

# Bloomberg

## New Ranking Lists the World's 50 Best Vineyards to Visit

*Argentina's Catena Zapata was just crowned the No. 1 wine estate in the world to go experience firsthand.*

This is the fifth edition of the annual awards, which are organized by UK-based William Reed Media, a family-owned digital data and events business based in London that also releases the mega-important and influential World's 50 Best Restaurants Awards list.

"The World's Best Vineyards highlights the very best wine tourism destinations around the globe," says Andrew Reed, managing director of wine and exhibitions at William Reed. "We understand that there is more to wine than grape juice in a bottle. It's also the story behind the winery, the visitor experiences you can have there." In 2023, he says, "there are more new entries than ever."

One underlying aim, naturally, is to promote wine tourism around the world. The United Nations World Tourism Organization held its first global conference on wine in 2016. In an email, Sandra Carvao, the UNWTO director of Market Intelligence and

Competitiveness said that "there are no global data on wine tourism," something they hope to address in an upcoming conference. At the same time, Future Market Insights Global and Consulting estimates that the wine tourism market will reach \$85.1 billion in 2023, and projects it will reach \$292.5 billion in 2033.

The growth in oenotourisme and the number of wineries over the past two decades are partly why William Reed expanded their portfolio.

### **How the top vineyards to visit are chosen**

The award structure is similar to the way the World's 50 Best Restaurants are selected. A global voting academy includes chairmen for 22 geographical regions; each of them recruits a panel of about 36 unnamed wine and travel experts. The more than 500 judges nominate up to seven destination vineyards they've personally visited in the past two years. The votes are counted and collated, and the vineyard with the most votes becomes No. 1, and so on for the top 100, though the top 50 get the airtime.

Wineries must be open to the public, but there's no defined set of criteria, which strikes me as problematic. "Decent wine is a given," says Reed (my view is that the wine should be great), and judges rank wineries based on their all-around visitor experience—which means stunning architecture, views that wow, perhaps a Michelin-starred restaurant or historic cellars, imaginative hands-on activities, concerts, ambiance, and more. Fair enough.

For example, in the second spot this year (for the second year in a row) is Spain's historic Marqués de Riscal, with its dramatic Frank Gehry-designed hotel topped by wide, twisted purple, gold, and silver-hued aluminum ribbons. In No. 3, up one place from its 2022 ranking, is Vik, a self-contained luxury wine destination in Chile created out of 11,000 acres of virgin territory. Besides the winery, it's home to a contemporary art-stuffed hotel and farm-to-table restaurant and offers horse riding in the vineyards.

## But what about climate change?

I've visited most of the top 50 wineries on the list, and in this climate change era, I'd argue that sustainability ought to be an essential criterion. I was glad to see that some winners, like those in the fourth, fifth, and sixth spots, are sustainability stars.

South Africa's Creation Wines (No. 4) is in the heart of the Cape Floral Kingdom, one of the most biodiverse wine regions in the world. It boasts a solar-powered cottage in the vineyards, walking and cycling trails, and plant-based food and wine pairings.

Bordeaux's Château Smith Haut Lafitte (No. 5), a leader in organic and biodynamic viticulture, offers a "forest of the senses" walking trail, horses for ploughing in the vineyard, and a "stealth" winery where CO<sub>2</sub> from fermentation is transformed into baking soda. Its adjacent Source de Caudalie hotel and spa feature beauty products derived from the winery's grapes and vines.

The multimillion-dollar Bodega Garzón in Uruguay (No. 6), owned by billionaire Alejandro Bulgheroni, was designed for oenotourisme from its inception and has achieved silver LEED certification. It includes a luxury hotel, an open-fire restaurant run by celeb chef Francis Mallman, cooking classes, learning how to press olives, and picnics in the vineyards.

You get the picture.



A yard at the France's Champagne Bollinger, which ranks at No. 23. *Photographer: BERTRAND GUAY/AFP*

France and South America dominate the top 50 spots. I was happy to see Maison Ruinart at No. 22; its crayères, or chalk cellars, are the most impressive in the region and often the site of brilliant art and sound experiences. And it's exciting that prestigious Champagne house Bollinger, (No. 23), has recently expanded into oenotourism. Oddly, none of the growing number of Provence wineries offering luxurious digs and world-class art has made it into the top 50 this year, though one did last year.

While there's a nod to newly recognized wine regions, with vineyards in Japan (No. 38) and Georgia (No. 47), I was surprised that only two US estates (Nos. 20 and 28), neither located in the popular Napa Valley, made the top 50. And the list contains only one in scenic, green New Zealand and one in Italy, a favorite destination for many wine lovers.

More adventurous and boutique picks can be found in the 51-100 list, which are revealed on the website, such as China's Canaan Winery (No. 80) an hour from Beijing, and New Zealand's Man O' War (No. 77) on Waiheke Island, with beachfront tasting spaces. At number No. 73 is America's great Ridge Vineyards high in the Santa Cruz Mountains of Northern California, one of my personal favorites.

## How important is winning?

The effect of grabbing the top spot is immediate, according to Sebastian Zuccardi, whose family's stunning stone winery in the Uco Valley in Mendoza, Argentina, was ranked No. 1 in 2019, 2020, and 2021. It's now graduated to the Hall of Fame. "There was a big increase in visitors after the first award," he said in an email, "and it's continued growing after every one."

Is wine tourism necessary to a US winery's bottom line? "The clear answer is yes," said Rob McMillan, EVP and founder of the Silicon Valley Bank wine division, in an email. He pointed out that all those "visitor experiences" drive consumer interest and attract people to a winery's tasting room and wine club, which translates into bottle sales that make up about 70% of a small premium producer's revenue.

Adrian Bridge, chief executive officer of the Flagship Partnership in Portugal, which owns several port houses, once shared why he thought oenotourism had become important. "The modern generation is going back to an earlier time when people traveled to explore and understand. Wine has become a way to unlock a region and culture."

**The top 50 list is below. Check the website for numbers 51 to 100.**

16. Quinta do Noval, Portugal

23. Champagne Bollinger, France \*New entry\*