

Sicily

Sicily's pavilion at this year's Megavino will not go unnoticed. With the exception of the national pavilions, Sicily's Institute of Wines and Olive Oils will be taking the largest regional stand. It is difficult to describe an island offering as broad array of wines as any continent though, as one region. 22 producers from the Mediterranean's largest island - where vineyards bask in all-day sun and are cultivated using centuries-old traditions – are aiming to portray a new image of quality and authenticity through their wines. By tasting some of the 100 labels on show, the visitor will be swept away on a journey through the senses afforded by this 'miniature continent'.

The name Sicily can no longer sufficiently describe the wines of Italy's most diverse wine region. A mere glance at the landscapes of Pantelleria and Etna reveals two regions and two wine industries that are poles apart. Sea breezes sweep across one whilst the other clings to the slopes of its volcano, producing wines of constantly changing character due to the myriad combinations of climate and soil types.

In fact, Sicilian wines cannot simply be put into words, they have to be linked to their native soils whose boundaries and unique characteristics are reflected in each wine. Seventeen extraordinary wine growing regions boasting a long-standing history need to be mapped out to fully discover and appreciate the relationship between wine making, culture, tradition and landscapes. From East to West (two indomitable spirits), from the far western tip of Pantelleria to the eastern extremity of the Strait of Messina, is a melting pot just waiting to be discovered.

1/ PANTELLERIA, *'Daughter of the winds', 'black pearl' of the Mediterranean*

The volcanic soils that make up the island are as black as Africa and in fact, Africa's coastline is closer to Pantelleria than to Sicily. The vines are grown low to the ground to protect them from the strong winds. The wines grown on the island are inimitable. The Muscat of Alexandria or Zibibbo grape variety produces one of the most ancient dessert wines with flavours of intensely fragrant date or apricot and a deep colour recalling old gold.

2/ MARSALA AND MAZARA DEL VALLO, *A major fishing harbour and the 'Port of God'*

The far western tip, *Maissala*, takes its name from the Arab 'Marsa Ali' or 'Marsa Allah' (Port of God). The area's vinous reputation comes from Marsala, the great sweet 'meditation wine' offering complexity and a wide array of styles ranging from amber to ruby, dry to sweet and young to extra old. Also, the Grillo grape variety produces a fresh white wine exuding elegant nose aromatics and pleasant floral and fruity scents due to use of appropriate wine making techniques.

3/ ERICE, *U'Munti (The mountains)*

Standing at the summit of Mount San Giuliano, Erice overlooks a coastal landscape of unparalleled beauty, a full 360° panorama from Mount Cofano and Capo San Vito in the east to the islands of Favignana and Levanzo and as far as Pantelleria to the south-west. Alongside native grape varieties (Grillo, Inzolia, Nero d'Avola), innovative varieties such as Muller-

Thurgau are grown. The resultant wines show excellent organoleptic characteristics. The much more recent sparkling wines grown here have become popular with wine buffs.

4/ SEGESTA, *Where art and the landscape become one*

The rural and cultural diversity in this region are the most evocative in the whole of Sicily. The area has been acclaimed for its wines since the 13th century, primarily for its white wines made from a grape variety exclusive to Sicily: Catarratto. Straw-yellow in colour with greenish tints, it shows delicate scents of citrus fruit and white-fleshed fruits and a sour after-taste.

5/ MONREALE – *From its cathedral to its extensive area under vine*

Monreale rose to prominence and acquired its present-day appearance at the time of the Normans. Its central feature is its famous cathedral, built so that it would tower over the Jato Valley and the route to Palermo on one side and the Oreto Valley on the other. The area is home to extensive vineyards producing wines from internationally-acclaimed grapes (Chardonnay, Syrah, Cabernet-Sauvignon, Merlot) and native varieties (Catarratto, Nero d'Avola, Perricone), vinted either separately or as blends.

6/ TERRE DEI SICANI – *“Where the real Sicily re-emerges”*

The succession of arid and fertile landscapes perfectly mirrors Tommaso di Lampedusa's descriptions in 'The Leopard'. The area's four appellations are: Contessa Entellina, Menfi, Sambuca di Sicilia and Santa Margherita, and it is home to renowned producers, the largest of which are Donnafugata, Settesoli, Planeta, Barbera, Cellaro and Feudo Aranci.

