

Exploring Wine



Exploring Spain – Wine and History JUNE 29-JULY 6, 2015

Spain is home to some of the greatest wines on earth, as well as the greatest bargains in wine – a fabulous combination. The arid high plains of northern Spain offer stark beauty and great bounty. Broad, dusty vistas backed by mountain ridges, dotted with a patchwork quilt of vineyards – it's a wine landscape like no other. And the history is fascinating – a Catholic country under Muslim domination for seven hundred years. Join us to explore the unique wines, cuisine, and culture of Spain!



Our small group of no more than 12 adventurers will launch our journey from Spain's most vibrant city, Barcelona. The nearby region of Penedès hosts most of Spain's sparkling Cava production, so we'll toast the start of the trip at one of the top boutique sparkling wine producers in the country.



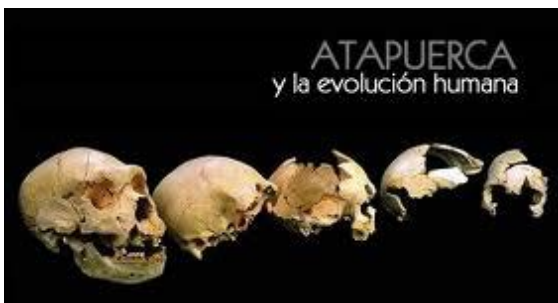
From the Cava area we wend our way into the remote and craggy mountains of Priorat, where a growing collection of Spain's best wines are made. After spending the night in a small, elegant hotel in a tiny mountain village, we travel down a rutted dirt track to visit the very first great winery in Priorat and talk to the family. We'll also visit the ruin of the ancient priory for which Priorat is named.

We make our way northwest through Campo de Borja with a visit to the great Alto Moncayo winery, then head for the culinary mecca of San Sebastián on the wind-swept Atlantic coast.

In San Sebastián we'll enjoy a spectacular meal at one of the trio of Michelin three-star restaurants; then to the west in Bilbao, we'll stop at Frank Gehry's famed Guggenheim Museum, before we reach Spain's most famous wine area, Rioja.



We'll spend two nights in an ancient walled village in Rioja, with visits to three top-rated wineries. Then at the UNESCO World Heritage caves of Atapuerca, we'll have an exceptional chance to watch archeologists sift painstakingly through dirt and rocks as they unearth and catalog the richest collection of pre-human fossils found in Europe. This amazing site has been shaking up scientists' view of human evolution.

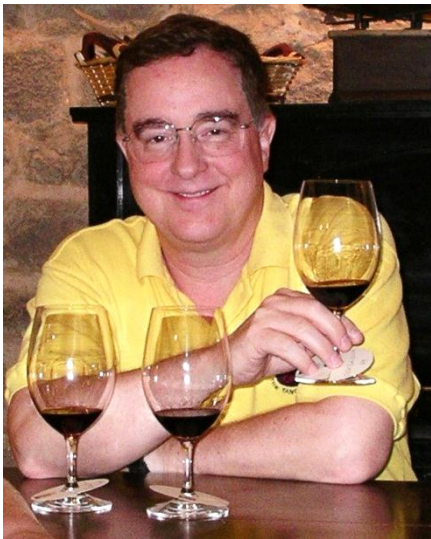


Our hotels offer four- and five-star comfort, mostly in historical settings. We'll experience the best in local cuisine, plus one gastronomic extravaganza with three Michelin stars. Our transport will be in a comfortable mini-bus with a local driver. We'll walk every day, exploring vineyards, villages, and historic sites, but the pace will be relaxed, and there will be some free time every afternoon.



Our final wine exploration will be in Ribera del Duero, a hotter, drier neighbor to Rioja producing often richer wines. We'll dine in a spectacular Relais et Chateaux hotel created in a medieval abbey. We'll take a jeep tour through vineyards, and from a hilltop castle we'll gaze across the expansive plains to the Duero River and the mountains that give it life. Then it's on to Madrid, where we'll visit the famed Prado museum to conclude our Exploring Wine journey across Spain.





A Sample Day:

- ❖ After a short morning drive, we visit a spectacular modern family-owned winery making among the best sparkling wines in Spain, escorted by the owner
- ❖ Lunch in a Priorat village followed by a visit to the ruins, tucked at the foot of a mountain, of the oldest monastery in Spain
- ❖ Visit and taste at a famed Priorat winery that is young like many in the area, but makes dazzling wines
- ❖ Enjoy an authentic local dinner, accompanied by the very best Priorat wines

Your guide for this exceptional experience is Charles Bennett, CWP, CSW, founder of *Exploring Wine*. A wine lover and collector for 30 years who honeymooned in Burgundy and once lived on a vineyard in Germany, he speaks French and German and has traveled extensively around the world. Charlie is certified as a wine professional by the Culinary Institute of America. He is also the chief U.S. wine officer (*Grand Echanson*) for the Chaîne des Rôtisseurs, the world's largest wine and food society, for whom he oversees the annual "Best Young Sommelier in America" competition. He holds degrees from Stanford and Tufts. In years past he won three Emmy awards on public television, was a business strategy consultant to CEOs of several Fortune 500 companies, and was VP of Internet Services for Compaq Computer. Wine is now his primary passion.

8 days and 7 nights. \$5,490 per person based on double occupancy, land only
See separate sheet for itinerary and reservation forms



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Portugal and the Douro Wine District Optional Extension JULY 6-9, 2016



Portugal offers two spectacles that are impressive even for those who aren't yet lovers of Port wine. First, along the romantic Douro River snake hundreds of steep and craggy vineyards, hugging the terraced hillsides. It's a dramatic and beautiful vista to enjoy as you float quietly along the historic waterway that has been Portugal's economic lifeblood through the centuries.

And then there is the cork industry, where workers hand-strip large sections of the spongy bark for eventual conversion into cork stoppers, flooring, or even furniture. A unique renewable resource.

At the conclusion of our Spain adventure, we'll fly from Madrid to historic Porto, longtime capital of the Port wine trade in the north of the country. Here on the cool, damp coast sit the Port houses of legend: Graham's, Taylor's, Cockburn, and many more.

We'll check into our luxurious hotel on a hill overlooking the city, then walk just across the street for a tasting and dinner at renowned Taylor-Fladgate.



The following day we travel along the Douro River from Porto to the village of Pinhão, the heart of the Douro wine district. Here among terraced vineyards, we'll take a boat trip along the river and taste at a famous wine estate before returning to Porto.



The next day we'll visit a major cork factory, watching the workers (and robots) grade, punch, and trim the stoppers that keep wines around the globe safe and quiet while they mature. Then we'll have free time to explore the historic old city of Porto.

On our final day, a visit to the famed Port house of Graham's, followed by a farewell lunch. Thanks for being part of the trip!



*\$2,395 per person based on double occupancy
See separate sheet for itinerary and reservation forms*