

James The Sommelier - Wines From Lesser Known Regions India

'Wine honors the soul, so honor it with yours.'

India

From India's railways to its architecture, the remnants of its colonial past still hold strong in this diversified country. In terms of drink, anyone who has been to India would agree that the most prevalent scene is a glass of whisky or a bucket of beer enjoyed by a roadside stall on plastic tables and chairs. And this image suits India, I think. It spans space and time, as the casual drinking culture will always seem to prevail in those areas of India that are drinker friendly. There are also the rheumy-eyed veterans, those who look like they have never stopped drinking since their first sip and who fuel the backstreet alcohol peddlers nestled in side streets all over the vast swathe of country. It does have a certain unpretentious charm of its own. Life is what it is.

Does wine, then, possess a place in this wonderfully carefree environment? Are there even enough people who drink to merit a business in wine? Well, considering grape production goes back 2000 years to the Persian occupation of India, I would say yes... it definitely does. Now, as more Indians become richer and their Bollywood dreams of Hollywood can become reality, Indians are embracing western standards in the pursuit of a more modern, vibrant economy and culture. Wine has become a necessity. And typical to their exuberant character, Indians want to immerse themselves in it.

Spanning north to south, wine producing regions are cropping up from Punjab to Tamil Nadu. The most famous and currently well-established regions are in Maharashtra including Nashik, Sangli, Sholapur, Satara, Ahmednagar and Pune. In the Karnataka state the best sites are situated on the foothills of the Nandi Hills in the outskirts of Bangalore. In Pune resides the first and infamous winery Chateau Indage, the current bastion of Indian produced wine. The immersion has begun. And as well as producing wine, the culture of wine is also gentrifying. With Internet sites and magazines like "Indian Wine Academy" and "Sommelier India" cropping up and shedding imbibing news from all over the country, like the third year of Sulafest- a recent wine festival designed to promote the up-and-coming Sula wines- there is no shortage of exposure. Even wine tours, for locals and tourists alike, are now available to any who want to follow the wine making process from harvest to tasting in the Sahyadri valley.



So, wine's roots have been planted in another unlikely place. The positivism and vivacious attitude with which India has adopted this new beverage culture is a sure cry to the overall inclusive nature of wine. Like a table full of guests enjoying a bottle or two, the more the merrier.

Tips: Enjoy spicy Indian dishes with a tart Sauvignon Blanc, a young Cote De Rhone or an Australian Shiraz. Be wary of highly alcoholic wines with spicy Indian cuisine as high alcohol content merely exacerbates spicy flavours.