

Queensland's Boutique and Unique Wineries

Queensland's wine industry is one of the State's best keep secrets. The history of the industry dates back to the 1860's - and like all good wines it has developed with age. Here's our pick of some of the boutique and unique wineries you can only find in the Sunshine State.

A ghoulish drink on the Sunshine Coast

Visit one of Australia's most unique cellar doors at the Little Morgue Winery on Queensland's Sunshine Coast. Originally a morgue, this boutique winery was transformed into a cellar door in 2006. The morgue's chapel is now a two-storey cellar door, where guests can taste a wide variety of aptly-named wines including 'A Touch 'O Coffin', 'An Aged Soul', 'Rest in Peace' and 'Dead Smooth'. Visit www.littlemorguewinery.com

The golden pride of north Queensland

The first commercial mango winery in the world began with the family-owned and operated Golden Pride Wineries near Mareeba in Tropical North Queensland. Originally a successful tobacco farm, today the property has more than 17,500 mango trees, making it one of the largest mango plantations in Australia. Golden Pride Wineries successfully launched their first dry, medium and sweet wine in 1999 after years of research and development into making wine from mangoes (which is a very different process than grape wines). Today guests can visit the winery to try a range of mango still and sparkling wines produced from the sweet Kensington Red mango. www.goldendrop.com.au

Queensland's oldest winery

Queensland's oldest winery, Romavilla Winery was established in 1863 and today produces a wide variety of table and fortified wines. Situated near Roma, 500km west of Brisbane on the slopes of the Great Dividing Range, Romavilla's first wine was sold in 1866 and they have not missed a vintage since. The present winery was built in 1878 and is a fine example of the large timber and corrugated iron buildings of pioneer days. www.romavilla.com

Purple Mangosteen wine anyone?

Pineapples, paw paws, jaboticabas, ginger and lycee are just some of the wines to come out of the multi-award winning Shannonvale Tropical Fruit Winery near Port Douglas. The vineyard makes single-fruit wines rather than blends and guests who come to their cellar door usually have a selection of approximately 12 different wines to taste. The range includes very dry wines to medium-sweet and port styles and all of the fruit is grown organically on their orchard. www.shannonvalewine.com.au

The berry-licious Bramble Patch

For all things berry you can't go past The Bramble Patch in the heart of the Granite Belt near Stanthorpe. Berry jams, dessert sauces, vinegars, savoury sauces, chutneys, desserts and wines are all available at this family owned and operated farm. The berry-fortified wines come in a range of flavours including blackberry, boysenberry, raspberry and strawberry and are perfect with desserts, combined with sparkling wine, or as is. www.bramblepatch.com.au

Students' finest at Banca Ridge

Run by the Queensland College of Wine Tourism, the Banca Ridge Winery and Cellar Door provide a hands-on learning experience for budding wine makers. Under industry guidance, students grow, pick and crush grapes grown on site to produce, bottle and label wines, which are available for sale through the Banca Ridge Cellar Door in Stanthorpe. The Banca Ridge Bistro provides a daily lunch menu prepared and served by hospitality students. <http://www.usq.edu.au/qcwt>

It's a date at Palm Grove

Discover how exotic the humble date can be at Australia's most remote winery, Palm Grove Date Farm and Winery. Open from March to mid-October, the winery produces date table wines, fresh dates, date topping, date spread, date liqueur, moisturising creams, fig jam and dried figs grown on the farm. After visiting Palm Grove, head to the nearby artesian mud baths where you can relax and rejuvenate in the unique natural springs under an outback sky. www.artesianmudbaths.com.au

An opera in the oldest family-owned vineyard

Situated in Stanthorpe, a three hour drive south-west of Brisbane, Ballandean Estate was established in 1931 and is Queensland's oldest family-owned and operated winery. Aside from their award-winning red, white and fortified wines, Ballandean is also known for hosting 'Opera in the Vineyard' every year. The black tie event is held on the May long weekend and attracts around 2,500 guests who enjoy world class performers, award-winning wines, spectacular scenery and a gala dinner dance. www.ballandeanestate.com

A 'green' winery near Brisbane

Sirromet Wines is Queensland's largest and most awarded winery, but it is its commitment to the environment that continues to make headlines. Situated a short drive from Brisbane, Sirromet combines a vineyard, winery, cellar door and restaurant. In January 2009, Sirromet became the first winery in Australia to release a wine in an environmentally-friendly PET plastic bottle. Even the labels and cartons of the wine are made from 100 per cent recycled materials. Sirromet also practices environmental sustainability in its wine production with an on-site worm farm recycling all organic waste from grape stems and skins to cardboard boxes, while on site rainwater collection means the winery is virtually 100 per cent self sufficient for water needs. www.sirromet.com

Three popular wine regions:

Gold Coast Hinterland Wine Country

The Gold Coast Hinterland is one of Queensland's fastest growing wine regions, encompassing boutique wineries and vineyards scattered amongst the rainforest beauty of Mount Tamborine and the emerald countryside of Albert River and Canungra. Cooling ocean breezes from the Gold Coast beaches just 30 minutes drive away create ideal grape growing conditions for Merlot, Cabernet, Shiraz and Chambourcin through to Semillon, Chardonnay, Viognier and Verdelho. Many of the cellar doors offer superb restaurants, cheese tastings, gourmet picnics and vineyard tours. Visitors to the region's vineyards and wineries can choose to join a tour, charter a coach or leisurely self-drive. www.verygc.com.au www.goldcoastwinecountry.com.au

South Burnett wine trail

With its warm summer days, crisp cool nights and fertile soils, the South Burnett is Queensland's newest wine-producing region and already is the second largest. Barely more than a decade old, the South Burnett is considered a 'boutique' region with small vineyards concentrating on quality wine products. Situated 200km north-west of Brisbane, the region currently features 25 vineyards specialising in Chardonnays and Shiraz wines. An established South Burnett wine trail links wineries and cellar doors in the region from Goomeri in the north to Nanango in the south. Along the way, vineyards can be seen alongside olive groves, timber plantations, orchards and traditional agriculture. www.southburnettholidays.info www.southburnettwine.com.au

Southern Downs and Granite Belt

A catholic priest is credited with starting the wine industry in this region more than a century ago. Fr Jerome Davadi may not have realised that encouraging his parishioners to diversify their farms would have been the genesis of what has become Queensland's wine capital. With more than 50 cellar doors, you'll be sure to find something you love in the Granite Belt, Queensland's oldest and most established wine producing region. Frosty winter days, mild summers and remarkable soil provide ideal conditions for producing grapes including Cabernet Sauvignon, Shiraz, Chardonnay, Semillon and Sauvignon Blanc. The Granite Belt is also home to several festivals and events celebrating the food and wine of the region. A biannual Apple and Grape Harvest Festival is held in March, winter is celebrated in July with the Brass Monkey Season and October springs to life with the Australian Small Wine Makers Show and the Annual Spring Wine Festival. www.southerndownsholidays.info
www.granitebeltwinecountry.com.au