

Wines of **Argentina & Chile**



Guide to the Wines of Chile & Argentina

Version 1.1

by David Raezer and Jennifer Raezer

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Introduction

Previewing this book?

Please [check out our enhanced preview](#), which offers a deeper look at this guidebook.

The wine scenes in Argentina and Chile are red hot, as quality is on the rise and the range of wines available is seemingly ever-expanding. With this in mind, we have designed a comprehensive region-by-region review of the wines of Argentina and Chile, so no matter where you are, you will know just what to order.

For each region, we lay out the primary red and white grape varieties, the flavor profiles each variety typically exhibits, the denominations in which these grapes reach their highest expression, and vintage ratings. Since value is a focus, we highlight the regions where you are most likely to find quality wine at good prices. Rather than seek to tell you what specific bottle of wine to order, we give guidance as to how to approach ordering the most appropriate wine for the region. When appropriate, we have let our opinions be known. Ease of reference and accessibility have led us to employ a bullet-point based format.

* **Look for the asterisks.** We mark each of our favorite regions, grape varieties, and appellations with an asterisk (*) — they have a record for providing quality, consistency, and good values.

Contact us anytime

Our readers are our greatest inspiration. Email us at founders@approachguides.com to let us know about your experience with Approach Guides — many of our recent updates have been inspired by customers like you. We personally respond to every email.

We hope you enjoy what we believe is a totally unique guide to the wines of South America.

Have a great trip!



David and Jennifer Raezer
Founders, Approach Guides

P.S. We have also designed this guide as a [wine app for the iPhone or iPad \(www.agwine.com\)](http://www.agwine.com)

WINES OF ARGENTINA



Catamarca



Introduction

The northern Catamarca region, with elevations ranging from 3300 to 7200 ft above sea level, is a new and emerging wine area. As with the Salta region, its neighbor to the north, Catamarca enjoys cooler temperatures and is **best known for making excellent versions of torrontes-based white wines**. Winegrowing areas are located in the **Calchaquies** (the towns of Tinogasta and Santa Maria; this is the southern extension of same valley that began in the Salta region) and **Fiambala Valleys**. For reds, look to cabernet sauvignon and tannat for expressive, concentrated and earthy expressions.

Red Wines

Red grape varieties:

