

La Dolce Vita Wine Tours

RIOJA ROUNDUP



This tour focuses on Ribera del Duero and Rioja. The two winemaking regions, respectively new and old, present two sides of Spain viticulture. We'll also see the historic and cutting-edge in the architecture of Burgos Cathedral and Bilbao Guggenheim Museum, and in the traditional and haute cuisine of Spain.

2014 dates

June 23-28 / September 15-20

Meet

Valladolid (1 hour from Madrid by train)

Price

\$3,095

Single supplement: \$350

Depart

Madrid

HIGHLIGHTS

- Visit **two wine zones**: Rioja, Spain's most historic wine region, and Ribera del Duero, *Wine Enthusiast's* 2010 Wine Region of the Year
- Private, **sit-down wine tastings** at Faustino, Contino, Roda, Emilio Moro, Contado de Haza & more
- The **Guggenheim Bilbao**, the architectural wonder designed by Frank Gehry
- The **Marques di Riscal**, a historic Riojan winery, with hotel & spa also designed by Gehry
- **Burgos Cathedral**, Spain's third-largest cathedral and a UNESCO World Heritage Site

DAY 1 – RIBERA DEL DUERO

Named *Wine Enthusiast's* 2010 Wine Region of the Year, Ribera del Duero is hot, hot, hot! Not like southern Spain with 90+ temperatures, but like a wine region that gets 90+ ratings. Granted DO status in 1982 when only 8 wineries existed, there are now 220 in this quality-minded region where tinta fino (tempranillo) reigns. From Valladolid, we head to our first winery, **Abadia Retuerta**. Being a stone's throw beyond the DO border, these mavericks grow nontraditional varietals like syrah and petit verdot and emphasize single-vineyard *cru* in diverse microclimates. In contrast, our second winery, **Emilio Moro**, works *only* with tinta fino, yet manages to craft five diverse styles from this indigenous grape. After lunch, our third winery is **Hacienda Monasterio**, a 19th century estate now oenologically managed by Peter Sisseck, a Bordeaux and Simi alum and now star winemaker in Ribera. If time allows, we'll visit the imposing **castle of Peñafiel** to take in the panoramic view of banks (*ribera*) of the Duero

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River. Dinner in Valladolid introduces upscale versions of classic Spanish dishes, such as *pimientos relleno* (stuffed red peppers), white asparagus tips, artichokes with *jamón* (a special Iberian ham), and paella. *D • Convento las Claras in Peñafiel*

DAY 2 – RIBERA DEL DUERO TO RIOJA

This morning we leave our Valladolid hotel and head to Rioja. But first we enjoy one final Ribera tasting: **Contado de Haza**. The owner, Alejandro Fernández, was one of the DO's pioneers following a career in agricultural machines. After being lauded by Robert Parker, his Pesquera was the first Ribera sold in the U.S. Then it's on to Rioja, stopping en route in **Burgos**, a city with a beautiful historic center and one of Spain's largest Gothic cathedrals, a UNESCO World Heritage site. We continue to drive to Rioja and head straight to **Miguel Merino**. This boutique winery—the smallest in Rioja, by Miguel's account—is in **Briones**, a charming village overlooking the Ebro River, whose past wealth is evident in the ornate sandstone cathedral. We'll see Miguel's retro tools for handcrafting modern wines, including vine canes for filtering and wet towels for temperature control, then taste his sensational Riojas. We then settle into our second hotel, a beautifully renovated convent in the town of **Haro**. Dinner is at the hotel's excellent bistro. *B, D • Hotel Los Agostinos*

