

GRAPE GETAWAYS

Are you a wine lover and do you dream of spending a holiday amidst lush vineyards that stretch away into the distance? To take it one step further why not indulge yourself with a stay in a luxurious five star hotel that has its own private vineyard, rustic wine cellars and branded spirits which are harvested, barrelled and bottled in-house. Would you prefer romantic sunset tastings at The Meritage Resort And Spa, a charming



property set against the rolling vineyards of California's wine country, the Napa Valley? Or, head to an ancient stone fortress in Tuscany that has been converted into the swank Castello Banfi – Il Borgo, a boutique hotel where you can savour Italy's finest home-grown wines and soak in the idyllic countryside atmosphere. *The Telegraph Platinum* rounds up the most luxurious wine getaways for the well-heeled connoisseur.

COMPILED BY RADHIKA SEN

CASTELLO BANFI-II BORGO, ITALY

THIS IS A BEAUTIFUL ITALIANATE STONE mini-castle with crenellations first built in the 1700s which has been re-styled into a luxurious hotel in the heart of Tuscany's idyllic countryside. The fortress-style exterior gives visitors a glimpse of Tuscany's historic architecture but the interiors have been renovated to offer plush modern comforts. What makes this beautiful vineyard property a dream vacation is its strategic location, flanked by the sea on one side and Tuscany's picturesque countryside towns on the other.

The Castello Banfi vineyards extend from the south of Montalcino to the borders of the Val d'Orcia, spread across 7,100 acres of land. About one third of the estate is

ITALIAN HIGH (FACING PAGE AND BELOW) Tuscany's Castello Banfi Borgo II, an ancient stone castle re-styled into a boutique hotel stands amidst a lush vineyard estate flanked by the sea on one side and an idyllic countryside on the other; The hotel's wine cellar which houses over 7,000 barrels of wine



TRENDS
PLATINUM

a cluster of single vineyards while the remaining stretch is a cluster of olive groves, fruit trees, woods and scrub. The most prized wine varieties that are cultivated on these estates include the Bolgheri DOC, Vermentino and the Chianti Classico.

To give you a first-hand understanding of the estate the hotel arranges a guided tour of the vineyards and conducts tasting sessions of four different wines — the Brunello di Montalcino Poggio alle Mura, Brunello di



\$1,500
PER NIGHT

Montalcino Poggio all'Oro Riserva, SummuS and ExcluS. To top it off you will also be treated to a scrumptious five-course lunch tasting paired with five Banfi wines. The hotel's in-house winery houses more than 7,000 customised barrels for storing and aging the wines.

You'll get to taste authentic Tuscan dishes at the resort's restaurants. Try some Castello Banfi wine and cheese pairings at L'Enoteca or the Wine Bar, and visit the Museum of Bottle and Glass where you can explore the rich history of winemaking and which also has a collection of wine bottles from down the ages.

Each of the nine rooms and five suites at the hotel is decorated with vintage fabrics and traditional accessories. To unwind, you can swim in the outdoor heated pool, take Italian cooking lessons or go horseback riding and hiking. But for an experience you will always remember taking off in a hot air balloon ride and admiring the vineyards, countryside and azure ocean waters down below.



\$1,995
PER NIGHT
PLUS TAX

THE VINES RESORT & SPA, MENDOZA, ARGENTINA

NESTLING AT THE BASE OF THE RUGGED Andes Mountains is The Vines Resort & Spa, a pristine 1,500-acre vineyard resort in the heart of Argentina's Uco Valley wine region. Combining the best of nature's beauty with an abundance of winemaking, the resort offers wine connoisseurs the rare opportunity of owning their private vineyard plots and cultivating custom handcrafted wines.

