

the grape escape

By Sarah Monaghan

Mallorca, the largest of Spain's Balearic Islands, boasts a growing number of wineries that are producing impressive reds and whites. Getting there, touring the grounds, and pairing your favorite glass with the sublime local cuisine combine for the perfect vacation.



Workers hand-cultivate vines in Mallorca's Binissalem region.



DO Binissalem/Mallorca Tourism; Sarah Monaghan

Bottles for sale at Bodega Jaume Mesquida.

In his first-century encyclopedic work, *Naturalis Historia*, Roman philosopher Pliny the Elder asserted that the wines of the Balearics “challenge comparison with the first vintages of Italy.” Nearly two millennia later, in 1956, Hollywood legend Grace Kelly and Monaco’s Prince Rainier sailed through the Mediterranean on their honeymoon, spending part of the time wine-tasting on Mallorca.

While Pliny and Kelly were clearly on to something, they would have been all the more impressed had they been able to visit Mallorca today. There are now more than 65 *bodegas* (wineries) on the island, with several award winners among them. It’s really not a stretch to say that the wines of Mallorca are on par with those of mainland Spain’s celebrated Ribera del Duero region. And most of the wines are still lovingly crafted under small-scale conditions.

But if good wine is all that you’re looking for, go ahead and visit your local liquor store and call it a day. What makes Mallorca a terrific oenotourism site is the immersive experience. Take it from a local. Jane Stanbury of the Mallorcan custom travel company Balearic Discovery has lived on the island for many years.

“The vineyards have really come on leaps and bounds in the last 10 years,” she says. “When we first moved here there were about 20 wineries, but few of them had grasped the concept that visitors were interested in finding out about production. Things have really changed — they’ve woken up to the fact that tourists are fascinated to see inside a real bodega — and we are now lucky to have a great selection of vineyards offering visits that vary from simple tastings through to lunch and dinner tours, while some will even produce your own blends and ship a barrel home for you.”*

And then there’s the journey. Hopping from winery to winery often requires a stunning drive through winding country roads. Many vineyards are in the western part of the island, not far from the rippling peaks of the Serra de Tramuntana. Taking the Ma-10 — a road that runs parallel to the coast, a few miles inland — reveals breathtaking views of the mountains and the Mediterranean.

As you tour the wineries, you’ll notice that many of the vines are new, which would seem to belie Mallorca’s storied wine production. Here’s what happened: After the Spanish Civil War, in the late 1930s, many vineyards were replaced by vegetable fields and almond trees, and wine production subsequently slumped so much that the island couldn’t meet demand for local consumption. It wasn’t until the 1970s that



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Mallorca reawakened to its potential for making exceptional wines. Vines were replanted, with a renewed focus on the hardy indigenous grape varieties that are perfectly suited to the island’s soil, climate, and topography — or, as the French call it succinctly, *terroir*.

These are unlikely to be grape names you’ll recognize — the most widely planted is manto negro, a strong, pungent red; and then there’s the spicy, sturdy callet. The main white grape is moll, a pale and fruity variety. And while you will find familiar grapes in blends, it is these native grapes that lend Mallorcan wines their distinction.

So where to start? You can drive to most wineries and ask for a tasting (and then purchase a few bottles to take home with you), but call ahead if you can, especially if you want to stay for a fuller tour or lunch or dinner. Our picks for visits:

Bodegas Santa Catarina (santacatarina.es)

Santa Catarina is located in a beautiful valley near Andratx, west of the capital, Palma de Mallorca, in the Serra de Tramuntana, where its wines benefit from the mild Mediterranean breezes, intense sun, and cool nights. The winery grows several grapes, and it follows its cellar visit with a tasting and picnic in the vineyard. The staff will even take you hiking for the best views.

Vinyes Mortitx (vinyesmortitx.com)

This old estate near the northern town of Lluc grows indigenous grapes alongside syrah, merlot, and cabernet sauvignon, producing wines that have earned medals from the Concours Mondial de Bruxelles wine competition and *Decanter* magazine. Coming here is worth it just to drink in the view: The

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The entrance to Bodegas Santa Catarina.
INSET: Bodegas Santa Catarina’s Lena-Luiza Hertle pours a glass of white.



Sebastián Bustamante

The Wine List

Mallorcan wines aren’t widely available in wine shops outside the Balearic Islands, but there are some fine bottles worth seeking out in stateside stores, or purchasing while you’re visiting Mallorca.* We asked Sebastián Bustamante, head sommelier at the five-star Hotel Reads — located in Binissalem, in the heart of wine country — for his top selections.

Reds

BODEGAS MACIÀ BATLE DO BINISSALEM

Reserva Privada 2006 (manto negro, callet, cabernet)

A medium-to-full-bodied wine with aromas of cinnamon, red fruits, and chocolate, this has a long and silky taste that pairs well with roasted meats or dry and blue cheeses.

