

Newsletter Blog

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

Sommelier's Travels - Hua Hin Hills Vineyard, Thailand

Having previously visited the impressive Siam Winery, it was time to see for myself where they grew their grapes. Being just a winery, there were very little grapes grown at Siam Winery apart from some experimental vines exploring the best conditions for Tempranillo, Dornfelder and Shiraz - so to visit their vineyard would be a different story entirely.

The journey to Hua Hin is much further south of Bangkok, in fact, a four hour journey from the center of Bangkok to the vineyard; Hua Hin Hills. However, before reporting on the vineyard itself, it is worth considering the town of Hua Hin. Boasting a plethora of activities and sights to see and do - including stunning Wats, beaches, cruises, renowned massage and spa houses, waterfalls dotting the surrounding area and the famous Hua Hin railway station, it is no wonder that the town has long been favoured by Thai royalty and Bangkok city-slickers as a perfect week-end getaway.

So with this in mind, it seems little coincidence that a vineyard would be so easily accepted into Thai culture as well as adding to Hua Hin's already charming character. Located forty minutes from the town center, Hua Hin Hills sits amidst a panorama of greenery and undulating hills. Resting at 210 meters above sea level, the vineyard revealed itself around the final turn by carpeting the gentle slopes with a fresh green colour. The rows of vines were, also, interspersed with boulder-like, grey blocks garnished with a couple of tourists slowly materializing as the elephant tours available to those who want to view the vines from a different perspective.

All in all, Hua Hin Hills grows between six and seven different grape varietals including Colombard, Muscat, Chenin Blanc, Shiraz, Tempranillo and Sangiovese all under various pruning and trellising styles complimenting the characters of each of the vines in that environment. But it is not as simple as it looks! Due to the vigorous growing conditions, winemakers must oversee a double harvest in the year because the grapes grow so quickly, therefore the trellising and pruning techniques are very specific to generate the best quality from grapes. However, this does not result in higher yields as one harvest (at the end of the wet season) does not get used to make the wine as the grapes are usually damaged, spoiled or diluted in taste. In fact, as it became apparent, this is the biggest hurdle faced by wine-makers in Thailand trying to produce labels from different grapes such as Tempranillo and Sangiovese as some years do not generate enough yield to justify production and, therefore, are not released. Again, in a split from the expected New World style of wine making, these New Latitude wines are discovering the true value of vintages and great growing years; even if they are measured with the Buddhist calendar.

At the end of the tour, I was lucky enough to take part in a tasting with the restaurant sales and marketing manager, Chiraphan. Starting with the Chenin Blanc, which was fruity with floral notes and an impressive elegance, we then moved onto their sweet selection, the sweet chenin blanc and the Muscat. On the nose, they had the desired tropical fruit aromas and developed in the mouth with a clean, balanced taste of peach, apricot and lychee flavours with a slight acidity. It is no wonder that the Muscat had just been rated Gold in Decanter's Best Wine in the UK; an amazing achievement. And so, another impressive display of wine culture in the heart of a country more famous for parties, incense and spicy Thai cuisine. If this small insight is anything to go by, Thailand is well on the way to cementing its 'New Latitude' wines on the map of wine regions of the world in style.

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