



Cellar to cellar

Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay, Riesling, and Pinot Noir, are just a few wines coming out of Adelaide Hills. Water conservation and alternate land-use requirements notwithstanding, this wine region is becoming a force to reckon with.

Text & Photographs: Gustasp and Jeroo Irani

There are two prerequisites for a wine tasting spree – a spirit of fun and the willingness to look foolish. Knowledge of wines? No way. Just pick up nuggets of information and cellar secrets en route and you will end up looking like a wine cognoscente.

We were greenhorns, mere wine enthusiasts, when we breezed through South Australia's Adelaide Hills region and spent a tipsy day tasting wines at a few of the 35

cellar doors ensconced in stunning landscapes—swirling, sniffing, sipping and spitting, nodding sagely and passing judgments on wines (talking about subtle oak and fruity flavours) that we knew very little about.

A long way since

Till about the 1970s, Australian wines were dismissed by wine lovers as being inferior, we learnt. Today, Aussie wines have stormed the charmed circle of wine snobs.

The softly appealing Adelaide Hills region has been acknowledged as one of the finest producers of the world's cool-climate grapes and is a 20-minute drive from the city of Adelaide, dubbed the de facto wine capital of the country.

Draped languidly across native forest and farmland of the Mt Lofty Ranges, the Adelaide Hills are a hidden gem with some of the oldest soils in the world. The small family-run wineries are located

in picturesque locales, snuggling amidst vineyards, apple, pear, and cherry orchards and undulating hills. It's a tough choice – head for the winery in a vintage water mill, a woollen mill and/or the pump shed? And, of course, there are beautiful contemporary tasting rooms too that create high-end boutique wines.

In fact, the Australians are not Johnny-come-lately's in the wine business, for Australian vines arrived in Australia aboard the first fleet in 1788, and successive waves of European immigrants consolidated the growth of the wine industry. The first vines were planted in the Adelaide Hills in 1839 and a case of that wine was delivered to Queen Victoria in 1844. There is no record of whether she sniffed at the offering or sipped it with appreciation.

Australia is probably the best place to learn about wines. For here, they do not take themselves as seriously as some of the more traditional wine regions do and yet, they do know their wines, which compare with the best the world

over. Incidentally, Australia was one of the first countries to realize that tourists love visiting lush vineyards and enjoy wine tasting—so expect a hearty welcome at the cellars.

Winery revelations

A drive down leafy winding roads led to the Petaluma Bridgewater Mill winery in the heart of the hills, where a friendly cellar door manager put us at ease by informing us that there are no fixed rules about how one should drink or enjoy wine. Established in 1860, the winery turned out to



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be a beautifully restored heritage-listed stone flour mill perched over a running stream, complete with a still turning water wheel. Knowing a little about wines would help us appreciate them more, she told us. In essence, the whole purpose of the three s's (swirl, sniff and sip) wine-tasting exercise is to assess the age of the wine, the origin of the grape, its colour, aroma and flavour.

Since we were relatively new to wines, the cellar door manager launched us off with light white wines, as they are more drinkable. Full-bodied wines, the reds in particular, are a cultivated taste and can put off novitiates.

And so, we started by pouring a little wine into a wine glass and checking its colour. Young whites have tinges of green, which fade to honey-gold with age. Swirling the wine around releases its aroma into the head, or hollow of the glass. We inhaled, looking for subtle fruit flavours like pears and apples. The final stage of the ritual was the most important—the actual tasting. We sipped the elixir and let it linger on our palates before swallowing it. We could have spat it out in a little contraption given for the purpose; this is the fourth and optional 's' of wine tasting. Indeed, a cellar is the only place where spitting is acceptable; drinking like a fish is not.

The Great Outdoors were waiting for us and so later we continued our meandering – zipped past Sinclair's Gully, an eco-certified cellar door and vineyard; Barratt Wines in a garden setting was a pleasant interlude while a glorious Pinot Noir at Ashton Hills almost did us in. We chatted with winemakers, marvelling at the vistas and reflecting on a process that's as old as time itself.



We stopped at The Lane Vineyard's bistro for a restorative meal. The place was full of happy customers and many sat by the lake with a bottle of wine and a platter of cheese. Outside on the wrap-around deck of the cafe, we sipped some more wine – their latest Sauvignon Blanc and their new age Chardonnay as well as their Cabernet and Shiraz – all high-end boutique wines. Each variety is handpicked, handled gently in the winery and aged in the finest quality French oak. And of course, they are replete with what the French so evocatively call the terroir or sense of place. (Terroir is the semi-mystical idea of air, soil and climate as they express themselves in grapes.)

More to these hills

Adelaide Hills is not only about quaffing wine, sightseeing is the attractive spin-off of a wine-tasting break. So we stopped at Hahndorf, an Australian-German village, for a cappuccino and a slice of apple strudel. Studded with vintage buildings of German brick and timber, dating to 1839, we took our time letting it all soak in.

We drove back to Adelaide, navigating the verdant geography



of the hills, its charming towns and its checkerboard vineyards. We were wine buffs by then and had honed our palates enough to appreciate the cool crisp wines that we took with us back home from Adelaide Hills. 🍷

Fact File

Jet Airways operates code share flights from India to Adelaide.

The Adelaide Hills is an easy 20-minute drive south-east of Adelaide and a 40-minute drive from the Adelaide International Airport. Rent a car or use the bus service that stops at the major towns in the hills.

There are a number of B&Bs and hotels in the Adelaide Hills for visitors who wish to enjoy a relaxed weekend in picturesque surroundings.

For more information contact: Vinod Advani, Honorary Tourism Ambassador, South Australian Tourism Commission, Mumbai
Email: earthvinod@yahoo.com
Web: www.southaustralia.com or visit Australian Tourist Commission website: www.australia.com which lists all the Indian travel agents that specialise in promoting Australia.