



Vineyards by Montsoreau



Red wine of Anjou

THE VINEYARDS OF WESTERN LOIRE PRODUCE SUPERIOR NECTARS OF ALL VARIETIES—RED, WHITE AND BLUSH, SPARKLING, SWEET AND DRY

WESTERN LOIRE WINE COUNTRY

TAKE A ROAD TRIP THROUGH THE VINEYARDS OF THE LOIRE VALLEY

BY ETHAN GELBER

Ask an oenophile what first comes to mind when you mention the Loire River and the answer won't be magical châteaux but the vast patchworks of estates surrounding them, the carefully tended vines pumping life into the precious red and green grapes of the Loire, source of some of the world's most famous wines.

The vineyards of Western Loire run from coastal **Pornic**, west of Nantes, to **Montsoreau**, near **Saumur**, and produce superior nectars of all varieties—red, white and blush, sparkling, sweet and dry. Drawing fragrance and flavor from the soil and surrounding nature, they are, of course, best savored at a *dégustation* (a tasting) in the same setting—in the very cellars of the land that gave them life.

Nantes, an animated university town, is the best place from which to begin a tour of the area's wine culture. The advent of France's *trains à grande vitesse* (or TGV) has brought this city, 240 miles from Paris, easily within reach in just over two hours. Leave in the morning, pick up your rental car on arrival and you will have all day to explore the *pays nantais* and beyond.

In Nantes, indulge first in some general culture, like the **Château des Ducs de Bretagne**, a six-towered, 15th-century stronghold steeped in history and newly reopened in February 2007 after 15 years of renovations. The summer months will also see two unusual artistic events. Thirty different artists will unveil installations along the banks of the Loire between Nantes and **St-Nazaire** in an event called **L'Estuaire**. At the same time, an urban renewal and tourism project, **Les Machines de l'île**, will kick off a large-scale exhibition of extraordinary contraptions conceived by Leonardo

Da Vinci and Jules Verne, while allowing visitors to rediscover Nantes' vast abandoned shipping vessels.

Beyond city limits, back in the thrall of the grape, trace the scenic byways of wine country. Southeast of Nantes are the Melon de Bourgogne vines that produce the fruity and dry Muscadets, sometimes slightly bubbly and *sur Lie*. Muscadet lands extend east as far as **Le Pallet**, home to **Musée du Vignoble Nantais**, **Clisson** and **Vallet**, the latter considered the capital of Muscadet; and then north to **Ancenis**, where another wine museum, **La Maison des Vins** extols the Muscadets of the Coteaux de la Loire.

Thirty miles farther east lies the city of **Angers**, on the edge of the Anjou and Saumur vineyards, the largest in the Loire Valley. The 28 distinct wines they make possible are well explained (and tasted) at the **Maison du Vin de l'Anjou**, across the square from the superb feudal chateau.

Just south of Angers are the region's poet-lauded "noble rot" sweet wines—Coteaux du Layon, Bonnezeaux, Quarts de Chaume and Coteaux de l'Aubance. If you're in the area on the first weekend of October, visit the **Château de Martigné-Briand** to experience *les vendanges Belle Epoque*, a grape harvest using old-fashioned methods.

Return your rental car in Angers for the high-speed TGV link back to Paris. The one-hour-45-minute trip is just long enough for you to share one last bottle of sparkling white. ■

For more on Western Loire, visit www.westernloire.com

CHATEAU DES DUCS DE BRETAGNE
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tel. 02 51 17 49 00
www.chateau-nantes.fr

L'ESTUAIRE
www.estuaire.info
(in French)

LES MACHINES DE L'ILE
www.nantes-tourisme.com

MUSEE DU VIGNOLE NANTAIS
82, rue Pierre Abélard,
Le Pallet
tel. 02 40 80 90 13

LA MAISON DES VINS
28, rue du Millénaire, Ancenis
tel. 02 40 96 14 92
www.vins-ancenis.fr

MAISON DU VIN DE L'ANJOU
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