You can also attend seasonal wine activities organised by The Vines that include Planting Vines, The Art Of Pruning Vines that ends with a tasting session of Recuerdo wine, and an all day Winemaking Camp where you tuck into a lovely breakfast before getting down to harvesting the grapes and learning all aspects of wine-

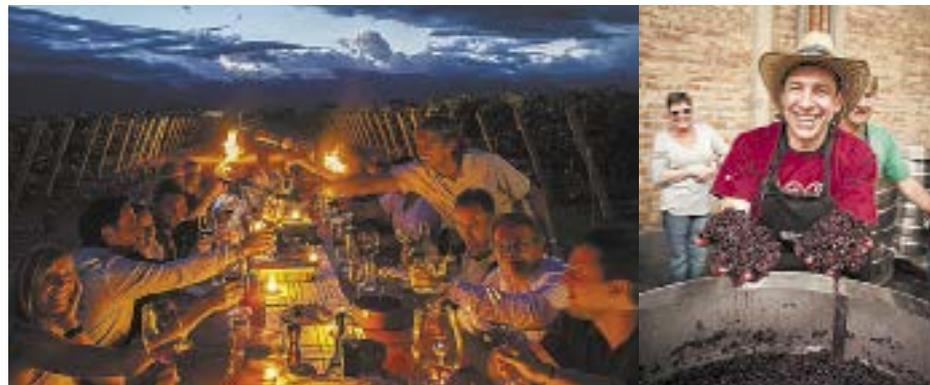
WINE WONDERLAND (CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE) The Vines Resort & Spa in Argentina set against the backdrop of the snowcapped Andes Mountains features luxury villas and a swank spa; The resort offers its guests a hands-on wine-making experience; All wine activities end with lively tasting sessions



making at the winery. One factor that draws oenophiles to this Argentinean getaway in large numbers are its training sessions. Since 2004, The Vines has helped many wine lovers around the world become winemakers. The customised classes are packed with tastings, conversations and private consultations to make it a fun-filled experience for everyone.

Book yourself a stay at any of the resort's spacious one-and-two bedroom villas that blend Argentinean countryside elegance with modern comforts. Each villa looks out to a breathtaking view of the majestic mountain ranges and flourishing vineyards, besides spoiling you with luxuries like an outdoor hot tub, a plunge pool and a private rooftop terrace. When taking a break from the nuances of winemaking, you can make the most of recreational activities like skiing, horseback riding, rock climbing or snowboarding.

Living up to its exceptional wine culture, The Vines Resort & Spa is also a destination for culinary delights. At the helm of affairs is internationally acclaimed chef Francis Mallmann who rustles up a rustic Argentinean food fare and pairs it with in-house wines to give you an authentic dining experience. To soak in some native spirits drop by The Bar & Cava where you will find many of Argentina's finest wines, cocktails and beers.



\$980
PER NIGHT

MONT ROCHELLE, FRANSCHHOEK, SOUTH AFRICA

TUCKED AWAY IN SOUTH AFRICA'S LUSH Franschhoek vineyard town, just 45 minutes outside of Cape Town, is Mont Rochelle, a picturesque 22-bedroom hotel and vineyard spread across 100 acres of land. The property is only about two decades old but it has been given a complete facelift after being purchased by Virgin's flamboyant chief Richard Branson in 2014.

In Mont Rochelle's vineyards, grapes of the Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay, Merlot, Shiraz and Cabernet Sauvignon varieties are cultivated. Being perched 400m above sea level the grapes are exposed to a range of climates, which helps to prolong the ripening period and produce full-bodied wines. For a sip of Mont Rochelle's finest produce, you can drop by the tasting sessions that take place every day at the hotel's restaurants, bar and wine cellar.

SOAK UP THE VINES (CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE) Nestling in South Africa's Franschhoek vineyard town, Mont Rochelle is a quaint wine resort owned by Virgin's Richard Branson; Mont Rochelle produces full-bodied wines that can be tasted at its restaurants; The hotel's century-old wine cellar



Explore the century-old wine cellar, previously used as a fruit-packing shed, that processes close to 150 tonnes of grapes every season. To get an understanding of the wine-making process set out on Mont Rochelle's winery tours where you will be taken around its working vineyard and cellar. The tour ends on a high with a complimentary wine tasting sitting.

Besides making the most of your wine experience, lap up the resort's luxury offerings. The suite rooms, named after Mont Rochelle's wines, provide great views of the valley. If you stay at the Cap Classique Suites, which are the largest rooms you can enjoy a lounge area, terrace and a private plunge pool.

Also, treat yourself to gourmet meals at Miko, the resort's main restaurant. The outdoor heated pool with its own bar is the perfect spot to unwind while enjoying splendid views of the Franschhoek Mountains. Or, pamper yourself at Mont Rochelle's spa where eco-friendly Africology products made from essential oils and natural plant extracts are used to nourish your skin.

