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Where to Wine and Dine on Lake Geneva



Frank Lukasseck/Getty Images

Set course for Lavaux, on the shores of Lake Geneva, for a taste of Switzerland's most storied — and stunningly beautiful — wine region.

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As the saying has it, there are three suns that shine on the Lavaux vineyard terraces in Switzerland. The first is the sun on the vines, the second is the sun that reflects off the hand-hewn stone terraces on which those vines grow, and the last is the sun on Lake Geneva itself, warming its deep, azure waters. The result of those suns is that Lavaux — and really all of Switzerland's Vaud canton — produces remarkable wines. The hitch is that, outside of Swiss borders, almost nobody knows about them.

So, go. Vaud, which embraces the north shore of Lake Geneva, is truly one of the world's most spectacular vineyard regions — a bold statement, given the competition,

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but true, particularly of the Lavaux subregion. Its intricate terraced stone walls, originally built in the 1200s by northern Italian stonemasons, helped make it a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2007. These walls — more than 240 miles of them, rising 20 feet or higher — meander above Lake Geneva's shores, allowing vines to be grown on the steep slopes. (Vaud's other subregions, such as Chablais and La Côte, are no less beautiful.)

The principal grape here is the white Chasselas, native to Switzerland. As Louis-Philippe Bovard of Domaine Louis Bovard says, "It's perfect in this mosaic of soils we have. Chasselas from one cru to the next can be as different as Chablis is from Montrachet." He's right. The wines made from Chasselas range from crisp, fresh, and light to rich and full-bodied; they age beautifully, as well.

Fly in to Geneva, but make your home base for visiting wineries the picturesque lakefront city of Lausanne. Wineries here typically have shops or tasting rooms with regular hours, but it's best to call in advance to make sure. And summer — when the vines are burgeoning with fruit, the waters of the lake are glittering in the sun, and temperatures are in the balmy seventies — is the ideal time to go. What are you waiting for?

Where to Wine and Dine in Lavaux

Domaine Louis Bovard

Bovard's quaint tasting room in the heart of the Lavaux wine region is home to some of Switzerland's greatest whites, among them the crystalline 2016 Grand Cru Dézaley Médinette.

Domaine Du Daley

Along with impressive wines, this ancient property (founded in 1392) offers one of the greatest views of Lavaux's steep vineyards and Lake Geneva from its open-air terrace.

Domaine La Colombe

Located in the La Côte subregion, this was one of the first wineries in Switzerland to adopt biodynamic viticulture. Try a Chasselas; they are all intense, minerally, and site-specific.

Henri Badoux

Head east from La Colombe past Montreux to the Chablais subregion, and stop at Badoux's tasting room to try the ultra-crisp 2013 Aigle les Murailles Chasselas.

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Les Frères Dubois

This historic producer, located amongst the Lavaux vineyard terraces in the tiny town of Cully, has an extensive range of older vintages available from its tasting room.

Where to Stay

When visiting Vaud, check into the Beau-Rivage Palace (rooms from \$427) in Lausanne. This 1860s-era hotel offers grandeur with its elegant salons, mirrored hallways, and spacious rooms. Have dinner at star French chef Anne-Sophie Pic's eponymous restaurant and order a great Swiss wine from the hotel's 75,000-bottle cellar.

How to Tour

Tasting rooms in Switzerland are welcoming, but roads can be steep and daunting after a glass or two of wine. Consider working with a bespoke tour company like CountryBred, which organizes top-notch personalized wine tours (with private drivers) in every Swiss wine region.

The Chasselas Whisperer

When in Vaud, have dinner at the quaint Auberge de l'Onde, located in the tiny village of Saint-Saphorin. Wine director and general manager Jérôme Aké Béda emigrated from the Ivory Coast to Switzerland in 1989, fell in love with wine, and in 2015 was named the best sommelier in Switzerland. His knowledge is vast, and his gift for pairing local wines with dishes, such as chef Christophe Mazzieri's grilled foie gras with passion fruit–green cardamom emulsion, is unbeatable.