You may have thought of travelling to Australia for its beaches, rainforests, or city life – but if an Aussie adventure is on your bucket list, the time has come to add a new, and more delicious, ‘must-do’ to your travel plans. Wine tourism has taken off in recent years, giving both visitors and locals new travel plans in Australia. Now the fifth-highest producer of wine in the world and the fourth-highest exporter of wine, Australia’s wine-growing regions sport an endless selection of premium, limited edition, artisanal and organic wines for novice and connoisseur palates alike.

In fact, visitors to Australia’s wine regions are frequently surprised by the nuances and tones in Australian wine. As Brent Williamson from Newstead’s The Wine Emporium explains, Aussie wine novices are often unaware of how fine, creative, and flavoursome the country’s wines can be.

“A major advantage to making wine in Australia is ripeness—we almost always get ripeness when we want it. It’s believed that a marginal climate is required to make fine and subtle wine, but many Australian winemakers are able to make subtle wines from a variety of regions, cool or warm,” he says. “The finesse of many wines surprises, as does the sheer creativity of winemakers.”

To begin priming your taste buds for an Australian wine tour, enjoy this quick guide to the country’s best-known winemaking regions, as well as tips on how to teach yourself about wine.

**South Australia and the Barossa Valley**

South Australia is often called the wine capital of Australia, and with 18 wine regions and 200 cellar doors open for your sampling pleasure, it’s easy to see why. For the wine novice, the choice and variety of wines on offer can be overwhelming. Why not get your feet wet by starting your South Australian wine travels in the National Wine Centre of Adelaide? Here, you’ll find an interactive Wine Discovery Journey and Exhibition designed to allow novices and experts to dive further into the art and science of winemaking. Even better, after making your way through the exhibition, head to the bar to sample a variety of Australian wines and cheeses, as well as tapas and espresso.

At the centre of Australian winemaking, South Australia’s Barossa Valley is home to over 150 wineries offering everything from household
names to boutique drops. The region’s typical rolling hills and varied climate allow winemakers to work with a variety of grapes, from Shiraz and Cabernet Sauvignon (warmer regions) to Riesling and Chardonnay (cooler regions). Visitors to the Barossa Valley are invited to savour its famous fortified wines and local produce platters or take a trip to sample the limited edition wines in the Barossa Small Winemakers Centre.

Victoria

A world of landscapes awaits visitors to Victoria’s wine regions, from quaint countryside to dramatic coastline, lush hinterland to rolling valleys and volcanic plains. The diverse landscapes and climates in Victoria’s five wine regions result in a special variation among its wines, even when produced with similar grapes. Visit the Mornington Peninsula, Sunbury and well-known Yarra Valley, alongside smaller, family-run wineries in Geelong, Macedon, and the Bellarine Peninsula. In Victoria, your taste buds will be spoilt for choice, with Shiraz, Pinot Noir, Pinot Gris, Pinot Grigio, Chardonnay, and sparkling wines all vying for your attention. Take a few days off real life, hire a car, and make a Victorian trip of it, pairing wines with craft beers, cheeses, gourmet products and fresh meats.

New South Wales

New South Wales’ Hunter Valley is Australia’s oldest, continually producing wine region and home to some of the country’s best-known producers. Despite being a classic location, the Hunter Valley is also home to emerging winemaking talents committed to developing new harmonies in their wines. Other New South Wales’ regions of note include the red wine producing Mudgee region, known for its Shiraz and Cabernet Sauvignon, the Southern Highlands, producing Pinot Noir and Pinot Gris, and Tumbarumba—not far from the state’s snow country—where Chardonnay and Pinot Noir are the standout wines.

Western Australia

Sunny Margaret River is Western Australia’s best-known region with a reputation for producing a large percentage of the country’s premium wines, particularly Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, Semillon and Cabernet Sauvignon. Its relaxed atmosphere, great weather, and access to a variety of sporting and leisure activities make Margaret River a popular destination with young people and surfers. Here, it’s more than possible to combine a weekend’s wine tasting with rock climbing, abseiling, and whale-watching opportunities, alongside great restaurants stocked with gourmet treats.

