



Wine Travel Destination 2013: Hunter Valley, New South Wales, Australia

Wine Enthusiast February 2013

By Joe Czerwinski



Australia's Hunter Valley is perfectly situated for wine tourism, just a couple of hours by road from Sydney, the country's largest city. Various companies run tour buses to the region direct from downtown, and chauffeured limo services are readily available. As a result, many visitors come to the Hunter just for the day. But to really explore the Hunter, it's best to get up into it and stay overnight, or longer. As one of Australia's traditional grape-growing regions, there's plenty of history to discover, alongside vast open spaces and some terrific wines made in styles found nowhere else on the planet.



Where to Dine

Many of the Hunter's best restaurants are located at resorts or wineries. Il Cacciatore ("The Hunter") at the Hermitage Lodge offers Italian cuisine using local ingredients and a range of Hunter wines. The most extensive wine list in the region is found at Tower Estate and its two affiliated restaurants—Roberts and Nine—a legacy of the era when legendary bon vivant

703 Jefferson Street, Napa, California 94559

Tel (707) 258 9552 Toll Free (800) 622 2234 Fax (707) 258 9577

WWW.OLDBRIDGECELLARS.COM



Len Evans was a partner in the business. Also notable is Muse Restaurant & Café, run by chef Troy Rhoades-Brown, an alum of Roberts, with a wine list that includes some aged treasures at reasonable prices.

Where to Stay

For the ultimate in luxury, Tower Lodge is a Relais & Châteaux property. Guests at this boutique hotel feel completely at home, despite the setting being anything but ordinary. At Peppers Convent, guests stay in an actual convent that has been relocated nearly 375 miles and magnificently restored. The nuns never had it so good. Pokolbin Village offers several different types of accommodations, with chocolate, cheese and wine shops on the property.

Where to Taste

The region's proximity to Sydney and its legions of tourists have led most of the wineries to develop sophisticated cellar-door operations. Many include restaurants, or at least the prospect of ordering cheese or charcuterie to accompany your tastings. Hope Estate regularly hosts expansive outdoor concerts, and in March 2013, will host a multiday country and folk music festival. McWilliam's Mount Pleasant Estate was where Maurice O'Shea, perhaps Australia's greatest winemaker, plied his work. Lake's Folly is unusual for its pursuit of Cabernet and Chardonnay, sold almost exclusively through a mailing list or at the cellar door, when wine is available (call first). Also notable: Brokenwood, Hungerford Hill, Keith Tulloch Wine, Lindeman's, McGuigan Wines, Tulloch (try the Verdelho), Tyrrell's Wines (ask if any aged Semillons are on offer) and Wyndham Estate.

When to Go

Spring and fall are the best times to experience the Hunter. Summer can be too warm for comfort.

Prominent Wines

The Hunter Valley is home to two distinctive wine styles, unduplicated elsewhere. As the region is warm and prone to late-season rains, growers historically harvested their grapes early. Semillon (ditch the French accent and pronounce it SEM-a-lon), is typically under 12% abv. With its high acidity and greenish tinge, it's fine young when served with raw shellfish, but aged examples develop golden hues and honeyed, toasty richness. Hunter Valley Shiraz is also traditionally moderate in alcohol, emphasizing aromas and flavors of leather and spice rather than jammy fruit. Chardonnay does well in the Upper Hunter Valley, where it develops warm, tropical flavors.

Budget Tip

Many folks visiting from Sydney come just for the day, but upscale meals and accommodations are less expensive in the Hunter. Stay over and enjoy not having to drive back after a long day of tasting.

Local in-the-know



Keith Tulloch, a fourth-generation Hunter winemaker who produces an eponymous label, says, “Take a short drive up to the top of the mountain range to a spot that overlooks the whole Hunter vineyard area, with views that extend down to the ocean about 30 miles away. There’s nothing to beat such a great view, especially with a plate of fresh seafood, or barbecue, and a glass or two of our best wines.”

Other Activities

Award-winning Hunter Valley Gardens features 10 different themed gardens and approximately five miles of walking paths. The rose garden alone contains more than 8,000 specimens of flora. Hot-air balloon is a popular way to see the region, or stay closer to ground and rent a bicycle to traverse the scenic byways.

