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Wine Travel: Arizona Wine Country Beckons

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By Jim Hofman

The beautiful Sonoran desert area of southern Arizona has long been a destination for travelers seeking a warm comfortable climate and ample sightseeing opportunities. The vibrant Tucson metro area offers a delightful mixture of culture and world class arts, but few know that just a short one hour drive away brings you to the heart of Arizona Wine Country.

It's an easy and scenic day trip from Tucson to Arizona Wine Country. Going east/southeast from Tucson on I-10, it's only an hour away. Exit I-10 a short 20 miles east of the city at Exit 281 and proceed south about 25 miles on Arizona Rt. 83. Note the changing topography as you climb more than 2000 feet through your journey.

Traveling south on Rt. 83, you'll soon enter the charming town of Sonoita, the gateway to wine country. Looking at the terrain in the Sonoita area, you'll begin to understand why wine has been produced here for many years. It's a perfect blend of medium elevation, rich soil, and low humidity. Owners of the seven wineries in this area will tell you this area is just about perfect for growing grapes.

Arizona Wine Country: The Wineries

Let's spend a little time at each of this area's seven wineries. As you'll typically find in a wine trail journey, these wineries are clustered together within a few miles. We recommend a late morning stop at one or two, a break for lunch, and then more wine exploring on into the afternoon.

We visited these wineries over the course of two visits, so feel free to mix and match your destinations. There's no prescribed order, as the wineries are scattered about in this pleasant, mostly rural area. No matter which you choose, you're guaranteed a true taste of Arizona's highly respected wine industry.

Callaghan Vineyards: Callaghan Vineyards produces premium reds and whites from its own 25 acre vineyard. Styled in Mediterranean and Spanish varieties, owner Kent Callaghan's wines have received accolades from prominent publications like Wine Spectator and the New York Times, and have been served at the White House on three occasions. Our favorite was Lisa's White, with its spicy apple aroma and subtle rich taste of pear and grapefruit.


Canelo Hills Vineyard and Winery: Canelo Hills is the product of owners Tim and Joan Mueller, who founded the operation in 2003. The Muellers were delighted to open their new tasting room in September 2007, realizing a long term dream to own and operate their own winery. Current wine offerings include a chardonnay, syrah, cabernet sauvignon, and an especially delicious crisp riesling.

Dos Cabezas Wineworks: Dos Cabezas is a relatively new arrival to the Sonoita-Elgin wine country, but not a newcomer to the Arizona wine scene. They've been producing wines since 1995, and recently moved the winery to this area from a location in the southeastern part of the state. Dos Cabezas was very proud to win two Governors Choice Awards in Dec. 2007 for Arizona's best red and white wine.

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About the Author




your-holistic-life
 Blog: Your Holistic Life - Live Well!
 Interests: My family, friends, healthy living

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Rancho Rossa Vineyards: Rancho Rossa is one of Arizona's largest family owned wineries, producing over 1200 cases per year entirely from their own fruit. Enjoy a taste of their Case Cuvee, a rich Chardonnay blend, as well as their Grenache, a red that's fermented in French Oak.

Village of Elgin Winery: Village of Elgin Winery is one of the area's original wineries. Established here more than a quarter century ago, Village of Elgin is well known for hosting two annual wine festivals, taking place in April and September. Offering a full and unique selection of reds and whites, Village of Elgin's wines will please any wine lover's palate.

Kief Joshua Vineyards: Kief-Joshua is another newcomer to the wine scene here and is located in the cluster of wineries known as "Winery Row", very close to many of the wineries listed above. Views from the tasting room are spectacular, overlooking scenic grasslands with mountains in the distance.

Sonoita Vineyards: Our last stop on this Wine Trail adventure is Sonoita Vineyards, the largest winery in this area and open since 1983. Their Arizona Sunset fruity rose wine was the first Arizona wine we tried many years ago. For a change of pace, try their Sonora Rossa. It's a spicy light red wine that's best served slightly chilled, perfect with Italian food.

If you're ready to spend a bit more time in this area, consider an overnight stay at one of the area's lodging options, or plan a visit to the nearby historic towns of Tombstone and Bisbee. Either way, a trip to Arizona Wine Country is a perfect long weekend destination that you'll savor for years to come!

About the Author:

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