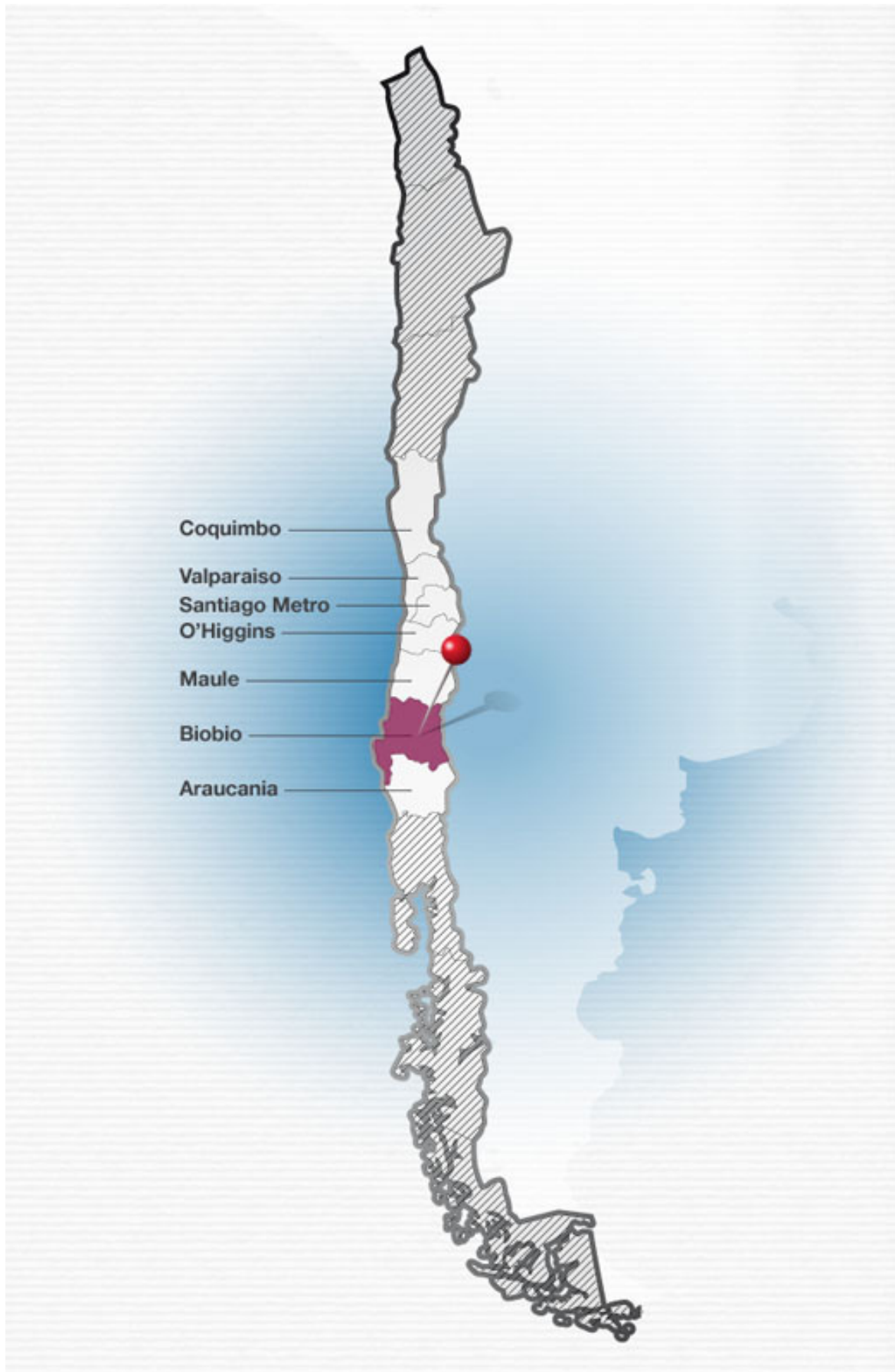
- * **Cabernet Sauvignon**. Argentina's cabernet sauvignon-based wines are generally lack-luster. When at their best, wines can achieve cabernet sauvignon's typical flavors of black cherries, black currants, tobacco, bell peppers, and plums. That said, **cabernet sauvignon achieves its best results in the northern regions of Catamarca and Salta, where flavors of intense dark fruit, peppercorn, and earth predominate**.
- **Malbec**. Originally from Cahors, in Southwest France, malbec is Argentina's quintessential grape variety and one of our favorites. Prone to rot and mildew, malbec fares exceptionally well in the generally drier climate characteristic of Argentina's winegrowing regions. Malbec-based wines are typically very dark in color and deliver a burst of big fruit flavors, including blackberries, plums, mulberry, and raisins; notes of game, violets, spice, and often mint add complexity. Gentle tannins and balanced acidity levels make malbecs very approachable, easy-drinking wines that are rather food-friendly. If grapes do not ripen fully (which can happen in Argentina's cooler climate regions), wines can display herbaceous qualities. **Malbec-based wines from Catamarca are generally well made; given the region's cooler climate, they display slightly higher levels of acidity and lean more toward the lighter, red fruit side of the flavor spectrum**.
- **Syrah**. Syrah holds tremendous potential in Argentina and we expect that it will likely garner increasing momentum in the future. For now, Argentine versions of syrah achieve consistently good, although not yet world-class, results. Syrah generally delivers full-bodied wines with nice acidity and flavors of meat, herbs, and pepper. While grown in Catamarca, we believe this variety achieves its best expression in other slightly warmer regions.
- * **Tannat**. The low-production tannat grape variety produces thick, chewy wines with big tannins and copious levels dark fruit. Although tannat achieves its highest levels in nearby Uruguay, **the best Argentine versions hail from the northern winegrowing regions of Salta and Catamarca**.

