



On Cruise Vacations, Wine's Popular Pastime

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Cruises now offer extensive wine collections, with programs for tasting and learning about wine for both connoisseurs and curious beginners.

MIAMI, Aug. 2, 2017 -- Cruise vacations are an increasingly popular way to relax, unwind and recharge. And while at sea, there's opportunity for guests to embrace some of life's most enjoyable pleasures – with wine-tasting and learning about wines an area of interest for many. Whether guests are curious beginners or connoisseurs, shipboard wine collections are carefully curated to excite the senses with both classic and new tastes.



Wine collections on cruise ships cater to all tastes and offer unique programs to taste and learn about different wines, whether you're an expert or simply curious. Photo courtesy of Holland America Line

The efforts that go into the wine collections at sea are being recognized by wine experts as being extraordinary.

Carnival Cruise Line recently earned a prestigious 2017 Wine Spectator Award. The world's largest cruise line was applauded for its handpicked selections, chosen to complement the cuisine at the Fahrenheit 555 steakhouses aboard Carnival Vista, Carnival Breeze and Carnival Sunshine.

On cruise ships, wine-loving guests may choose a bottle from wine lists or purchase a valued-priced, multi-bottle wine package from a menu. Main dining rooms, specialty restaurants and wine bars also offer selections by the glass, allowing for experimentation.

Oenophile-focused shore excursions at select ports take you right to the vineyards for discussion about winemaking with vintners – in places such as Italy, France, New Zealand and Australia. On its Pacific Wine Country itineraries, Princess Cruises offers guests opportunity to tour wineries including in California's Sonoma County.

Onboard wine seminars provide guests opportunity to chat with experienced sommeliers and sample different varietals. Cruise lines such as Germany's AIDA Cruises and P&O Cruises Australia also offer theme cruises focused on food and wine, which bring additional experts onboard.

"A cruise vacation is a great time to try something new, and when it comes to wine, that is very much encouraged by

the sommeliers onboard," said Jo Poelmans, senior manager, restaurant and bar operations for ultra-luxury line Seabourn.

"Wine is fashionable and also entertaining onboard ships," added Csaba Imre Szentpaly-Toth, Cellar Master on the Holland America Line's ms Zaandam. "Guests have opportunity on a concentrated basis to open their eyes to the secret world of winemaking, sommeliers, the art of food and wine pairing and the exciting history of wine-producing regions and people. We can lift the veil and introduce guests to new tastes and the rediscovery of old favorites."

Cruise lines select bottles from vintners around the world. Carnival Cruise Line alone orders hundreds of thousands of bottles of wine each year. Each of the line's 25 ships carries about 5,000 bottles of wine at any one time, with the stocks constantly being replenished.

Carnival Cruise Line's bestselling wines include Layer Cake Cabernet, Oyster Bay Sauvignon Blanc and Ecco Domani Pinot Grigio, said Eddie Allen, vice president of beverage operations for Carnival Cruise Line. In main dining rooms, the wine menu features more than 100 wines available by the bottle and some 30 selections available by the glass.

For a quiet sip, visit The Library Bar on the Carnival Breeze, Carnival Sunshine or Carnival Vista (and coming next year on the new Carnival Horizon). In the relaxing, library-themed oasis, you can pour your own tastes from state-of-the-art self-serve wine dispensers.

The 12 ships of AIDA Cruises stock nearly 100 varieties from famous wine regions including in Germany, France and the United States, said Johannes Nagel, AIDA Cruises' senior manager of hotel services

The cruise line has its own branded AIDA Selection wine, a Frühburgunder (pinot madeleine), developed with Germany's Brogsitter winery. To celebrate the recent christening of the AIDAperla, AIDA Cruises is also serving a special Prima Perla Prosecco from the Veneto region of Italy.

Italy's wine heritage is at the forefront on Italian line Costa Cruises. The line recently partnered with The Wine Bank in Pollenzo, Italy (a cooperative founded by Carlo Petrini of International Slow Food Movement fame), on a sustainable and organic wine list – which features more than 100 labels from Italy and around the world. The line's traditional wine list also has iconic selections from Italy and elsewhere.

The most popular wine on Costa Cruises ships is a sparkling Demi-Sec from the Ferrari collection, said Marco Serra, a Costa Cruises corporate sommelier.

"Ferrari winery is an important piece of Italian wine history and on our ships you may find the entire Ferrari collection," Serra said. "The Trento Doc Ferrari Demi-Sec is obtained from Chardonnay grapes that are grown on the steep slopes of the mountains of Trentino."

On several of the ships of British line P&O Cruises, The Glass House restaurant is a stylish, sea-view haven for lovers of good food and wine. Award-winning wine expert, food connoisseur and TV personality Olly Smith (who comes onboard the ships several times a year to lead food and wine experiences) handpicked the bespoke collection of specialty wines, which includes classics and off-the-beaten-path blends. Forty wines are available by the glass and paired with tapas. The idea, according to Smith, is to spend the evening sipping and tasting in a "no snobbery" experience.

