



AS NEARBY AS LONG ISLAND, AS FAR AFIELD AS PORTUGAL, ITALY, OR SOUTH AMERICA, TOURS OF LESSER-KNOWN WINE REGIONS OFFER BREATHTAKING SCENERY AND CULTURE. OH — AND THE FOOD!

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Call it the Oenophile's Theory of Vacation Planning: If you like sunshine, good weather, and great scenery, you'll usually find all three in abundance wherever wine grapes are grown. And the happy corollary to the Oenophile's Theory is that you'll also find good food to accompany those local wines.

Some of our favorite wine regions are a little off the beaten path. Just a short ferry hop from New London, Conn., Long Island's North Fork is one of North America's most underappreciated wine regions. About three dozen operations along a 20-mile stretch of road range from casual farm wineries to heavyweights such as Lenz Winery in Peconic whose wines hold their own on the world stage.

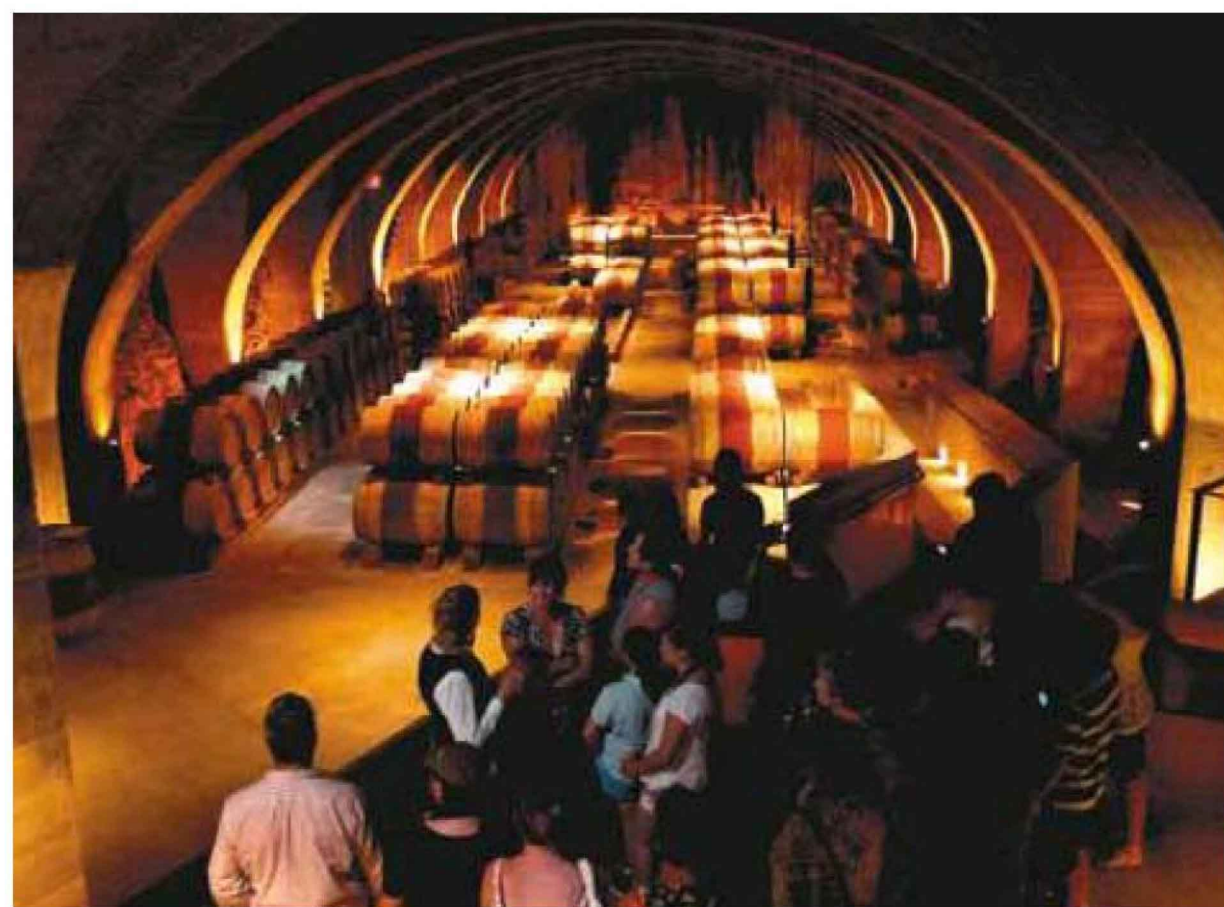
Following the Napa-Sonoma tourism model, many wineries have decks overlooking the vineyards where tasters can sip wine with a picnic lunch. Shinn Estate Vineyards in Mattituck even installed an outdoor patio last year with a bar and grill to serve small bites to complement their wines. More traditional farms are still part of the North Fork agricultural mix; their farmstands proffer everything from spring strawberries and asparagus to summer sweet corn and tomatoes and autumn pumpkins.

