



# Grape ESCAPES

story by LAURIE WALLACE-LYNCH





-Photo courtesy Wineries of Niagara-on-the-Lake

## TOURING NIAGARA WINE REGION BY CAR, BIKE, HELICOPTER, ROLLS-ROYCE OR BRITISH DOUBLE DECKER BUS

If you're driving through Niagara Wine Country, you might do a double take if you spot a British double-decker bus filled with smiling, laughing people out exploring wine country for the day. Aptly called the Twenty Valley Magic Winery Bus, this classic British double-decker is just one of the unique ways to explore glorious Niagara Wine Country. You can also hop into a classic British cab, enjoy the luxurious comfort of a Rolls Royce, take a bus tour, or pedal your way through wine country on a bike.

The Twenty Valley Magic Winery Bus originated in Nova Scotia wine country and proved so popular that last year the company expanded to the Niagara Region, based in Jordan.

"It's a North American one-of-a-kind adventure with hop-on, hop-off stops at four of Niagara's boutique wineries, combined with a great onboard experience with commentary by our knowledgeable guide," says David Hovell, partner/operations manager. "The bus travels in a continuous one-hour loop throughout the day, offering patrons an hour at each winery with enough time to visit all four wineries in a day. What we offer is flexibility so if you wish to stay at one winery longer, you can do so. When the wheels on the bus go round and round, you are in for an all day adventure!"

There are actually six boutique wineries on the roster to add variety, but the magic number is four stops per day.

"Each winery provides a 10 to 15 minute talk to share their story, and what makes them unique is they also offer a welcome greeting sample taste of their wine before guests go and explore on their own," explains Hovell. »

### the weekend

#### BRING:

-Family and friends that are ready for a day of laughs, adventure, and tastings of some great wines.

#### TREAT YOURSELF:

Spend the night at one of the area's fine hotels after a day of fun. Queen's Landing, Prince of Wales Hotel, The Charles Hotel and White Oaks Resort & Spa offer luxurious accommodations for a weekend away



«Many friendships are forged on the bus and the conversation gets louder as the day goes on! This is wine touring in a responsible way whereby we take charge of the driving so you can relax and enjoy the day.»

Community Transport Group in Niagara-on-the-Lake (NOTL) offers unique wine tours via authentic English cabs, small or large tour buses and even a tour in a vintage Rolls Royce. The Vine and Dine Afternoon Wine Tour with Cheese Pairing and Public Tour lets visitors explore NOTL wine country on a four hour tour with stops at four wineries and tastings of three to four wines per stop with a wine and cheese pairing at one of the wineries. If you really want to impress a loved one, book the romantic Sunset NOTL Private Wine & Dinner Tour in an authentic British cab. And for a tour that looks like it's straight out of the TV show *The Bachelor*, tour wine country for five or so hours in a Silver Cloud Rolls Royce as part of the Vine and Dine Grand Winery Tour, which includes dinner in Niagara Falls.

Touring wineries by bicycle is the hottest trend in wine tourism, according to Andrew Niven, director of marketing for Konzelmann Estate Winery. Niven is also chair of the Wineries of Niagara-on-the-Lake, a collective group of 26 wineries, which represent 80 per cent of the local wines in the region. From small boutique wineries to large estate wineries like Wayne Gretzky Estates, Jackson-Triggs, Inniskillin and Peller Estates, the group works together to promote wine tourism.

“Bikes are a major trend and we have a real focus on strengthening our facilities with improvement of bike paths,” explains Niven. “There are about six or seven places in NOTL who conduct guided cycling tours through wine country, as well as offer self-guided tours with a map so you can explore at your own pace.”



Exploring Niagara wine country in the Twenty Valley Magic Winery Bus, a classic British double-decker.  
-Photo courtesy Magic Winery Bus



A vast selection of wine awaits visitors at Stratus Winery.  
-Photo courtesy Wineries of Niagara-on-the-Lake





Guided cycling tours are a growing trend for exploring the area, as well as self-guided tours.  
-Photo courtesy Grape Escapes Wine Tours



Zoom Leisure Bikes in NOTL offers Niagara's largest selection of high quality cruisers, hybrids, tandem and children's bike rentals. The popular Afternoon Wine Tour is a scenic guided tour through Niagara country with a sprinkling of history. The ticket includes bike rental, a visit to three local wineries with sampling of their award winning wines, a cheese and wine pairing, as well as a visit to a wine cellar. Zoom will even pick up all your purchases along the way and they will be waiting for you on your return.

Grape Escape Wine Tours offers group, private and custom wine tours by bike or car. If you are on a tight schedule, the Morning Bicycle Tour with Wine Pairing may be for you and the ride is about 15 km long, touring through scenic NOTL wine country.

Of course you can always drive your own vehicle, but since you are touring wineries and there's a little alcohol involved, why not leave the driving to someone else?

"For wine tastings, wineries offer a one or two ounce sample and we suggest tasting to buy rather than tasting to drink," cautions Niven. "Many wineries also offer tours every hour on the hour. Weekends, especially between 1 and 3 p.m. are especially busy, so we recommend that visitors book tours online to ensure a spot. Most of our visitors come from the Greater Toronto Area and the Niagara Falls/border area. On a typical day in peak season, we would see about 600 to 800 visitors at our winery." »



## Travel Show

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Explore wineries such as Peller Estates.  
-Photo Community Transport Group



« Niven says he has noticed a significant shift in what winery visitors want.

“People want to stay and hang out and learn, and to enjoy the whole wine experience,” explains Niven. “They want to hear the story behind the winery and learn more about wines and then purchase a bottle of their favourite to take home. Perhaps it’s Millennials driving this trend for wine knowledge, as our core is changing to the 28 to 45 demographic.”

Food and wine pairing experiences are yet another huge trend.

“Our wineries offer Sip and Sizzle experiences and we sold 3,000 tickets to the May event,” says Niven. “Come Taste the Season happens in November, and in February we run an event on weekends called The Days of Wine & Chocolate. You buy a pass and can visit up to 25 wineries and sample a food and wine pairing.”

For a truly unique way to tour wine country, you can book a 30 minute helicopter ride and fly over Niagara Falls and wine country before landing at Peller Estates. Later that afternoon, a shuttle picks visitors up and drives them back to the airport to get their car.

Niven suggests another unique suggestion for GTA visitors to tour wine country in style.

“With the new NOTL International Airport offering flights from Toronto, you can fly here and have a limo waiting on the tarmac to take you on a wine tour, have dinner and then fly back that evening! We are becoming known as a world class destination for wine and wine experiences, combined with first-rate accommodations in one of the most beautiful regions in the country.”



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