

AN INTRODUCTION TO NEW ZEALAND

of Wineries

334

of Acres

9,380 ha (about .24% of world's production)

Average Yield

9.8 tons acre

Major Regions

Marlborough, 2997 ha, Hawkes Bay 2011, Gisbone 1368

Latitude

35.7 to 45.15

Successes

Sauvignon Blanc - increased by 36%

Harvest

1999 - 79,700

Note:

White Wine Sales	1732 Sauv, 2309 ha Chardonnay, Pinot Noir 741 ha, Cabernet 571 ha,
Merlot	476 ha
Red Wine Sales	
Consumption	9.4
Hail	
Grapes	
Exports	30% of wine sales

Large-scale wine making in New Zealand is fairly new; most vineyards and wineries are less than 30 years old, with many less than 15. But Old World skill and tenacity is evident as you visit and sample in many areas. There is definitely a Dalmatian/Croatian influence in the wineries of the Auckland region just as there are Italian influences in the wineries of the Marlborough region.

New Zealand, situated between latitudes 34 and 47 degrees south, shares great similarity in weather and topography with areas of California, especially the Napa Valley -- softly rolling hills, warm sunny days and thirsty arid soils. And don't let it scare you that the bulk of New Zealand wines are whites; a reputation of excellence is growing for its reds, especially merlots and pinot noirs.

New Zealand is divided into five major wine-producing regions, with many minor regions pushing into the limelight. If you look on a map of New Zealand, you'll notice many regions follow the east coast of both the North and South Islands, which is under the influence of the South Pacific.

AUCKLAND REGION:

Greater Auckland is home territory to some of the biggest names in New Zealand wines, names like Selaks, Cooper's Creek and House of Nobilo; in Henderson you'll find Babich, Corbans and Delegat's. This region is gaining a reputation for quality wine-making; its red wines are some of the country's best and its white wines are setting new standards.

Waiheke Island, sprawling in the sun of Auckland's Hauraki Gulf, is only a 35-minute ferry ride away from the city. Fullers Tours operates the only organized tour on this "alternative" lifestyle island retreat of 7,500 permanent residents. This big-bus tour, taken as part of an island sightseeing package, only touches down at two pre-designated wineries (on my tour these were The Croll and Stonyridge Vineyards). The stops were, for me, much too short and felt a little too staged. Because of the character of the island, though, a winery tour by bicycle may be just the ticket for those inclined.

Waiheke Island is popular with the red wine set, with several of the vineyards experimenting with white varieties. What truly surprised me, though, was how I could look out over parts of the island and swear I was deep in the Napa Valley and not thousands of miles to the south. And the pace he

GISBORNE AND THE POVERTY BAY REGION:

Gisborne sits in the north of a fertile region that stretches down the coast to Hawke's Bay. This region produced almost one-third of the total New Zealand vintage for 1995.

The remoteness of the Gisborne area often leads it to be overlooked on the wine trail of the North Island. However, the wines of this region are of high quality and this is leading to more respect and recognition. Unfortunately, "poverty" pretty much sums up the organized tour opportunities in this area: the only wine tours to be found in this region are either the ones visitors put together for themselves or the one offered by Eastland Outback Tours, a small-bus tour company based in Gisborne. However, this is an area of rich history and rich wines, especially gewurztraminers and chardonnays, so the rewards are well worth the effort. Matawhero and the Milton Vineyards are two of the major wineries in the area.

NAPIER/HASTINGS AND THE HAWKE'S BAY REGION:

This is the bountiful and delicious area of Hawke's Bay, a real jewel in the crown of New Zealand wineries. The area offers more excellent wineries and vineyard restaurants than many entire countries, and the local winery tours reflect this earthy knowledge of viticulture.

In this region you can sample world-class cabernet sauvignons, merlots, pinot noirs and wonderful chardonnays at some of the country's more well-known wineries such as Mission Vineyards, Vidal and Ngatarawa. With more than 20 wineries offering tastings and tours, this region can create a feast for the senses for many days.

In the Hawke's Bay region, my choice for a winery tour is Vince's Vineyard Tour: Vince is truly a gift to wine tour aficionados. When asked how he gathered his knowledge of wines and wineries, he said, "I was born Italian and into a wine-making family -- what more do I need?" His good sense of humor, friendship with the local wineries and easy-going nature all add up to a great tour experience.

WELLINGTON AND THE MARTINBOROUGH REGION:

This eclectic region on the southern terminus of the North Island is currently going through an identity crisis, for now "Wellington" is the official name for the entire region encompassing the areas of Wairarapa, Te Horo and Wellington (the city). For such a large region, the wineries here are tiny; happily, most are clustered within an easy stroll or bike ride of each other.

This is pinot noir country, though classy chardonnays, rieslings and gewurztraminers spring forth from this bountiful region. The big guns of the Wellington region include Pallister Estate, Martinborough Vineyards and Ata Rangi, with many smaller wineries scattered about, creating something for every palate.

For a well-orchestrated tour of this region, none can compare with Baxter, owner and operator of Grape Escape Wine Tours, based in Wellington. If truly investigating wine and its culture is your "cuppa," Baxter is your man.

NELSON/BLENHEIM AND THE MARLBOROUGH:

From its humble start in only 1973, the Marlborough is expected to account for 40% of New Zealand's vineyard acreage by 1998. This region is "Montana" country with the huge Montana winery setting the pace, both in acreage under vine and litres produced, but there is also much to sample and enjoy at Seifried Estate, Hunter's and Neudorf Vineyards, just to name a few. The area is famous for its white wines, particularly its sauvignon blanc, chardonnay and riesling vintages.

Wine has been made around Auckland since the mid-1800s. In the 1970s and '80s new areas like Marlborough and Martinborough pushed the region into the shadows, but in the 1990s it is going through something of a renaissance. Travelling around the wineries is a pleasant way to spend a day. Commercial tours are readily available, but if you would like to drive yourself, there are several alternatives.