On the ships of P&O Cruises Australia, connoisseurs and newbies alike will want to check out selections that include labels from the renowned Hunter Valley, about 90 miles north of Sydney. With its five-ship fleet, P&O purchases nearly 100,000 bottles of wine from the Australian region each year – having a significant positive impact on local winemakers.

Onboard Pacific Aria, Pacific Dawn, Pacific Eden and Pacific Jewel, The Cellar Door wine bar is an innovative venue for tastings, master classes and seminars, run by onboard staff.

The venerable Cunard line shows its passion for wine in a collection that encompasses labels from the world's most famous Old World vineyards, tempting New World wines and carefully selected examples from smaller boutique vineyards.

Expert sommeliers onboard the three Cunard ocean liners assist guests with making their selections from an impressive, 48-page wine list. There's also a handy tasting guide rating white wines on a scale of very dry to luscious and red wines from light to full bodied.

Rare wines are available by the bottle or by the glass, via Cunard's groundbreaking Coravin system – which allows pours without removing the original cork. Among the precious tastes is a Château Lafite Rothschild. Guests might also choose a First Growth Wine Flight, featuring the five Premiers Crus of the Médoc, complete with an explanation of their common theme and differences.

Cunard's wine list also includes the line's own private label of four varietals made from grapes from France's upper Minervois – there's a wonderfully complex chardonnay/viognier, cabernet sauvignon, Grenache/Syrah/Mourvèdre and a Grenache/Syrah Rosé.

For those serious about pursuing wine education, Cunard partners with the Wine & Spirit Education Trust (WSET), the world's largest provider of wine and spirits qualifications, for courses offered shipboard.

In the Princess Cruises fleet, the Royal Princess and Regal Princess boast the largest at-sea collections of Super Tuscans – representing most of the brands available worldwide. Selections are showcased at the Tuscan-inspired specialty restaurant Sabatini's. To try a variety, sign up for the Super Tuscan Wine Tasting.

At the Vines Wine Bar, in a charming corner of the Piazza atrium on all of Princess Cruises' Grand- and Royal-class ships, there's opportunity to sample a selection of dozens of vintage wines and sparkling wines. The menu includes wine flights and a selection of wines by the glass, served with complimentary gourmet nibbles. A new experience with Napa's Silverado Vineyards provides guests opportunity to try their hand at wine blending.

Wine connoisseurs on Regal Princess might consider booking a Wine Maker's Dinner, a unique, intimate dining experience held in a private space inspired by a wine cellar. The menus are developed in conjunction with noted winemakers and paired with matching wines.

Guests on Seabourn enjoy carefully chosen complimentary wines and champagne from a list of more than 40 varietals, while connoisseurs may choose additional options from a premium wine menu featuring more than 160 wine and 18 champagne labels.

Particularly impressive on Seabourn are selections from some small, family-operated vineyards in Napa – some are arranged via the cruise line's connection with culinary partner Thomas Keller, arguably America's greatest chef.

"We are honored to offer wines from Colgin Cellers and Lail Vineyards, for example, allowing our guests to try these extraordinary vintages," said the line's Poelmans. "We also carry some of the most exclusive French wines onboard such as Domaine de la Romanée-Conti. At the end of the day, we're Seabourn and we strive to deliver the best."

Holland America Line guests can choose from some 200 labels available at any one time, said the Zaandam's Szentpaly-Toth. The wine list changes by itinerary and destination, with separate lists for the main dining room and specialty restaurants.

"Our American guests are immensely interested in the European chic of wine history and sampling those vintages from France and Italy," Szentpaly-Toth said. "Our European crowd would try almost anything they can from California to Washington State."

The best sellers onboard Holland America Line ships include non-oak, barrel-aged whites, Sauvignon Blancs and Pinot Noirs from New Zealand and Super Tuscans. Orlando Ashford, president of Holland America Line, has his name on a private label Super Tuscan that has resonated well with guests, Szentpaly-Toth said.

On the ms Koningsdam, there is also opportunity for guests to create their own wine at BLEND, a wine-blending experience offered in cooperation with Chateau Ste. Michelle, Washington State's oldest winery.

Cellar masters on each of the Holland America Line ships sample wines, visit vineyards and are attentive to guests, both at tasting events and seminars and one-on-one. "I find our guests falling in love with our wine team and taking their suggestions," Szentpaly-Toth said.

Here are five tips from shipboard sommeliers:

1. Let your wine steward know what you plan to order for your meal. He or she might suggest you order a powerful, fruity wine with your rack of lamb, for instance.
2. Try wine with dessert. Sweet wine, such as a Moscato, pairs well with the bitterness of chocolate.
3. Consider ordering wine based on the countries you are visiting. You might go for a Spanish wine in the Mediterranean or a Chilean wine in South America.
4. Don't be afraid to ask questions. Shipboard sommeliers and wine experts are there to help take your wine experience to the next level.
5. Ask about the history and origin of the wines you order. There are stories behind the creations.

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