

# 10-MINUTE GUIDE TO THE WORLD'S MOST INTERESTING

Wine expert Max Allen's instant, straight-talking advice

This is a very personal list of some of my favourite wine regions. Some are well known, others might perhaps be less familiar to you. All have two things in common – they produce delicious wine and they offer other, non-wine-but-still-splendid attractions that are almost enough reason in themselves to visit.

## ANDALUCIA, SPAIN

Yes, the Rioja region is better known and Ribera del Duero is hipper, but there's something entrancing about Spain's southern coastal sherry country. The light, for a start – there's a clarity, a power to the sunshine here that intensifies every experience. And there's no better place in the world to enjoy a glass of cold, bone-dry manzanilla or nutty oloroso sherry than in a small tapas bar in the old towns of Jerez or Sanlúcar.

■ **If you only visit one vineyard** Emilio Lustau has a stunning array of sherries made by small, family-owned winemakers (emilio-lustau.com).

■ **Try Tio Pepe Fino Muy Seco, Jerez, Spain (from £7.99, widely available)** It has a unique style, with a distinct, nutty aroma and a cracking freshness. Drink it cold while you nibble on olives, salted almonds or langoustines.



## RHEINGAU, GERMANY

One of the German wine industry's greatest assets is its amazing history. So while the vertiginous hillside vineyards along the Mosel might be more picturesque, I'd head for the more sedate country and marvellous old castles along the Rhine. Be amazed by the 200-year-old bottles and 300-year-old casks sleeping in the vast, candlelit cellars.

■ **If you only visit one vineyard** Schloss Johannisberg is the estate I'm talking about – the one with historic vineyards, ancient cellars and pristine wines (schloss-johannisberg.com).

■ **Try 'R' Riesling, August Kessler 2005, Germany (£6.99, Booths)** August Kessler is a fine producer, and his wine shows the impressive intensity of fruit typical of the region. It's delicate, no doubt, but full of expression with notes of citrus and white peach. The style is off-dry, making it a great summer aperitif.



## MARGARET RIVER, AUSTRALIA

One of Australia's most popular wine regions: superb wines, magnificent, mysterious towering gum tree forests, and some of the best, wildest surf beaches in the world make Margaret River a must-see destination.

■ **If you only visit one vineyard** Choose Cullen for its quintessential biodynamic Margaret River wines, best enjoyed in the organic/biodynamic cellar door restaurant (cullenwines.com.au).

■ **Try Cape Mentelle Cabernet Merlot 2005, Australia (£14.99, £9.99 on three for two offer, Wine Rack)** To Bordeaux lovers, western Australia – and specifically Margaret River – means cabernet. Cape Mentelle is one of a number of producers in the region that makes fine, elegant, impressive Bordeaux-style blends.



## LANGUEDOC, FRANCE

Bordeaux, Champagne, Burgundy, Alsace, the Rhône. All wonderful, justifiably famous French wine regions. But I lost my heart to the Languedoc many years ago – the shimmering Mediterranean heat, the chirping of cicadas echoing through olive groves, the affordable, sun-drenched wines, many made from gnarled old vines by enthusiastic young winemakers.

■ **If you only visit one vineyard** Domaine Borie de Maurel has some of the most thoughtful yet utterly thrilling red wines (boriedemaurel.fr).

■ **Try M&S Minervois 2006, France (£5.99)** The essence of the wines of the south is that they are a blend of varieties – syrah, grenache and carignan – with no one varietal dominating. It makes for a very individual style that's clearly of the south, just as you will find here – it's rustic, with red fruits, a bright, youthful wine to enjoy over the summer.



## MENDOZA, ARGENTINA

Argentina is becoming just as well known as Chile as a wine producing country. In the high country around Mendoza, old vineyards have been squeezing out tiny quantities of intensely flavoured red grapes for centuries. The wine culture here is as deep as the flavour of the famous Argentine beef.

■ **If you only visit one vineyard** Bodega Catena Zapata is a Mayan-influenced pyramid-shaped winery building and produces some of the country's best red wines (catenawines.com).

■ **Try Norton Malbec 2007, Argentina (£4.99, Oddbins)** Buy the finest steak you can and uncork this soft, unoaked, plummy number for a taste of the real thing.



## SANTORINI, GREECE

Dug into the black soil of this ancient volcano, the assyrtiko vines of Santorini struggle against drought, fierce heat and wind to produce some amazingly refreshing, crisp, dry white wines – perfect, of course, drunk alongside snapping fresh seafood in one of the island's many restaurants.

■ **If you only visit one vineyard** Hatzidakis is a young, modern winery that, unusually for Greece, makes a big thing of growing its grapes organically (hatzidakiswines.gr).