DAY 3 – GUGGENHEIM BILBAO & HISTORIC RIOJA

Morning takes us to the city of **Bilbao**, about an hour north of Rioja on the Gulf of Biscay. Long a sleepy port town, it underwent a wholesale revitalization after the construction of the **Frank Gehry–designed Guggenheim Museum**. Here there's time on your own for lunch, sightseeing, and museum-going. (Bilbao also has an excellent Fine Arts Museum with pieces by Goya, El Greco, Murillo, and other Spanish masters.) Mid-afternoon, we return to Haro to visit the Last of the Mohicans in Riojan winemaking, **Lopez di Heredia**. Prepare for a fascinating visit! Proponents of long-aged Riojas, this winery—the third oldest in Haro—doesn't release its Gran Reserves until 20 years after harvest. We'll patrol their 1890 cellar lined with 13,000 barrels, then sample this "historic" style of Rioja, which offers sherry-like oxidative notes and still has many fans. Dinner in Haro features classic pairing with Rioja, such as roast suckling pig or lamb. *B, D • Hotel Los Agostinos*

DAY 4 – CLASSIC VS MODERN RIOJA

Another historic name in Rioja is **Faustino**, which also follows a traditional, long-aged approach to Rioja, while actively courting the younger generation. Despite its mega size (15 million bottles), it nonetheless makes delicious fresh white Viura and venerable Rioja blends that show hallmark notes of leather, vanilla, and balsam. This behemoth contrasts sharply with our afternoon visit to **Contino**, a boutique winery that established the "chateaux" concept in Rioja in the 1970s—that is, a winery that grows all its own grapes on its adjoining property. Our host will be the winemaker and manager, Jesus de Madrazo Mater. Situated in a unique microclimate on a bend in the Ebro River, Contino is one of the few wineries that also makes a pure Graciano, normally a blending grape. After a stroll through the vineyards to see a Roman bridge on the Ebro river, we'll taste their mouth-watering, modern wines. Tonight we transfer to our third hotel, housed in a renovated monastery in the pilgrimage town of Santo

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Domingo de la Calzada, where bronze scallops in the sidewalks mark the way for the long-distance hikers and religious pilgrims on the Camino del Santiago. Dinner on your own. B • *Hotel Los Agostinos*

DAY 5 – RIOJA’S ARCHITECTURAL FLOURISH

There’s time in the morning to stroll in town and visit the **Cathedral of Santo Domingo de la Calzada**—the only one (surely!) to have a live chicken and rooster permanently on display. Here you’ll learn the legend behind this living relic, which ties into the history of this pilgrimage town, Santo Domingo de la Calzada, where bronze scallops in the sidewalks mark the way for the long-distance hikers and religious pilgrims on the Camino del Santiago. We’ll also stop by the Rio Oja, from which Rioja got its name. After lunch, we visit the **Marchese de Riscal**. Founded in 1862, the winery is key in the history of Rioja and was the first to bottle it for commercial sale. Today it’s just as famous for its modern architecture and luxury spa/hotel/winery complex designed by **Frank Gehry**. After a tour and tasting, we head to the tiny town of Samaniego (pop. 400) to visit a member of the Spanish New Wave: **Remirez de Ganuza**. One of Rioja’s first grape grower–winemaker hyphenates, Ganuza continually experiments in the vineyard and cellar, blazing techniques for a new generation. Our day winds up with a farewell dinner at the hotel’s top-notch restaurant, where we’ll say *salud!* to our new friends. B, D • *Hotel Los Agostinos*

DAY 6 – HASTA LUEGO!

We depart immediately after breakfast to drive to Madrid. Drop-off is at the Madrid airport by 1 P.M., which is connected to the city by subway. B

Please bear in mind that this itinerary is made one year in advance, so details may change due to the winemakers’ schedule (especially during harvest), hotel availability, weather, and other unforeseen circumstances. Any substitutions will be with a property of equivalent interest and value.

What’s included

- 5 nights accommodations (double room) in three deluxe hotels, with breakfast buffet
- 4 gourmet dinners (three courses with wine)
- 1 welcome lunch
- All wine tastings mentioned
- Shuttle at to Madrid airport at conclusion

What’s not included

- Air travel
- 1 dinner on your own and most lunches
- After-dinner drinks, or special wines at tastings that are not part of what is provided to the group
- Optional entry to Guggenheim museum and Burgos cathedral
- Items of a personal nature
- Anything not specifically mentioned as included