cycling tours are another option for more active groups wishing to immerse themselves in the vineyard-dominated countryside, as well as really earning those gourmet dinners! We can even arrange for your luggage to be transported from hotel to hotel if you wish to experience a few different locations on your trip.



Corporate Events

Are you looking for something different to impress your clients, or an out-of-the-ordinary team building trip? Then come to the experts. With over a decade of experience in arranging corporate events in the premium wine regions, The team at Grape Escapes are able to cater for all your professional needs, including conferences, AGMs, incentives and prizes, team building, corporate hospitality, product launches and gifts.

We are not just an events management company with no specialist knowledge, who will merely act as a broker; we are a full service trip organiser who can offer the services of an events management company with the expert local knowledge of a destination management company, giving individual attention and support to each client

Grape Escapes have a reputation for providing excellent and memorable company events, and many of our clients return to us again and again. Our clients have included multi-national banks and financial institutions, insurers, large retail operations, pharmaceuticals and oil companies. We specialise in creating the ideal trip to match your company's specific requirements and budget. Anything from an exclusive product launch in a prestigious Champagne House, or a gala dinner in a classed growth Château in Bordeaux, to a 200 delegate AGM on a private island in Provence, we have the contacts to ensure that your guests have a wonderful time and that your event runs smoothly.

In order to offer you the flexibility to arrange a perfect event, all of our corporate trips are completely bespoke and tailored entirely to your requirements. We make our clients' trips memorable for all the right reasons, and provide value for money, irrespective of budget. We want you to have the corporate trip that stands out from the rest, where your clients or colleagues remember the experience for its quality and enjoyment.

Grape Escapes Gifts

What can you buy for the wine lover who has everything? A Grape Escape could be just the thing! We are pleased to offer a range of gift voucher solutions as detailed below.

Monetary voucher - At the simplest level, we can create a monetary gift voucher for any amount from £100 to £1000 or more. The recipient is then free to choose any of our tours to the region of their choice and can add additional money to it as they wish.

A gift voucher for a specific type of tour but with unspecified dates. For example, a Prestige Champagne tour staying in a 4* hotel, valid for the next two years.

A gift voucher for a particular tour on a specific date. If, upon receipt, the recipient needs to change this date, it is usually possible, provided sufficient notice is given.

Details of all of the public tours that we offer can be found on our website. Alternatively, we also create bespoke private tours for those who would prefer a more individual approach

to their trip; for example, to include a visit to the maker of the recipient's favourite wine or Champagne.

All of our gift vouchers are customised to include details of exactly what has been selected and your own personal greeting. Discretion is guaranteed and all documentation can be sent to a third party address to ensure that the surprise is not discovered by the recipient. For a really special present, why not attach the gift card to a bottle of Champagne?

If you want to give an unforgettable and unique present, be it for a wedding, anniversary, birthday, retirement or any other occasion, then we'd be delighted to take care of it for you!





Financial Protection

As a member of ABTA, an Association approved by BIS, Grape Escapes has provided a Bond to meet the requirements of the Package Travel, Package Holidays and Package Tours Regulations 1992. In the event of Grape Escape's insolvency, this Bond provides security for:

- Non-flight inclusive packages commencing in and returning to the UK.
- Packages excluding flights to and from your destination which are offered by Grape Escapes.

Please note that bookings made from overseas must be made directly with Grape Escapes and not via an agent. In the above circumstances, the following will apply:

- A refund of your prepayments if you have not yet travelled; or
- Repatriation where your non-flight inclusive package commences in and returns to the UK if you have already travelled.

AIR TRAVEL

Many of the flights and flight-inclusive holidays on our website are financially protected by the ATOL scheme. But ATOL protection does not apply to all holiday and travel services listed on this website. Please ask us to confirm what protection may apply to your booking. If you do not receive an ATOL Certificate then the booking will not be ATOL protected. If you do receive an ATOL Certificate but all the parts of your trip are not listed on it, those parts will not be ATOL protected. Please see our booking conditions

for information, or for more information about financial protection and the ATOL Certificate go to:
www.atol.org.uk/ATOLCertificate

When you buy an ATOL protected flight or flight inclusive holiday from us you will receive an ATOL Certificate. This lists what is financially protected, where you can get information on what this means for you and who to contact if things go wrong.



Get in Touch!

We love to share our passion for wine and travel here at Grape Escapes, so feel free to give us a call to discuss your requirements. We look forward to creating your perfect trip!

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