

[Argentina]

MENDOZA

Saddle up for some adventurous tasting in the mountainous capital of Argentina's thriving wine scene, where old-world expertise meets new-world innovation.

Maybe you can't distinguish between Italian wine regions on a map, or explain the difference between French and American oak barrels. But unless you've been living under a rock, chances are you've noticed that right now Argentina is hot on the international wine scene. Think about it: you can't glance at a wine list without seeing the word 'Malbec', or turn on the radio without hearing a chef talk about the best-value Argentinian bottles for your summer barbecue.

If the runaway popularity of Argentinian wine strikes you as sudden, you're not alone. Even Argentinian people didn't realise how fantastic their wine could be until fairly recently, though it's safe to say they were always fully aware of the natural beauty of Mendoza. The nation's wine-producing capital occupies a spectacular stretch of sun-drenched landscape at the

foot of the snowcapped Andes. Even if there weren't any vineyards around, it would still be a popular travel destination, thanks to its gorgeous weather and picture-perfect opportunities for hiking, horseback riding, skiing, fishing, whitewater rafting or cycling. Luckily for travellers there is indeed a glass, or several, waiting for you at the end of that bike ride.

The wine produced in Mendoza, whether in the longer-established region of Luján de Cuyo or the up-and-coming Uco Valley, isn't just the product of the natural landscape. It's the result of a new generation of winemakers that knows the rules of French or Italian winemaking – and knows how to break them. It's a South American playground for innovation, the meeting point between tradition and new technology. Raise your glass: here in Mendoza, it's a brave new world.

GET THERE

Mendoza El Plumerillo is the nearest major airport, 8km from Mendoza. Car hire is available.



01 TAPIZ

You'll know you've arrived at Tapiz when you spot the llamas. Dozens graze in the fields around the vineyards, controlling weeds, producing fertiliser and providing wool that local artisans use to make traditional blankets and ponchos, on sale to visitors in the winery's boutique.

The picturesque llama family is a pleasingly old-fashioned counterpoint to the state-of-the-art (and sustainable) winemaking technology Tapiz employs inside. The two signature wines are Malbec and Torrontés, made with grapes harvested here, in Agrelo, as well as in the Uco Valley and further afield in Argentina's northernmost wine region of Cafayate in Salta. They're presided over, in part, by the world-renowned French winemaker Jean-Claude Berrouet, who works as a consultant with the brand. For a particularly

'We have found this place where I think we can make the best wines in the world because of the climate and soil combination...'

—*Laura Catena, President of Bodega Catena Zapata*

memorable experience, book a tour of the vineyard by horse-drawn carriage, followed by tasting wines straight from the barrels.

www.bodega-tapiz.com.ar; tel +54 261-490 0202; Ruta Provincial (RP) 15, km 32; 9.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, to 12.30pm Sat & holidays

02 RUCA MALÉN

According to the cofounder of Bodega Ruca Malén, you don't need to hear descriptions of his wines: you need to taste them yourself. 'As is the case with any work of art,' Jean Pierre Thibaud has said, 'pleasure can

only derive from personal discovery'.

Perhaps the best way to discover this particular wine experience is through a leisurely meal at the restaurant. The five-course lunch with wine pairings, served in a sun-filled dining space overlooking the surrounding vineyards, is considered one of the finest in Mendoza. A word to the wise: after indulging in a feast like this one, you might not have any room left for tasting more wine until the following day. Although the winery takes its name from an old Mapuche legend, the wine tastings and blending classes at Ruca Malén are all about