VINS NADAL DO BINISSALEM

Crianza Albafior 2006 (manto negro, cabernet, merlot)

With its intense nose and aromas of cloves, nutmeg, and red fruits, this wine goes perfectly with Mallorcan bread and *sobrasada*, a sausage popular in the Balearics.

VINS NADAL DO BINISSALEM

Syrah 110 2006

Intense with vanilla, butter pastries, and cherry notes, it’s best with stewed and barbecued meats, and matured cheeses.

Whites

BODEGAS MACIÀ BATLE DO BINISSALEM

Blanc de Blancs 2009 (prensal and chardonnay)

A wine with a very Mediterranean character, this has intense notes of tropical fruits, peach, and apple, and pairs especially well with green salads, vegetable pastas, and grilled white fish.

VINS TONI GELABERT DO PLA Y LLEVANT

Macabeu Blank 2009

With its notes of green apple and pear, this wine possesses clean flavor and dry acidity. Drink it with a light grilled or steamed fish.

VINS MIQUEL GELABERT DO PLA Y LLEVANT

Chardonnay Roure 2007

Fermented in barrels of new French oak for six months, this is a golden-yellow wine with flavors of tropical fruits. Pair it with seafood, rice, white meats, and semicured cheeses.

*Laws governing the receipt of wine shipments vary widely among countries, states, and even counties. Be sure to check the regulations for your area. Sending wine home from Mallorca by UPS or FedEx can be expensive. Some wineries will have distributors in your home country ship wine to you rather than send it from Spain. Ask about your best options at the winery.



fastFACTS

RESORT DIRECTORY: IntervalWorld.com or pages 232 to 233 and 239

CLIMATE: The average daytime high temperature during the fall months is about 70°F. Mallorca is relatively dry, but October is the rainiest month.

DON'T MISS: Weather permitting, the beach, specifically Platja S'Amarador, on the island's southeastern coast. Onbeach.com voted it Europe's best.

CURRENCY: euro

SALES TAX: The value-added tax (V.A.T.) is 18%.

TIPPING: At restaurants and in taxis, leave 5% to 10%.

INTERVAL TRAVEL: IntervalWorld.com

RENTAL CAR: Recommended

VISITOR INFORMATION:

Tourist Office of Spain
212.265.8822
spain.info
www.illesbalears.es

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The breathtaking Mallorcan coastline.

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vineyard sits in a secluded valley overlooked by Puig Tomir, one of the island's highest peaks. Thanks to the vineyard's small size, you can usually take a tour with the head oenologist herself before sampling the wines.

Bodegas Macià Batle (maciabatle.com)

One of Mallorca's biggest producers, Macià Batle is located in the idyllic village of Santa María del Camí, just 12 miles northwest of the capital. Aside from the comprehensive tours and tastings of its award-winning wines (accompanied by tapas), what makes this bodega a must-visit is its intriguing artistic bent. Each year, artists are commissioned to design the Reserva Privada labels, and there's a gallery on the premises.

Bodega Jaume Mesquida (jaumemesquida.com)

This award-winning winery is run by the brother-and-sister team of Jaume and Barbara, who are both under 30 and who rely entirely on biodynamic cultivation methods (everything is done by hand — no tractors, fertilizers, or pesticides). It's close to the village of Porreres, just south of the island's center, and you can enjoy a three-and-a-half-hour bike tour of the winery (bikes are supplied, tastings are included), or simply explore on foot and have lunch or dinner.

Can Feliu (sondaguet.com)

In addition to cabernet, syrah, merlot, chardonnay, and callet production, Can Feliu is a working farm that grows organic vegetables and fruits. When you visit, be sure to take the opportunity to descend into the 221-year-old vaulted cellars, complete with a trap door through which a donkey used to haul the wine. You can have your own barrel of wine mixed and shipped home.* ■

Sarah Monaghan contributes to a variety of international travel and lifestyle publications, as well as BBC Radio 4. She wrote about the Costa del Sol in the Fall 2010 issue of *Interval World*.

Mallorca Tourism: Sarah Monaghan

Pairs With ...

Fine Mallorcan wines demand good food. Try these specialties:



Coca, Mallorca's answer to pizza.

Pa amb oli: This classic island dish literally means "bread and oil," and usually consists of dense, rich bread doused in island olive oil, rubbed with garlic and tomato, and served with cured ham, chorizo, and local cheeses.

Frito mallorquí: Often served in tapas bars, this dish is a mix of fried potatoes and vegetables, with lamb or pork flavored with wild fennel and mint.

Coca: Similar to pizza, coca is often topped with red peppers, garlic, and parsley.

Sobrasada: A rich chorizo sausage made of cured pork, paprika, and salt, this is often eaten raw spread on crusty bread or cooked with honey.

Tumbet: An excellent vegetarian option, tumbet is a mix of potatoes, eggplant, and zucchini lightly fried in olive oil then layered with fresh tomato sauce.



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