

Highlight Tourism

Etna, travel suggestions for a tour of the slopes of the volcano

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The success of **Mount Etna**, the most famous Sicilian viticultural area has no desire to stop or slow. Both critics in the wine sector and the international press continue in their fervent praise the unique character of this angle of the island which, with its mountainous climate in the middle of the Mediterranean, represent something unique in the oenological production of Sicily.

Returning once again to the tour which, during the *Sicilia en Primeur* event, took the journalists hosted by Assovini Sicilia on a discovery trip of Etna (tour n.8), we shall attempt to trace an itinerary for a voyage planned for the next summer vacation period. We are on the northeastern side of the volcano, between Linguaglossa, Castiglione di Sicilia, and Passopisciaro. Villages which have conserved their authentic original beauty.

We shall go to discover the territory through visits to five different producers of wine. Each, in its own style, interprets the millennial-old viticultural tradition of the volcano, adding in some cases hospitality in the cellars as well. There are local producers (Girolamo Russo, Pietradolce and the Cantine Nicosia), the great names of Sicilian wine (Tasca d'Almerita and Firriato) and a producer who, though not Sicilian, was won over by the by the sheer fascination of the spot.

For lodging we suggest the Firriato wine resort created by the Di Gaetano family which, in 2007, purchased the over 60 acres (25 hectares) of vineyards of the Tenuta Cavanera estate in the Verzella district. The rooms, carved out of the internal spaces of an old, stone grape-fermenting structure, enjoy a splendid view over the volcano. Not to be missed: the sight of the century-old vines and a stroll along the path which leads away from the brand new wine bar.

www.firriatohospitality.it

To fully understand the complexity of Nerello Mascalese, the historic grape variety of Etna's winemaking tradition, move on to Passopisciaro, one of the hamlets at the center of the rebirth of the great red wines of Etna, and reserve a tasting with Giuseppe Russo. In 2005, he renovated the cellars of his father, **Girolamo Russo**, and cultivates his vineyards organically, observing a tradition which has allowed these century-old vineyards to be handed down to us.

www.girolamorusso.it

An wine which absolutely needs to be tasted is the Vigna Barbagalli of **Pietradolce**. We are in the Contrada Rampante zone of Solicchiata, in the cellars of Michele Faro. A surprising wine, perhaps one of the finest interpretations of Nerello Mascalese, we are already conquered by the label which depicts the volcano as a woman, an image which immediately mirrors the elegance and personality of this grand Mount Etna red wine.

www.pietradolce.it

The trip continues in the Contrada Rovitello area of Castiglione della Sicilia, at the cellars of **Silvia Maestrelli (Tenuta di Fessina)**, a producer of Tuscan wine. In 2007, fascinated by the exceptional richness of this territory, she immediately acquired, together with her husband, an old, lava stone wine fermenting structure dating from the 18th century which faced out onto 17 acres (seven hectares) planted to Nerello Mascalese grapes. A praiseworthy restructuring and renovation of the edifice has brought it back to its former splendor and, within its walls, four tasteful chambers for sleepover guests are in the process of being finished.

www.tenutadifessina.com

The **Tasca D'Almerita** family wished also to be present on Mount Etna in order to fully complete its ambitious wine-producing program. The over 60 acres (25 hectares(i)) of vineyards of the Tenuta Tascante estate are located in three different districts: Marchesa, where the fermenting cellars are located, Piano Dario, where shortly the news space dedicated to wine tourism will be constructed, and Sciaranova. Vineyards immersed in chestnut and oak woods, 121 small terraced vineyard plots, and 150 dry walls are just a few of the elements which make the Etna estate of this family, which has written the story of Sicilian wine, something unique.

www.tascadalmerita.it

We finish our trip in Trecastagni on the southern slope of Etna, visiting the **Cantine Nicosia**. With over 120 years of history behind it, the Nicosia family has, for five generations, boasted one of Etna's oldest and best known names. The ample line of wines currently includes two bottle-fermented sparkling wines: a blanc de blancs made from the Carricante grape and a blanc de noir produced from Nerello Mascalese. A gourmet stop: the Osteria di Cantine Nicosia open only by advanced reservations for a maximum of 50 persons.

www.cantinenicosia.it