7/ AGRIGENTO *The Valley of temples and Nero d'Avola*

Nero d'Avola, the prince of Sicilian grape varieties, thrives on land facing the Strait of Sicily in a region geared to wine growing. It is an all-round grape variety capable of producing a wide range of wine styles, from fresh and fruity young wines showing aromas of cherry including morello, to well-structured, harmonious reds intermixing notes of forest fruits, spice and violet, and dessert wines with their complex notes.

8/ CONTEA DI SCLAFANI *The foothills of the Madonie mountains dedicated to wine growing*

This extensive geographical region covering three provinces in the centre of the island (Palermo, Caltanissetta and Agrigento) is located in the Madonie national park. The vines planted along the hillsides produce white and sparkling wines from innovative and native varieties as well as superb reds with noble tannins, boasting long-lasting persistency on the palate.

9/ CASTELLI NISSENI *A harsh land with a history dating back thousands of years*

Located in the heart of southern-central Sicily near the province of Caltanissetta, the area is dotted with mediaeval fortresses set against a backdrop of vineyards. This is one of Sicily's most interesting wine regions. Nero d'Avola produces ruby-red or very intense garnet-hued wines with purple-blue tints when young turning to a slightly orange colour as they mature.

They show a captivating bouquet with notes of cherry, plum and violet and are full-bodied and harmonious on the palate with a pleasurable after-taste of clove and black pepper.

10/ ETNA – *A unique region and microcosm, boasting wines with extremely ancient characteristics and traditions*

With the highest still-active volcano in Europe and its soil as red as lava, the region offers a variety of landscapes, different in both shape and type. Vines are grown as high as 1,000 m above sea level. The slopes of the volcano produce wines of constantly changing character due to the myriad combinations of climate and soil types, making Etna a miniature continent unto itself. It is home to unique wines produced by ‘heroic viticulture’ and drawn from varieties that embody the true sense of native: Nerello Mascalese, Nerello Cappuccio and Carricante, which can only express their quintessential qualities in the Etna region.

11/ PIAZZA ARMERINA – *The town of mosaics*

Located in the heart of Sicily, in the province of Enna, the town has a deep-rooted rural character. A clutch of wine producers clearly stand out from the crowd and grow superlative quality wines. These include Maurigi, Gigliotto, Tenuta Chiarelli Cuffaro, Tenuta dell’ Abate, Antica Tenuta del Nanfro and Abbazia Ogliastro.

12/ VITTORIA – *Views over the Mediterranean and Cerasuolo*

This area was officially recognised as DOCG Cerasuolo di Vittoria due to its unique organoleptic characteristics. It is a blend of Nero d’Avola and Frappato.

13/ NOTO – *World capital of Baroque*

This is the extreme south-eastern corner of Sicily, boasting the fishing villages of Portopalo di Capo Passero and Marsamemi and the little towns of Pachino, Ispica, Rosolini and Noto

Historically, the area was geared to producing dessert wines from Moscato di Noto with their unusually intense fragrances. It was given a new lease of life after the advent of wines made from Nero d’Avola, Pignatello and Frappato.

14/ SIRACUSA – *Greek origins*

The city rises above the island’s south-eastern coast.

One of Italy’s oldest wines is grown here: the famous Pollio, one of Italy’s best-known dessert wines made from the celebrated Moscato or Moscato Giallo (yellow) and showing golden hues of varying intensity.

15/ MESSINA FARO – *Between the sea and the Peloritani mountains, ‘gate of Sicily’*

Messina, the ‘gate of Sicily’ emerges on the extreme north-eastern tip of the island along the strait that bears its name. Faro, a red appellation wine with its three varietals – Nerello Mascalese, Nero Capuccio and Nocera – has achieved cult status within the region.

16/ MAMERTINO – *The hillsides overlooking the Tyrrhenian sea*

Known since Roman times, these red and white wines are grown on a stretch of land facing the Tyrrhenian coastline and show an intense, deeply-coloured hue.

17/ EOLIE – *The Seven Pearls of the sea*

The Aeolian archipelago today is one of Sicily's most popular tourist haunts. The seven volcanic islands facing the Tyrrhenian coastline are known for their dessert wine, Malvasia delle Lipari, made from the aromatic grape Malvoisie and, more unusually, the red Corinth grape (up to 8 percent).