

Swirl, sniff, sip, and savor

South African vineyards yield wines worth discovering

Sure, areas of South Africa are the playgrounds of striped and trunked creatures, but the country has something else to offer: the most savor-worthy wine east of the Prime Meridian. So, somewhere between the zebra rides and ostrich farm visits, discover the Napa Valley of Africa.

European tradition with an African twist. In Stellenbosch and other regions surrounding Cape Town, hectares and hectares of wine-yielding vineyards produce some 85 percent of South Africa's wines. Most of the wineries are family-owned, run by the descendants of French, Dutch, and German immigrants who followed wine forefather Jan van Riebeeck in the 1650s. Elegant Cape Dutch homesteads serve as relics of past prosperity.

Although once considered a symbol of the worst of South Africa's apartheid, the Cape wine region is coming to symbolize



the nation's desire to reconnect with the world. In 1998, a mansion in the area served as the site for a meeting between Nelson Mandela and President Bill Clinton.

An up-close encounter with wine-making. Surrounded by majestic Helderberg and Table mountain scenery, tour barrel-vaulted wine cellars to witness the wining process first-hand. See where the fruit is pressed, juiced, and fermented. Finally, sample cabernet sauvignon, merlot, chardonnay, and others mere feet from the

source. Swirl, sniff, and sip to experience the sweetness of life in a place where the motto is, "Conserve water, drink wine."

Ecstasy at a price you can afford. South African wineries create a careful mixture of the past—in the carved wooden casks and preserved Old World taste, and the present—in the stainless steel fermentation tanks and New World marketing. Although Cape wine is delicious enough that you'd be willing to pay handsomely for it, you'll be tickled at what a bargain the exchange rate makes—usually less than \$20 for even the best varieties.

That's surely worth a day away from the zebras. ■

South Africa: Safaris to Vineyards. Read about our Jan 22-Feb 4 trip in this issue, page 23.



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