



travel

Pól Ó Conghaile
Travel insider



Wine weekend, anyone? Grape escapes are taking travel by storm...

Know your *vins* from your *vinhos*? Got a penchant for bass notes and bouquets? Then you'll love wine weekends, the latest phenomenon trickling through travel.

Grape-grazing isn't new, of course. From California's Central Valley to the chateaus of France, tourists have always enjoyed wine country interludes. But now, the volume and range of grape escapes is booming — from escorted tours to wine cruises and immersive experiences allowing visitors to mix their own blends. This month, the UN World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) even held its first ever global conference on wine tourism.

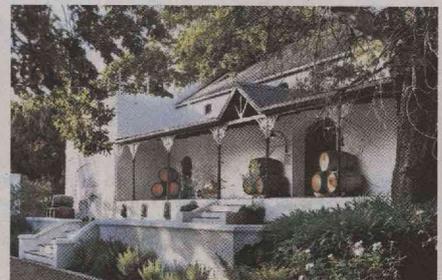
"Wine, food and travel go hand-in-hand," says Sharon Jordan of Uniworld River Cruises. "As Irish consumers become more savvy with their wine, so have we in the travel industry." Wine tours tap into landscape, people and heritage, offering rich experiences that click with contemporary travellers. It's not just about bumper regions like Bordeaux, Rioja or Marlborough, either. Trailfinders says South Africa is its most popular wine destination. Emerging spots range from Hungary to Georgia. Eurostar is even considering a 'Wine Line' that will whisk passengers from London to Bordeaux in 4.5 hours — pending French rail developments in 2017.

Tips for your tipples? Wine tours work best when you pace yourself, sort the driving ahead of time, plan your meals, and don't treat tasting rooms like the pub. Now kick back, and enjoy one of the few times in travel (and indeed, life) when spitting is acceptable. *Sláinte!*



SAVE

You don't have to go overseas for a wine break. Ireland may be short on vineyards, but a growing number of hotels and country houses are offering wine weekends and events — including Ballymaloe House (ballymaloe.ie), Kelly's in Rosslare (kellys.ie), which has wine appreciation talks with Raymond Blake in November, and The Twelve in Galway (abovethetwelvehotel.ie), where managing director **Fergus O'Halloran** graduated as Canada's top sommelier. It has a winter roast with Ribera del Duero wines on October 23 (from €110pp, including B&B).



SPLASH

Stretch the spend, and the wine world is your oyster. Sunway (sunway.ie) has a seven-day escorted tour of San Francisco, Sonoma and Napa from €2,679pp next June. Elsewhere, Trailfinders (trailfinders.ie) has a seven-night tour of South Africa's Cape Winelands from €999pp, including car hire and three nights at Richard Branson's five-star Mont Rochelle Hotel (abovethetwelvehotel.ie) in Franschoek. Uniworld ([uniworld.com/ie](http://uniworld.com/)) also has an eight-day, all-inclusive 'Bordeaux, Vineyards & Chateaux' luxury river cruise on special from €2,059pp, departing October 23.



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