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WORLD OF Cruising

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Inside

**RAISE A GLASS TO CRUISE'S
WINE REVOLUTION**

**EXPLORING AUSTRALIA'S
FINAL FRONTIER**

**GOING OFF-GRID
ON THE GANGES**

**EAT, DRINK, HIKE,
REPEAT IN VANCOUVER**

**20-PAGE
RIVER CRUISE
SPECIAL**

VENICE UNMASKED

See the city through a new lens
on a blockbuster winter getaway





VINEYARD VOYAGES

MESSAGE *in* *a* BOTTLE

From vineyard escapes to barnacle-encrusted vintages aged in the sea, Rashmi Narayan examines how wine experiences can help travellers uncork the world's most storied cruise destinations



VINEYARD VOYAGES



FROM FAR LEFT Alfresco tasting at La Raia wine estate near Genoa; many wine estates now have guest tables; future prize-winners maturing in the barrel



Cruise lines are inviting their guests to sniff, swirl and sip their way through some of the world's most picturesque wine regions

“May I order a mint tea?” I ask my good-humoured stewardess Mila as we leave the port of Buenos Aires aboard *Crystal Serenity*.

“I’ll bring you some after dinner, but now it’s time for wine,” she replies, with a cheeky smile. “We have an extensive wine menu,” she adds, handing me an iPad, “but if you are feeling adventurous, take this short quiz.”

Intrigued, I swipe through the customary wine list and go straight to the questionnaire, responding to each prompt with increasing curiosity. Who’s your favourite celebrity? What’s your preferred holiday type? Do you know your circadian rhythm and what kind of cuisine you’ll be eating later?

Having just spent several days in Argentina, I’ve had plenty of opportunities to sample the country’s wines. I savoured a glass of crisp white Torrontes from Salta province. This was

followed by a fruity Malbec from the high-altitude Terrazas de los Andes, which I sipped at a neighbourhood taverna while watching a couple dance an impromptu tango on the street. Craving something a little more familiar, I’m happy to see Mila return with a full-bodied Barolo from northern Italy, which is what I would have ordered anyway.

Cruising and wine are a match made in heaven for travellers like me – not least because I don’t need to take turns being the designated driver – but it hasn’t always been this way. There was once a time when a ship’s wine list was limited to one red, one white and a single champagne if you were lucky. However, as travellers’ appreciation for wine has matured, so too have onboard cellars, many of which are now impressively well stocked with Old and New World varieties. Vineyard tours and other wine-based excursions have become more commonplace,

too, with cruise lines inviting guests to sniff, swirl and sip their way through some of the world’s most picturesque wine regions. Take AmaWaterways, for example, whose guests can roll up their sleeves and get stuck into some traditional grape stomping. Then there’s Celebrity Cruises, which swept the board at the 2025 Wine Spectator Awards, winning 21 honours.

“Wine tourism is becoming increasingly popular among those who are eager to get a deeper understanding of the destinations through which they travel,” says Bernardo Marquez, general director for World of Wine, a new cultural district on the outskirts of Porto dedicated to celebrating Portuguese viticulture. “Here, visitors don’t just taste wine – they absorb Portugal. This immersive experience leaves a lasting impression, creating memories that are far richer and more personal than they would get from conventional sightseeing.” ▶

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FROM LEFT Traditional music accompanies a tasting in Portugal; a bite to eat at La Raia estate in Italy; wine ages well beneath the waves

“Visiting a winery means meeting people, feeling welcomed and sharing values rooted in respect for nature”

VINTAGE ESCAPES

To me, experiencing a region’s viticulture isn’t just a matter of tasting the wine; it’s about discovering the story that every vineyard has to tell. In France, that might be about the Benedictine monks whose ancient techniques are still used by winemakers in Bordeaux, Burgundy



and Champagne today. In Spain, one of my favourite tales comes from the sacred town of Caravaca de la Cruz, 50 miles from Cartagena. Alongside its magnificent 17th-century basilica lies a cobbled street, which is the setting for the festival of Los Caballos del Vino (literally “the Wine Horses”). According to folklore, the town was once besieged by Moorish forces, who poisoned its water supply. Rescue came from the Knights Templar, who smuggled wine through the siege on horseback to quench the townspeople’s thirst – an act of heroism that is commemorated every year on the second day of May.

According to Ludovic Walbaum of tourism development agency Atout France, it’s tales like these that remind us of wine’s ability to bring each destination to life. “By inviting travellers to discover our winemaking traditions,” he says, “we’re really offering them a gateway into our

culture itself – the rhythms of rural life, the pride of local producers and the joy of gathering round a shared table. It’s an experience that goes beyond tasting – it’s about understanding how wine shapes our landscapes, our cuisine and our way of living.”

Wine tourism certainly offers an effective and delightful way to connect with a destination. But perhaps its most profound benefit is the way it can help us to connect with each other.

“Visiting a winery means meeting people, feeling welcomed and sharing values rooted in respect for nature,” says Piero Rossi Cairo, chairman at La Raia, a 180-hectare luxury wine estate located an hour’s drive from Genoa in Italy. “Much like silent group reading or yoga classes, wine tourism allows us to break away from the rhythm imposed by our electronic devices.”

