



Across Italy with a glass of wine

A guide to the best Italian wines for summer



Vinyard at Manarola, Italy



Summer. Italy. Two words that go perfectly hand in hand. You often imagine yourself dining “al fresco” on a charming veranda or sipping a glass of wine by the pool. It simply does not get any better. But the most important question is: What is the perfect wine for the occasion? The immediate answer would be Rose’, possibly from the Provence area.

Well, as an Italian food and wine travel expert I have decided to take you for an Italian summer wine tour highlighting stunning locations with exciting alternatives to your standard Rosé. So pack your bags and join me for a very special summer wine tour. And please, do me a favour: don’t forget your passport!

Named Enotria (land of wines) by the Greeks, Italy is without a doubt, the region with most diverse wines in the world. With its unique soil structure and unmatched number of grape varieties this country is the perfect destination for adventurous wine lovers.

However, due to Italy’s great variety and complex appellation system, people often find it difficult to choose which wine to go for. Enough, for now, with the technical stuff, let’s get down to what wine is all about: stimulation of senses! The wines that I will recommend to you will not only be versatile, refreshing and food friendly but, most of all, will instantly connect with their land of origin through a journey made of passion and love for local produce.

Red wines

Italian red wines are famously known for being full bodied and robust, the perfect match with local hearty cuisine. Although in the southern regions during the summer, locals drink chilled full bodied reds, I thought I'd ease you in gently and recommend two wines that are much more similar to a Pinot Noir and can be served at room temperature or slightly chilled. The first wine is Rossese di Dolceacqua. Located in Dolceacqua, close to the Ligurian Riviera on the border with France, this wine is made with Rossese grapes and is currently considered very hip among the wine buffs. Most Italians won't even know of its existence, so, if your aim is to impress all your friends, this is the one to go for. Light and delicate like a gracious ballerina, this red wine will dance on your palate with hints of bright red fruits and local herbs such as mint and thyme with a slight olive paste finish. Sipping this wine while admiring the dramatic Ligurian coastline over a gentle salty breeze makes you almost feel like you are drifting away on air.

Next, one of my current favourites - Nerello Mascalese from the stunning Mont Etna in Sicily. Known as the Burgundy of the Mediterranean for its great complexity, old vines and variety of rich soil, Etna is currently considered among the world's premier areas for fine wine production. This area has recently boomed resulting in the production of a style of wine that was relatively unknown in most parts of Italy. Nerello Mascalese based wines magically blend the elegance of a Pinot Noir and the richness of a Barolo – a heavenly mix! Due to the great richness in minerals provided by its unique soil, these wines develop impressive personality showing great fruit purity with gentle smokiness and earthy nuances. A mysterious and funky wine with a complex personality that will captivate your senses and immediately transport you to a different world.

White wines

Italian white wines are often characterised by their freshness and crispiness making it the perfect match for light summer meals. Of course, that is not entirely true as some whites can be extremely rich and mature beautifully. In this case, I have selected two wines that taste and smell like the Mediterranean, making them the perfect companion for any seafood based dish or mild cheese. The first one is Falanghina. This grape can be found in a handful of regions but I specifically chose the one that works as a base for most of the wines produced in the Amalfi Coast. Perhaps because of the incredible location where this wine is harvested, its citrusy and delicate floral notes make it the perfect wine to sip while sitting on a restaurant overlooking the bay tucking into a good Scialatielli ai Frutti di Mare. Don't even get me started on how good this is, (I will leave this to your imagination...) all I can say that it is worth living for.

The Second wine comes from the north of Sardinia and is called Vermentino. Just like Falanghina this wine that can be found in other regions but my favourite is the one from the Gallura area, close to the glamorous Costa Smeralda. Dry and sharp, salty and persistent for me, this is what I would call a “summer holiday” wine. It can adorn your table either as an aperitif or it can work as an exquisite accompaniment to a local pasta alla Bottarga (dry mullet roe). Paired with a Gallurese soup, a sort of local lasagne made with bread soaked in stock instead of pasta sheets, it acquires a dimension explored by the very few!

Rosé wines

These are, without any doubt, the summer wine. The perfect mix of the freshness of a white with the opulence of a red, it will be your best friend for a couple of months. The Rosé world is mesmerizingly interesting and diverse: some prefer it dry, other semi sweet - it really is a different world of wine. Wine producers often struggle to understand what is the main draw for consumers as the range of taste is so wide and is often considered a beverage rather than a quality wine making, it the most “marketable” wine (hence all these swanky bottling looking like a glitzy Vodka). Do not worry, the wines I will recommend wouldn't be caught

dead in some fancy night club!

The first one is called Chiaretto (which literally means the light one) and it comes from the Southern area of Lake Garda. Also known as “wine of the night” because of its vinification happening overnight, this wine made with Garda red local grapes such as Groppello, Barbera, Marzemino and Sangiovese has tons of personality. Pale pink in colour, it is quite structured unlike most Rosé combining intense floral aromas and wild berry notes with refreshing acidity. A wine to be enjoyed at its young age to appreciate its typical characteristics. Chiaretto can be paired both with freshwater fish as well as spiced white meats. For our second wine we head to Puglia, more specifically to the charming Salento, the hometown of Italian Rosé. Here this type of wine has been consumed for many generations allowing locals to “perfect their art”. Made with local red varietals such as Negroamaro, Primitivo, Nero di Troia and Malvasia Nera, I personally prefer the ones that are mainly Negroamaro based as they tend to be more complex. With hints of sweet red fruit and citrus these wines can pair beautifully with a local Burrata cheese with a tomato Focaccia or Apulian raw prawns. Seriously, it’s not even funny how good the food in Puglia is! If by now your mouth is not watering like mine, there may be something terribly wrong with you!

Sparkling wines

Of course our wine tour would not be complete without some quality bubbles. Being from near Venice myself, I would naturally go for a fine Prosecco. Although being currently the most popular sparkling wine in the world, there is often misunderstanding of the real quality of this product. In great demand over the last 15 years, the majority of producers have opted for quantity rather than quality leading the average consumer to think that it can be a cheap alcoholic alternative to a soft drink! Luckily some local artisans still believe in crafting delicious high quality Prosecco. Based on Glera Grape, Prosecco, like Champagne can only be produced in the designated Prosecco production area. Known for its fresh apple and pear aromas most Prosecco tend to have a slight sweet finish. For this summer I would definitely recommend a Pas Dose-zero sugar (yes you’ve read that right) which has a much fresher and cleaner taste. A superb “party wine” or ideal to sip while sitting by the pool without worrying too much about the calorie intake or the fear of instantly getting out of shape!

I hope these wines go down a treat for this Summer- do not panic, I will be back with the winter selection!

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