

## Local Flavor

The Main River flows through vineyard-clad Würzburg and (below) going for baroque at the Würzburg Residence.



# More Than Riesling

Germany's Franconia region has been making some of the best wines you've never heard of – since the ninth century.

By Amanda Ogle

SOUTH OF FRANKFURT, along the Rhine and Main rivers and through the rolling hills of Bavaria, is the loosely defined region of Franconia, a dreamy area with centuries-old hamlets, colorful timber-framed shops, grand baroque palaces, and alfresco dining spaces lining cobblestoned streets. Before my recent visit, part of a Rhine and Main cruise from Uniworld, a friend begged me to bring back a few bottles of Franconian wine. “Isn’t it just riesling?” I thought. “She could get that at home.” I couldn’t have been more wrong.

The residents of Franconia have cultivated wine for more than 1,200 years –

and, it turns out, there’s plenty more besides riesling. The area’s mild climate, fecund soil, and twisting rivers make for excellent grape growing. I soon discovered, seeing rows upon rows of green vines covering the steep hillsides. Among the many varietals produced here are soft, floral silvaner; fruity Müller-Thurgau; and crisp, aromatic Bacchus: the top three plantings by acreage.

As I tasted my way through the region, I realized just how important wine is to Franconia. I was welcomed to exquisite vineyards and wine estates, and educated by enthusiastic locals in wine bars and shops. The area’s villages and towns even have their own *Winzerfeste* – wine

festivals held throughout the year after harvests – as well as wine hiking trails. Whether you’re on a cruise excursion or a wine vacation, wend your way through these three towns to learn the secrets of Franconian wine.

## WÜRZBURG

The Main River runs through Würzburg, making it the heart of the Franconian wine-producing region, as well as its cultural center. For wine-soaked history, don’t miss the **Würzburg Residence** (*Residenzplatz 2*), a baroque palace and gardens that is a UNESCO World Heritage site. Amid a stunning array of tapestries, paintings, and furniture, a breathtaking ceiling fresco, painted by Tiepolo, takes center stage across 6,500 square feet. In the Residence’s basement is **Staatlicher Hofkeller**, the expansive wine cellar of the former prince-bishop, where the Staatlicher Hofkeller winery (dating back to 1128, it’s one of the world’s oldest), ages its barrels. A cellar tour lets you explore its tunnels by candlelight. Two other large wine estates, the **Bürgerspital** (*Theaterstrasse 19*) and **Juliusspital** (*Klinikstrasse 1*) – former hospitals for the needy dating to the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries, respectively – produce old world-style wines with modern innovation.

## ROTHENBURG OB DER TAUBER

Roughly 35 miles south of Würzburg, the fairytale town of Rothenburg boasts beautifully preserved medieval buildings and half-timbered homes bedecked with vibrant blooms, all within thirteenth-century fortified walls. (The town is so classically charming, it was the inspiration for Pinocchio’s village in Disney’s 1940 film *Pinocchio*.) Rothenburg’s wine history claimed its pivotal moment in 1631: Legend has it that, in the midst of the Thirty Years’ War, the town’s Protestant mayor saved it from annihilation when he accepted a challenge from the leader of the Catholic invading army and chugged more than three liters of Franconian wine in a single go. A much smaller glass of *Wein* awaits at **Glocke Winery and Hotel** (*Ploenlein 1*), where you can sample vintages made from historical grape varieties, such as Adelfränkisch, that are the house specialty. For local cuisine paired

(WÜRZBURG) HIRO1775/GETTY IMAGES.  
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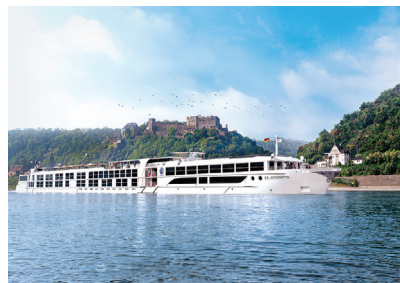
with Franconian wine, dine at cozy Löchle wine tavern, in the **Hotel Reichsküchenmeister** (Kirchplatz 8).

### RÜDESHEIM AM RHEIN

In the UNESCO World Heritage-designated Upper Middle Rhine Valley, the small town of Rüdesheim has a rich wine history. Here, vineyards mainly produce riesling, but Spätburgunder (pinot noir) is also a specialty, and wine bars, inns, and wineries stock other regional varietals. Susan Boehnstedt, an Arizona-based Virtuoso travel advisor who has lived in Germany's Black Forest region and visited the country more than 30 times, suggests a meal at **Breuer's Rüdesheimer Schloss** (Steingasse 10), a restaurant with an extensive wine list, including Franconian Grauburgunder (pinot gris), Weisser Burgunder

(pinot blanc), and Spätburgunder Weissherbst (rosé). Also pop by the fun, funky **Vinothek RheinWeinWelt Rüdesheim** (Am Rottland 6), a wine lounge where guests insert coins into machines that dispense their choice from 76 winemakers. If you're still hungry, you can pair your selection with local specialty cheeses and sausages from the lounge's Delicatessen.

Across the Rhine, Boehnstedt recommends a visit to **Bingen am Rhein**, her favorite German wine town. "Some of my favorite memories come from there. Surrounded by castles and hillside vineyards, it's set in one of the country's best white-wine-producing regions," she says, giving a special nod to the **Hildegardishof** winery (Ockenheimer Chaussee 12). "It has delicious vintages and a lovely view overlooking the river."



## TASTER'S CHOICE

Our picks for how to sample Franconia's finest.

### CRUISE

Sailing along the Main, Rhine, and Danube rivers, **Uniworld's** 15-day Amsterdam-to-Vienna voyage aboard the 130-passenger *River Princess* stops in several spots in Franconia, including Würzburg, for a **wine-tasting**, and Rüdesheim, where you can visit RheinWeinWelt or hike and picnic in a vineyard. *Departures: Multiple dates, April 28 to October 13, 2019; from \$8,699.*

Sip Franconian wines at Staatlicher Hofkeller after **touring the Würzburg Residence**, explore Rothenburg on a walking tour, or delve into Rüdesheim's wine scene on **Tauck's** 15-day cruise from Amsterdam to Budapest (or the reverse) on the 98-passenger *Treasures* or *Esprit*. *Departures: Multiple dates, May 5 to October 20, 2019; from \$7,590.*

### EXPLORE

In partnership with Uniworld, **Butterfield & Robinson's** eight-day Rhine River bike cruising adventure from Basel to Amsterdam has travelers pedaling Franconia to taste wine, take in **Rhine Gorge castles**, and tour lush landscapes. Travel aboard the 154-passenger *Antoinette* by night and hit the road during the day. *Departures: Multiple dates, May 26 to September 22, 2019; from \$7,495.*

Your travel advisor can work with one of **Virtuoso's on-site connections** – Culture Trip Germany, Pure Germany, and Unique Germany – to craft a customized tour of the Franconia region and beyond, tailored to your personal interests. **VI**



Medieval Rothenburg and (above) *Antoinette* cruises the Rhine River.



**SOUVENIR IN A BOTTLE** Part of the fun of vacationing in the world's wine regions is bringing a bottle (or a case) back home – call it a sippable memory. Whichever Franconian *Wein* you choose, be sure to buy it in a **bocksbeutel**: the traditional, fat-bellied round vessel that has symbolized the region's wines for more than 250 years.

(ROTHENBURG) FRANKENTOURISMUS/PFITZINGER, (BOCKSBEUTEL) MANUELA WESCHKE/GETTY IMAGES