Another option is the Swan Valley, home to some of Western Australia’s oldest vineyards. At less than 30 minutes from Western Australia’s capital city, Perth, it’s a great nook for an
indulgent long weekend away sporting inviting tastings from producers of all sizes, from boutique to family-run, organic to large-scale. Visitors have their plates full in Swan Valley, with distilleries, craft breweries, local produce, decadent sweets, cafes, art galleries, lakes, bushwalks, and rivers all waiting to be explored.

**Industry challenges**

Ask some foreigners for their opinion on Australian wines, and all you’ll receive is a sniff and declaration that others are far better. Brent has lived through many of these conversations and admits that the industry’s current challenge is improving the image of Australian wines in foreign markets. Perhaps stemming from the idea that Australians are unstoppable ‘larrikins’ (jokers), Australian wines still have a road to walk before being taken as equals, particularly in the highly competitive European market.

Brent warns that “stereotypes still exist when it comes to the Australian wine image overseas… I fear our wines around the world are thought to be either casual, fun wines with no degree of seriousness—or at the top end: big, rich and saturated.” However, instead of focusing on these opinions, he’s quick to highlight Australian winemakers’ creative ability in their art.

“A distinct regionality and sub-regionality is being discovered by winemakers, and this journey is most intriguing for people both new to Australian wine, and for those who think they already know Australian wines,” Brent says.

“I’m sure many people don’t realise how fine our wines can be. There are Margaret River Cabernet Sauvignon that are mid-weight and without a hair out of place, Adelaide Hills Shiraz with spice, energy and lovely linear shape, and some of the Victorian Chardonnay and Pinot Noir are tight, lean and structured. Educating drinkers in foreign markets is our biggest challenge.”

**Wine sampling and tasting tips**

Interested in getting to know wine beyond a quick sip at your next get-together? You’ll be pleased to know that it won’t take a master’s program in oenology to get you there. In fact, Brent recommends against attempting to become an instant expert on all grapes and regions, and instead favours a more methodical approach to learning about wine. “Have a focus,” he says. “Rather than reading up on every winemaking region in the world, begin with a grape variety or region and get to know it.” Otherwise, he cautions, the information simply won’t stick. He also suggests visiting as many winemaking regions as possible and participating in tastings.

But how can you make sense of the differences between wines when presented with dozens at a time? Again, Brent favours a methodical approach at organised tastings, particularly those of
200 wines or more. “Take your time and taste in blocks of, say, eight, and let them sink in,” he says. “Tasting a different Pinot Noir each night is great but a tasting with six to 10 different Pinot Noir, particularly across regions, will allow you to see the difference much more clearly.”

**Wine tasting at home**

While at home, continue learning by reading about the regions or grapes that currently interest you—for example, the Margaret River or Pinot Gris—and purchase wines in that category. Take your time when sampling; savour the colours and flavours and notice what they evoke. Later, if you want to take your wine studies to another level, invest in good glassware designed to best complement red and white wines (remember that not all glassware is created equal!). Another great idea for the novice wine lover is to keep a notebook where you write your thoughts on the wines and regions you taste. This will be a great resource in the future and help you see how your palate adapts as you learn more.

From Australia to Chile, via France, Spain, Argentina, and more—there’s a world of wine out there to explore.

**Australia and Wine**

In 2011, Australia was listed as the world’s 11th largest wine producing country (based on vineyard area), at 170,000 ha. That same year, it was ranked as the 7th largest wine producer, producing 1,118 ML of wine.

- In 2013, Australia was ranked the world’s 5th largest exporter of wine, exporting a total of 717 ML of wine that year.

- Of 1.58 million tons of wine grapes grown in 2012, 768,918 were produced in South Australia, which in turn remained the largest-producing state in Australia. (Australian Bureau of Statistics)

- In 2013, stocks of Australian wine reached 1.17 billion litres, a 4.8% increase on the previous year’s stocks, yet not large enough to beat 2006’s bumper production of 2.11 billion litres. (Australian Bureau of Statistics)