01 The vineyards of Bodega Salentein

02 Plan a lakeside getaway at Casa de Uco

03 Malbec wine grapes in Mendoza

04 Bodega Catena Zapata

05 Explore the vineyards of Casa de Uco in style

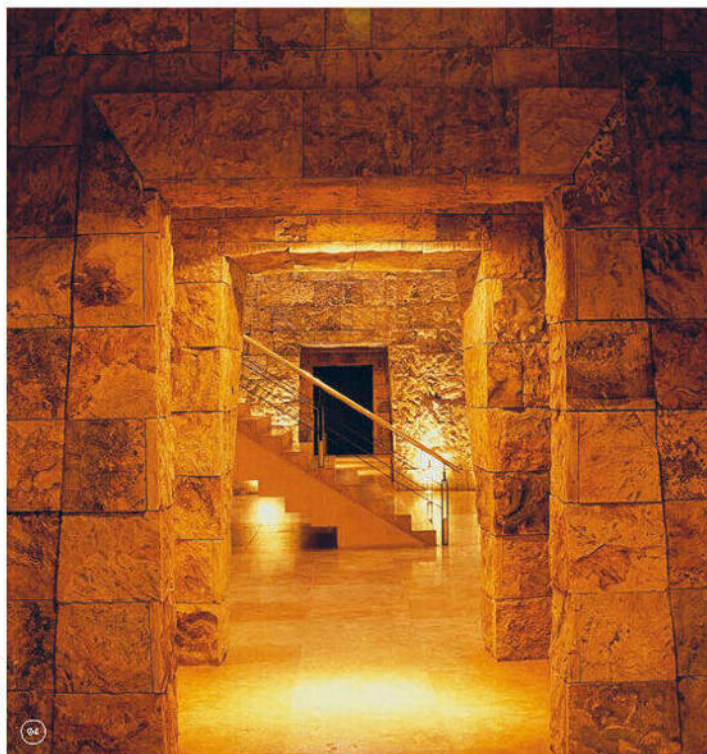
06 Bodega Salentein's underground cellar

07 Grapes in the vineyards of Salentein

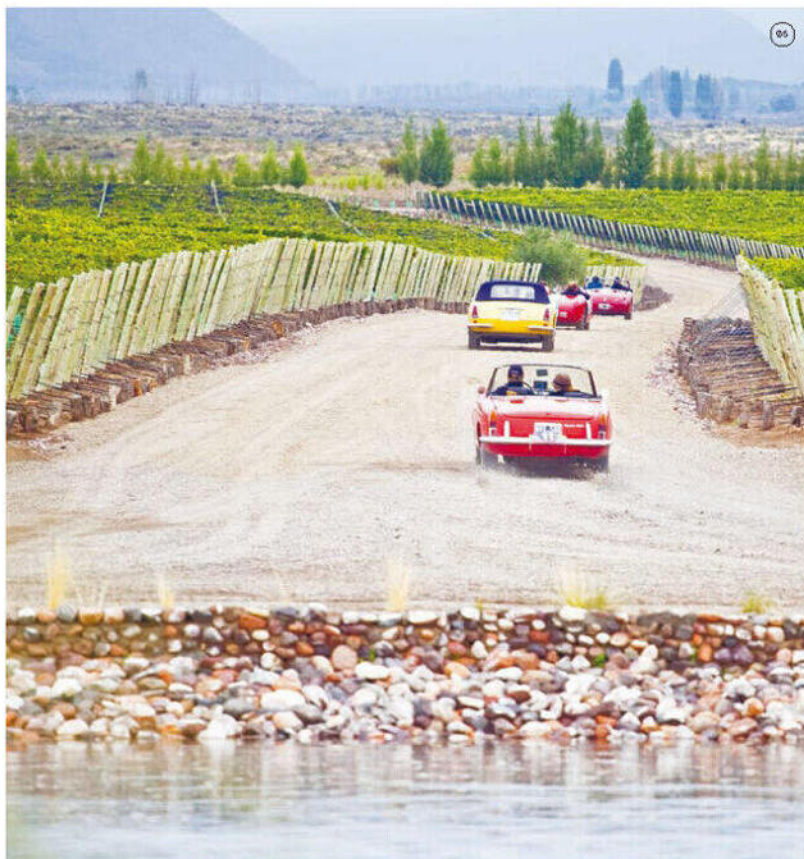
08 Casa de Uco's restaurant is top class



Yield Levy © Alamy



Courtesy of Catena Zapata



Courtesy of Casa de Uco

modern winemaking techniques. www.bodegarucamalen.com; tel +54 261-15 4540974; RN 7, km 1059, Agrelo; tastings 10am, 11am & 3.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am & 11am Sat

03 CATENA ZAPATA

Like Mendoza itself, Catena Zapata represents an appealing balance between old traditions and contemporary winemaking. The vineyard was founded by Nicola Catena, an Italian immigrant to Argentina who planted his first Malbec vines in 1902. It later became the experimental playground for Nicolás Catena – arguably the most celebrated winemaker in Argentina – and his daughter, Laura, current president of Bodega Catena Zapata and author of the talked-about 2010 book *Vino Argentino: An Insider's Guide to the Wines and Wine Country of Argentina*. Her energetic and unpretentious



approach is revolutionising the face of Argentinian wines.