White Wines

White grape varieties:

- * **Torrontes.** Torrontes-based wines are **Catamarca's strength.** Torrontes is the only grape variety unique to Argentina (there is no connection with the Spanish grape variety of the same name; however, it is probably related to the Spanish muscat variety). This is a **vastly under-rated variety and one of our favorites for great wine values**, particularly given the quality improvements that have resulted from recent efforts to reduce yields, transition to optimized yeasts, and strictly control fermentation temperatures. While there are three different types of torrontes, only the torrontes riojano (originally from the province of La Rioja) is suited for the production of fine wines. At its best, the torrontes riojana yields high acidity, exceptionally aromatic wines, with scents of roses, jasmine and geranium. Flavors include citrus, peach, and grapefruit, with an underlying spiciness. This variety will appeal to lovers of bold fruit wines such as viognier, as well as those that like the crisp acidity of sauvignon blanc. **While the absolute best versions of torrontes come from the neighboring Salta region's Cafayate Valley, those from Catamarca are excellent.** If you have not tried a torrontes yet, you are missing out on a great new wine experience!

* Biobio



Introduction

The Biobio region, located in the larger Southern Region, is in a **dynamic period of modernization of its winemaking practices**. While the Itata Valley DO is moving slowly, the Bío Bío Valley DO is moving ahead briskly and it shows in its wines.

The Bío Bío Valley DO is an impressive, up-and-coming zone, and its wines are distinctive with their bright, light-bodied characters, generous fruit flavors, and high levels of acidity. We recommend the Bío Bío Valley DO's wines based on **merlot (possibly the best in the country) and chardonnay (offering distinctive minerality)**.

Red Wines

Red grape varieties:

- **Cabernet Franc.** Cabernet franc is **in the early stages of cultivation in Chile**. Cabernet franc generally yields mid-weight wines, exhibiting flavors of raspberry, candied cherry, and graphite, with good acidity; most distinctively, these wines exhibit an underlying earthiness. Look to the Curicó (see chapter on Maule region) and **Itata** (see discussion below) DOs for the best, early versions of experimentation with this variety.
- **Cabernet Sauvignon.** Cabernet sauvignon is Chile's most cultivated grape variety and has historically been the variety most associated with the country. Wines typically exhibit generous flavors of black cherries, black currants, tobacco, bell peppers, and plums; softer, fruitier, and slightly more alcoholic than their Bordeaux counterparts, Chilean versions of cabernet sauvignon are also unique in that they exhibit pronounced notes of eucalyptus and/or mint.
- * **Malbec.** Introduced in the wake of Argentina's success with this variety, malbec is beginning to gain modest momentum in Chile. The malbec grape variety typically yields full-bodied, moderate acidity wines, with flavors of game, violets, and blackberries; due to their gently tannic character, they are approachable, easy-drinking wines immediately after bottling.
- * **Merlot.** Although Chilean merlot-based wines are generally disappointing, those from the **Bío Bío Valley DO (see discussion below) are the exception and should be sought out**. Although the reasons for these poor results are not fully known, it might be attributable to merlot's tendency to dehydrate in Chile's warmer micro-climates. That said, when at its best, merlot achieves generous flavors of raspberry, herbs, leather, and violets; acidity levels are low.
- **Pais.** The país variety is a longstanding grape variety in Chile, most likely introduced by Spanish missionaries in the 16th century; amazingly, until the mid-1990s, it was the most widely planted grape variety in Chile. It makes low quality wines, largely for local consumption, and should be avoided.
- * **Pinot Noir.** Pinot noir, native to France's Burgundy region, yields light- to medium-bodied red wines with aromas of black cherry, raspberry and currant. It is known for being a particularly challenging grape variety, temperamental and highly sensitive to both over-production (high yields) and temperature (as achieving optimal ripeness is challenging). **Unfortunately, winemakers have not quite figured out how to make high quality pinot noir in Chile yet**; we expect that these wines are probably not going to wow you,

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Los Angeles Times

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