■ **Try Hatzidakis Assyrtiko 2007, Greece (from £9.19, Adnams, Tanners, Waitrose)** Haridimos Hatzidakis is truly passionate about his wines, and his assyrtiko is a unique treat – with white floral notes and a bright citrus freshness, it's a very welcome change from a world of chardonnays and sauv blancs. A modern European classic.



● To find out more about wine regions of the world, visit [bbc.co.uk/food/tv\\_and\\_radio/wineadventure\\_index.shtml](http://bbc.co.uk/food/tv_and_radio/wineadventure_index.shtml)

# WINE REGIONS



Max Allen gives you the inside track on wine without the guff. He left England for Melbourne 15 years ago and continues to win plaudits, home and away, for his down-to-earth advice on how to enjoy wine to the full.



## OREGON, USA

Give the overcrowded cellar doors of Napa Valley a miss and head instead for the smaller-scale wineries and vineyards of Willamette Valley outside Portland.

■ **If you only visit one vineyard** As well as one of the oldest vineyards in the region, Ponzi has a wine bar in the town of Dundee ([ponziwines.com](http://ponziwines.com)).

■ **Try Firesteed Pinot Noir 2006, USA (£12.99, Liberty Wines, [libertywine.co.uk](http://libertywine.co.uk))**. Pinot noir fans get very excited by Sonoma (California), Central Otago (NZ), Walker Bay (SA) – and Oregon. But Oregon's wines are still hard to track down in the UK. Firesteed gives a taster – it's relatively light, but has charming rounded red fruits.



## STELLENBOSCH, SOUTH AFRICA

There is something deeply aesthetically pleasing about the sight of green, orderly rows of vines set at the foot of steep hillsides or mountains. This is yet another region that boasts such a view, with the added attraction of the stark white Cape Dutch architecture of many of the wineries dotted across the landscape. The wines just get better and better, too, with crisp chenin blanc leading the whites and, increasingly, superb spicy shiraz standing out among the reds.

■ **If you only visit one vineyard** Spier is a wine centre that stocks labels from 175 other local wineries as well as having a golf course and wildlife encounters ([spier.co.za](http://spier.co.za)).

■ **Try Finest Ken Forrester Chenin Blanc 2006, South Africa (£4.99, Tesco)** Chenin is South Africa's workhorse white grape. Ken Forrester, winemaker and restaurateur, has rescued it from the doldrums and he makes a range of food-friendly whites. This version is a bright, creamy, appley youngster, which is delicious cool.



## CENTRAL OTAGO, NEW ZEALAND

You could visit Marlborough and see for yourself how the deep, pebbly gravel soils produce those famous distinctive sauvignon blanc flavours. But if you like spectacular mountain scenery – and spectacular pinot noir – go to Central Otago. The skiing mecca of Queenstown is also a very good reason for heading down to the far south of New Zealand's South Island.

■ **If you only visit one vineyard** As well as the breathtaking view (the vineyard hugs the shore of Lake Wanaka), Rippon boasts some breathtaking biodynamic pinot noir ([ripon.co.nz](http://ripon.co.nz)).

■ **Try Quartz Reef Pinot Noir 2006, New Zealand (£15.99, or £13.99 if you buy two, Majestic)** The beautiful valleys of Central Otago are producing exceptional pinots – bold and vibrant rather than soft and juicy. But the extreme climate and hilly terrain mean low production and high prices. Quartz Reef has a fine, spicy complexity.



## VENETO, ITALY

Take a tour through the hills of Veneto, where ancient viticulture (vine rows strung between cherry trees) and old winemaking techniques such as drying the red grapes on trays before turning them into the famous, brooding amarone red wine, can still be glimpsed. Visit one of old Verona's small wine bars for a glass of cold soave or cherry-scented valpolicella.

■ **If you only visit one vineyard** The Serego Alighieri, a 650-year old country estate, offers superb wines and takes its name from having once, briefly, been home to the poet of the *Divine Comedy*, Dante Alighieri ([seregoalighieri.it](http://seregoalighieri.it)).

■ **Try M&S Valpolicella Classico Ripasso 2006 (£7.99)** What lifts this wine out of the pizza house valpol category is the word ripasso. This means that partially dried grapes have been added to the fermenting grapes. This classic technique gives the wine a boost – slightly higher alcohol, a richer palate and a deeper colour.



## 10-second guide to wines to try from:

- **Andalucia** dry manzanilla sherry
- **Central Otago** succulent pinot noir
- **Languedoc** old vine grenache
- **Margaret River** blackcurranty cabernet sauvignon
- **Mendoza** full-bodied malbec
- **Oregon** complex pinot noir
- **Rheingau** delicate riesling
- **Santorini** crisp dry assyrtiko
- **Stellenbosch** apple-like chenin blanc
- **Veneto** dark, intense amarone

■ **NEXT MONTH**  
BRILLIANT BARBECUE WINES