Look for Luca, Laura's line of small-quantity, artisanal-quality wine made from Argentina's old vines; taste the winery's classic Malbecs straight from the barrels or the fermentation tanks on one of several tour and tasting options for visitors.

www.catenawines.com; tel +54 261-413 1100; Cobos s/n, Agrelo; 9am-6pm Mon-Fri

04 SALENTEIN

Located in the Uco Valley, the Dutch-owned Bodega Salentein is as much an architectural landmark as a destination for wine enthusiasts. The main building was designed in the shape of a cross. Each of the four

wings serve as a small winery with two levels — stainless steel tanks and French wooden vats on one floor, and an underground cellar for aging wine in oak casks on the other. The central chamber, or the crux of the cross, functions as a state-of-the-art amphitheatre modelled after the look and feel of a classical temple.

Check the calendar ahead of time: in addition to regular tastings, Salentein hosts a line-up of musical performances and art exhibitions in its barrel room and gallery. Where better to sample the brand's famous Pinot Noir from the 2009 harvest? Make a weekend of it and check into the 16-room Posada Salentein. Don't miss the fantastic Sunday *asado criollo*, a traditional Argentinian



barbecue with a gourmet twist — the feast lasts for several hours. www.bodegasalentein.com; tel +54 026-2242 9500; RP 89, Los Árboles, Tunuyán; 9am-5pm Mon-Sat

Courtesy of Bodega Salentein

WHERE TO STAY**HUENTALA HOTEL**

Complete with a wine cellar, this elegant 81-room hotel is located near one of Mendoza's main squares – a good choice if you'd like to stay in town. www.huentalahotel.com; tel +54 261-420 0766; *Primitivo de la Reta 1007, Mendoza*

CASA DE UCO VINEYARD & WINE RESORT

This sleek, sustainably built lakeside getaway, featuring a stylish restaurant and complimentary horseback riding on its large property, is located within easy reach of many of the best wineries in the Uco Valley. www.casadeucowine.com; tel +54 9261-476 9831; *RP 94, km 14.5, Tunuyán*

WHERE TO EAT**BODEGA MELIPAL**

The lavish lunch with wine pairings in Luján de Cuyo, overlooking vineyards nearly as far as the eye can see, is a wine-country classic. www.bodegamelipal.com; tel +54 261-479 0202; *Ruta 7, km 1056, Agrelo*

1884 RESTAURANTE

Located in a romantic old house and courtyard garden, 1884 is a landmark restaurant by pioneering Argentinian chef and winemaker Francis Mallmann. www.1884restaurant.com.ar; tel +54 261-424 3336; *Belgrano 1188, Mendoza*

WHAT TO DO

Arrange a hike, a horse-riding excursion, a rafting adventure, or even a side trip to Aconcagua – the highest point in the

southern hemisphere – with one of the many outdoor outfitters in town. For an active excursion closer to the city centre, rent a bicycle, either independently or as part of an organised winery tour. Back in town, stop by the Vines of Mendoza tasting room to sample wine from the surrounding region. www.vinesofmendoza.com; tel +54 261-438 1031; *Belgrano 1194, Mendoza*

CELEBRATIONS

The event of the year in Mendoza is the Fiesta de

la Vendimia, or the annual harvest festival, taking over the city for 10 days at the beginning of March. Although the celebration honours all of the region's fruits, the grape, of course, takes centre stage. Highlights include traditional foods, folkloric concerts and a colourful parade and pageant to crown the queen of the festival. Be sure to book ahead: Vendimia draws huge crowds, both from Argentina and abroad. www.vendimia.mendoza.gov.ar

Courtesy of Casa de Uco

