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The Stellenbosch Wine Region: The Heart of South Africa's Wine Industry

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Visiting Stellenbosch Wineries

Wine tourism is well-developed in Stellenbosch. If you are planning a trip to the area, be sure to find out whether the wineries you wish to visit will be open during your stay. Some wineries are closed on Sundays, while others are only open on certain days of the week.

Rustenberg, founded in 1682, is one of the oldest wineries in Stellenbosch. Wine production began almost right away, and Rustenberg's owners have been bottling wines since 1892. The Barlow family bought the winery in 1941; they offer tastings Mondays through Saturdays in a sleekly modern tasting room that was once a stable.

Rust en Vrede was founded in 1694 by the man who lent his name to Stellenbosch, Willem Adrian van der Stel, who was serving as Governor of the Cape at the time. The manor house that is the heart of today's winery was built in 1790, and the front of the house was rebuilt in 1825 after a fire damaged the building. Since 1977, the Engelbrecht family has focused on making red wines only, with very good results. Rust en Vrede's Coenie Snyman was named the Diners Club Winemaker of the Year for 2009. The winery's well-known restaurant, also called Rust en Vrede, was named Best Wine Tourism Restaurant in the 2010 Best of Wine Tourism awards.

Waterford Estate, owned by the Ord and Arnold families, specializes in unusual wine tasting experiences. The Wine Drive Safari takes you by Land Rover into the vineyards and onto estate land that has been set aside in its natural state; your guide will explain how the grapes are grown and offer you a tasting experience right in the vineyard. Waterford Estate also offers dessert wine and chocolate tastings as well as traditional wine tastings.

De Trafford Winery offers lodging in the on-site Garden Cottage as well as tastings on Friday and Saturday mornings. This boutique winery focuses on quality and innovation; De Trafford is even producing "straw wine," or "vin de paille," the only wine of this type made in South Africa. This process involves drying chenin blanc grapes on straw as the first step in making a sweet dessert wine.

What's Next for Stellenbosch?

South Africa's winemakers, including those in Stellenbosch, have been systematically increasing their red wine production, drawing away from traditionally-successful white wines. Stellenbosch producers will need to continue and expand their efforts to market the Stellenbosch brand to ensure that wine exports continue to increase during this transition process, particularly to countries outside the United Kingdom.

Stellenbosch wine producers are pinning their hopes for stronger brand recognition on the 2010 FIFA Soccer World Cup, hosted by South Africa. Soccer fans from around the world are expected to flock to the various venues around the country, and they will undoubtedly be more than happy to try the country's famous cabernets and chenin blancs.

With a winemaking tradition stretching back 350 years and every incentive to continue producing top-notch wines, Stellenbosch wine producers are ready to expand their presence on the world wine stage.