

It seems like only yesterday that I was discussing Europe's 2008 harvest. Well now it is already the Southern hemispheres 2009 harvest time. This gives me a great opportunity to talk about one of my favourite and most popular wine producing countries in the Southern hemisphere, New Zealand. A country not only famous for the filming of Lord of the Rings and adventure holidays but also for its vibrant wine.

New Zealand is the most dynamic and fastest growing wine producing country in the world. The first vine was planted in the mid 19th Century north of Auckland. Wine growing has rapidly grown and spread across both main islands. Only 50 years ago New Zealand consisted of only a few hundred hectares of vineyards and now the country consists of almost nearly 30,000 hectares.

I would like to explain the development of New Zealand wine by taking a trip around both islands starting where it all began near Auckland. Strangely although wine growing in New Zealand started north of Auckland this certainly isn't where it has developed. Taking a trip South East I would like to stop at Gisborne were fascinatingly this is the first region in the world to experience the sunrise each morning. Chardonnay occupies around half of Gisborne's vineyards and has lead Gisbornes grapegrowers and winemakers to christen their region the Chardonnay capital of New Zealand.

Half way to south of the North Island you will find Hawkes Bay, the country's second largest region. Hawkes Bay occupies the warmest area of New Zealand; this provides the perfect climatic conditions for the red Bordeaux Blend and Syrah grapes that grow there. Our final stop on the North Island will be the capital, around Wellington. Wellington is the official name for the large region which occupies the southern section of the North Island. Wairarapa, on the lower eastern side of the region, is Wellington's only wine district. Martinborough, as well as being a town, is also the oldest and best known wine area within the Wairarapa region. Pinot Noir is the region's most planted and certainly most acclaimed grape variety.

After crossing the treacherous Cooks straight (the area of water which separates the North and South Islands) we enter Marlborough. When the first Marlborough vines were planted in 1973 few people predicted that the region would become New Zealand's largest and best known winegrowing area in little more than twenty years. The Cloudy Bay winery, through its cult status in the UK and USA, has played an important pioneering role in establishing New Zealand's and Marlborough's reputation. Marlborough's Sauvignon Blanc has also played a major role in the regions rise to prominence due to its distinctive pungency and zesty fruit flavours providing a real contrast from its European counterpart. It is argued by many critics that the Marlborough region is the best place in the world to grow Sauvignon Blanc grapes.

We are now finishing off our whirlwind tour at New Zealand 's highest and the worlds most southerly wine region, Central Otago. The height of the region is apparent when you read one winemakers slogan 'wines with altitude'. It is also New Zealand's only true continental climate with greater extremes of daily and seasonal temperatures than are found in any of the country's maritime regions. A new, but aggressively expanding wine area, where the Pinot Noir is the dominant grape variety, Chardonnay ranks second with Sauvignon Blanc and Riesling .The wines of Central Otago have a purity, intensity and vibrancy that seems totally appropriate to anyone who has visited the region and breathed the pure mountain air.

I hope that this month I have given you a good idea of one of my favourite wine growing countries and haven't exhausted you!

A Votre Santé
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