

Tucson's Wine Country

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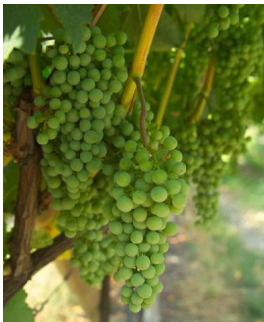
Tuesday, 18 August 2009 11:00 - Last Updated Tuesday, 18 August 2009 11:17

As summer nears its end and children head back to school, some parents try to finagle a little time away, alone with each other.



With California at our doorstep and its breathtaking northern region a jet ride away, a weekend in Sonoma's wine region doesn't seem that far off. But, what if you didn't have to travel that far? In fact, Arizona is known to grow a large variety of grapes that include cabernet sauvignon, merlot, syrah, chardonnay, sauvignon blanc and sangiovese right in our very backyard. Now that's worth toasting to.

Dubbed "The Heart of Arizona Wine Country," Elgin, Ariz., showcases distinctive wineries all offering a large selection of wines with a vast bouquet of flavors. Located an hour southeast of Tucson, Elgin's vineyards back rolling hills and cascading mountains. Rows of colorful grapes line endless fields, plump with juices soon to become wine—a vision often reflective of California's wine region. So how is it that Arizona's dry, arid, sometimes windy climate produced a selection of award-winning wines?



At an elevation of 4800 feet, **Callaghan Vineyards** is a family-owned and -operated, award-winning vineyard. Their Web site tells the family's first years as a vineyard and the many lessons they would soon learn. The area's excessive heat and extremely dry climate were ultimately the tipping factors in changing the grapes they would later bottle. Today, according to the vineyard's Web site, "Mediterranean and Spanish varietals—tempranillo, mourvedre, petit verdot, petite sirah and grenache are the basic building blocks for our red blends, while viognier and riesling are blended for our estate white wine." These exquisite grapes help pepper the family's 25-acre estate. www.callaghanvineyards.com.

Just down winery row, as it's so cutely nicknamed, is **Sonoita Vineyards**—one of the oldest commercial vineyards spanning 40 acres of prairielike terrain. Beginning as an experimental project between vineyard owner, Dr. Gordon Dutt, and retired University of Arizona soil scientist, A. Blake Brophy, the two literally stumbled upon their future vineyard noting their success was due to the area's very rich soil composition—a balance near identical to the soils of Burgundy, France. According to Sonoita Vineyards Web site, "the vineyard consistently creates gold medal winners, including a cabernet sauvignon chosen by national wine critics to serve at a Presidential Inauguration Gala, due to the unique growing conditions of the Sonoita Appellation." At 5,000 feet elevation, the vineyard bottles chardonnay, sauvignon blanc, cabernet sauvignon, syrah, merlot, pinot noir and mission varietals. www.sonoitavineyards.com.



And like Cali, Southern Arizona's wine region offers worthy tours. Not only do these tours introduce locales to the area's best kept secrets, they also offer the perfect way to befriend area wine makers and ask questions about their vineyards. Most wine connoisseurs jump at the opportunity to learn about a new vineyard and sample several of their wines, so why not you? Enjoy an afternoon sampling several of the area's best wines and touring their vineyards.