And at Lavender by the Bay in East Marion, more than 60,000 of the colorful plants reach their peak bloom in July.

The North Fork didn't get serious about wine until the 1980s — the same time that winemakers took a shine to the rolling hills of Virginia's Piedmont, which Thomas Jefferson pronounced "the Eden of the United States." The gourmand-in-chief predicted the area would produce wines to rival Europe and finally Jefferson is looking prescient.

After touring Monticello, Jefferson's self-designed estate in Charlottesville, it's fun to check out some of the 100 or so wineries in the area. A good bet is Barbourville Vineyards, established by an Italian winemaking family in the 1970s on land once deemed fit only for tobacco. The tasting room makes it easy to sample the range of wines, but since Barbourville is so successful with grapes

Dawn illuminates vineyards in Mendoza, Argentina (top photo); the cliff-top Tuscan village of Pitigliano is known for its white wines (above right); the Bordeaux-inspired aging cellar is a highlight of Mission Hill Family Estate in British Columbia (right).



PHOTOS BY DAVID LYON

rarely seen outside Italy, it's even more satisfying to pair the wines with the Northern Italian cuisine in the winery's Palladio restaurant. A scenic walk leads to the ruins of the estate of James Barbour, Virginia's governor from 1811 to 1814. They are a state historic landmark — designed by Barbour's friend Thomas Jefferson.

The southwest corner of Tuscany has been producing wine since the Etruscans were in charge, but wine tourism is something of a newcomer. Only a two-hour drive from the Rome airport, the lower Maremma region has always been rich in *enoteccas* (wine shops that also sell most of their wines by the glass), but only in the last few years have B&Bs and tasting rooms blossomed at the wineries.

This is the home of Morrellino di Scansano, a bright red wine with a finish that evokes red cherries, and the growers' consortium office in Scansano provides maps and a list of hours for winery tastings. In Scansano itself, the Terenzi estate combines some of the best Morrellino wines with an inn amid the vineyards.

Most lodgings encourage a visit to the nearby sulfur hot springs of Saturnia, a spa town since the Roman days. On the way, it's worth detouring to the medieval fortress city of Pitigliano, known for excellent white wine, fruit preserves, and sausages. (The entire region is studded with Michelin-recommended country trattorias.) Driving the opposite direction leads to the ocean and the Parco dell'Uccellina nature preserve, where guided horseback tours of the trails and beaches are offered at the stables of Azienda Agricola Alberese.

The most improbable wine-growing landscape we've ever seen is Portugal's Douro Valley, where vineyards cover every inch of steep, stony riverbanks that rise 1,000 feet on both sides of the river. Port has ruled the valley for more than 300 years, yet a generation of wine-growing mavericks who call themselves the Douro Boys have begun making some of the most complex and interesting table wines in Europe.

Good bases for touring are Pinhao, where even the train station is covered with tile murals of wine growing, or Peso da Regua, the capital of the Upper Douro. Both towns have port warehouses and tasting rooms for the surrounding vineyards, or "quintas." And both are stop-offs for river tours aboard rabelos, the high-prowed vessels traditionally used to ferry pipes of port downriver.

Perhaps the most dramatic lodging is at Quinta do Vallado, run by one of the Douro Boys, where guests choose between an 18th-century manor house or the ultra-modern hotel building. The win-



The Douro River cuts a blue ribbon through the mountains of northern Portugal. The rocky vineyards of the Douro Valley are some of the steepest wine country in the world.