You can, of course, spend a lovely day out in the vineyards, and the hotel will make it all the more enjoyable by packing you a delectable picnic with your choice of wines.





\$2,500
PER NIGHT
PLUS TAX

**THE MERITAGE RESORT AND SPA,
NAPA VALLEY, CALIFORNIA**

SPREAD ACROSS 32 ACRES OF LAND

amidst the Napa Valley's bountiful vineyards, The Meritage Resort and Spa is a serene escape where you can savour the best that California's wine country has to offer. What's more, you don't even have to step out of the resort if you're not inclined — though it would probably better if you did explore the surrounds. The resort offers a wide array of indulgences for the discerning wine aficionado.

Wake up to an expansive view of rolling hillside vineyards, then head to the on-site Trinitas Cellars for a tantalising tasting session of The Meritage Resort and Spa's premium in-house wines, which include Cabernet Sauvignons, Cabernet Francs, Merlots, Petit Verdots and

HEADY ESCAPE
(CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE) The Meritage Resort And Spa located amongst Napa Valley's lush vineyards offers stunning views and a relaxing ambience; Head to the onsite Trinitas Cellars to taste the resort's in-house wines; The resort's sprawling Spa Terra is located in an underground cave



Malbecs — all made from grapes picked at the estate. You can also try wine and chocolate pairings at the Trinitas Cellars, or check out the Archive Tasting at the Trinitas Library located one block away from the resort.

To get a feel of the countryside, take leisurely strolls through the vineyards. And the seasonal vineyard tours that are usually hosted over weekends take you on winding walking trails right up to Napa's famous Grape Crusher statue. Other outdoor activities for adventure-seekers include biking and kayaking along the Napa River.

A major attraction for those staying at this Californian resort is Spa Terra, located underground in a 22,000-sq ft cave that offers up a host of wine spa therapies to soothe your senses. It's famous for being North America's only underground spa.

Many of the resort's 322 luxury guestrooms have spacious balconies or patios overlooking the vineyard estate. And, when in need of non-liquid sustenance dine at the resort's signature restaurant Siena where you can tuck into a Napa terroir-inspired menu complete with the freshest meats, fish and local produce. For a little nightcap drop by The Commons: A Wine Bar that offers of the finest wines in Napa Valley poured by the glass, as well as single malt scotches and small batch bourbons to quench your thirst.



\$1,000
PER NIGHT
PLUS TAX

CHÂTEAU DE MERCUÈS, FRANCE

A FAIRYTALE LIKE CASTLE DATING BACK

to the 18th century located a stone's throw away from the French village of Mercuès is renowned as the Château de Mercuès — a luxury vineyard hotel. When Georges Vigouroux, winemaker in Cahors, acquired the Château de Mercuès in 1983 not only did he decide to turn it into one of the finest castle hotels but also a prestigious wine estate by creating 32 acres of vineyard and an underground cellar for ageing the in house wines.

To explore the castle and its vineyard book yourself a Vineyard and Castle Excursion tour that's organised by the hotel to take you around the vines of Cahors and see first hand how the Malbec grape is cultivated. Inside the castle you can take a stroll down its grand staircases that

A FRENCH TOAST
(CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE) The Château de Mercuès, a castle hotel near France's Lot Valley, that's surrounded by the vineyards of Cahors; Mercuès, the fine dining French restaurant at the hotel, where you can try regional cuisines; The hotel's underground cellar filled with rows of wine barrels



lead you to the underground cellar filled with rows of barrels where you could indulge in a lively wine-tasting experience. The chateau vineyards produce concentrated wines famous for their deep black colour and aromas.

Besides soaking in the beautiful vineyards, make the most of your stay at this idyllic resort. The vintage inspired rooms of the castle are done up in different styles and provide breathtaking views of the estate.

For an authentic French culinary fare head for the Mercuès, a gourmet restaurant that serves up regional cuisines like braised young pigeon with foie gras or a pot roast saddle of pikeperch paired with rich Malbec wines. If you prefer a more open-air set up then drop by The Treize Heures restaurant that has a chic bistro ambience and a menu that changes according to the terroir and uses the freshest market produce. The Château de Mercuès also hosts Gastronomic Events where you can attend culinary classes, sample wine and food pairing and visit local truffle markets.

