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Falling FOR Barossa

From world-class wines to epicurean delights, South Australia's Barossa Valley offers pleasures that will keep you coming back for more.

WORDS: CHITRA SANTHINATHAN PHOTOGRAPHY: ADAM LEE

Rows of vines stretch out as far as the eye can see at Jacob's Creek, one of the many world-famous wineries that dot the Barossa.

CASA CARBONI
CUCINA ITALIANA



Learn how to prepare potato *gnocchi* with sausage *ragu* just like mamma's at Casa Carboni, an Italian cooking school and *enoteca* in the Barossa.

The Barossa needs little introduction. If you're a wine connoisseur or lover of honest-to-goodness produce, chances are you'd have heard of this precious piece of South Australia, a fertile valley gifted with a Mediterranean climate of warm, dry summers and cool, wet winters – perfect for the cultivation of luscious wines and the growing of delicious food.

Located about an hour's drive north of the state capital, Adelaide, this lush valley is home to some of the best wines in Australia, if not the world, with over 150 wineries, among them internationally renowned labels like Penfolds, Jacob's Creek and Seppeltsfield, as well as smaller boutique producers. Beyond the vines, culinary maestros are orchestrating a revolution of their own – cooking up a storm using only the best of the Barossa. On a recent visit, I discovered the charms of the Barossa, through experiences that afforded me a taste of the valley, from its history to its tables overflowing with food and wine.

BAR-ROSA OR BAROSSA?

References to the valley being the Bar Rosa (a pun on the number of cellar doors and fine reds available) are sometimes bandied about in jest, but the Barossa got its name from South Australia's first surveyor-general Colonel William Light. In 1837, Light christened the magnificent ranges he sighted here as the Barroosa Ranges (from which the valley derives its name) in commemoration of the British victory over the French in the Battle of Barrosa, which took place in Spain several decades earlier. The misspelling is popularly attributed to a clerical error when the name was transcribed – though we will never know if said transcriber was having a glass of wine himself at the time!

While it's not South Australia's only wine district, it is undoubtedly her most famous. When I visited in autumn, the rolling hills were a patchwork of greens and yellows, and the vines were just turning colour, from the emerald of the previous season to inviting shades of burnished gold. Charming bluestone (a local greyish-blue stone) cottages straight out of a fairytale dotted the landscape, as did century old churches with names like Gnadenfrei, which lent the valley a nostalgic, European air.

It was the early Prussian settlers from Silesia (now part of Poland) escaping religious conflict in their homeland, who in the mid-19th century, brought with them Lutheran beliefs, a disciplined work ethic and traditions from the old country. Thanks to the hard work of those Silesian settlers and other adventurous pioneers, we can now partake in glorious New World wines. When they arrived, these settlers found a land ripe for the planting of vines, and



laid the foundation that turned the Barossa into the premier wine growing region it is today.

A FINE BLEND

My Barossa journey unfolded at Penfolds (www.penfolds.com), a name synonymous with exquisite wines. Founded in 1844 by an English medical doctor, Penfolds is world famous; its Grange range is highly-prized and sought after by wine collectors everywhere. But a mere wine-tasting was not the reason for my visit to this cellar door. Penfolds was at the top of my itinerary because it offered the unique experience of playing winemaker for an hour and a half. The 'Make Your Own Blend' experience is the only one of its kind in the Barossa, and comes highly recommended!

Ushered into the Winemakers Laboratory, a room reminiscent of my high school chemistry lab with white coats and glass cylinders laid out on the table, my assignment was to concoct a special blend of wine – something the winemakers here have been doing since 1992. The blend is popularly known as the GSM, a combination of three grape varieties – Grenache, Shiraz and Mataro that grow prolifically in the Barossa. Familiar only with the Shiraz, I was quickly brought up to speed on the other two varieties under the expert tutelage of Penfolds wine educator, Noleen Mattschoss. Briefed on the flavour profiles of each variety, I was clued in on how much of each wine went into the previous year's blend and also allowed sips of each to appreciate their singular qualities.

"Grenache is aromatic on the nose and lighter in body. By looking at the deep colour of the Shiraz, you can tell it will add richness and weight to your blend, while the Mataro is more savoury, reminiscent of Aussie style licorice. What you're doing is

FROM TOP: The 'Make Your Own Blend' experience at Penfolds offers visitors the opportunity to create their very own blend of wine to take home.

Explore the best of the valley on a trike – a three-wheeled vehicle that can accommodate up to three adults in its custom-built rear.

Have a cuppa at Maggie Beer's Farm Shop, the restaurant/store owned by one of Australia's most celebrated foodies.



Vines frame a picturesque window at Seppeltsfield, one of the Barossa's earliest wineries.



The Barossa's rolling hills and patchwork of vineyards make for a truly spectacular sight.



ALL IN A DAY'S WORK

Strapped for time? Explore the best food and wine experiences the valley has to offer in a day with the Butcher, Baker and Winemaker trail. Promising rewarding culinary expeditions, as well as opportunities to sample the valley's top drops, the trail is a great way to sample the valley's celebrated produce.

www.barossa.com

IN THE MARKET FOR GOOD EATS

Take advantage of seasonal produce at these regular markets and foodie events.

BAROSSA FARMERS' MARKET

● Corner of Stockwell and Nuriootpa roads, Angaston ● Open Saturday, 7.30am to 11.30am www.barossafarmersmarket.com

MOUNT PLEASANT FARMERS MARKET

● Mount Pleasant Showgrounds (Talunga Park) ● Open Saturday, 8.00am to noon www.mpfm.org.au

SUNDAY LUNCH AT CASA CARBONI

● Murray Street, Angaston ● Every Sunday, 12.30pm to 3.00pm (except in July) www.casacarboni.com.au



oenologist, I did learn a thing or two about the nuances in appearance, perfume and taste of the three wines, plus, I got to take home a bottle of my handiwork!

LOVE AT FIRST SIP

Next up was Jacob's Creek (www.jacobscreek.com.au), another one of the Barossa's illustrious winemakers. Here, at the Visitor Centre, not far from where the first grape vines were planted by winemaker Johann Gramp in 1847, I had the privilege of tasting the ambrosial Gramp's Five Generations Botrytis Semillon, named after five generations of the founding family. With a honey and marmalade bouquet, this dessert wine was almost confectionery on the palate – simply magnificent! After a quick lunch and a brief tour of the gorgeous grounds, I was introduced to another unique Barossa treat: The trike – a three-wheeler that is essentially a Harley Davidson motorbike with a custom built rear. Barossa Unique Tours (www.barossaunique.com.au) operated by Tony Tscharke offers chauffeured tours showcasing the history, culture and spectacular scenery of the Barossa on either a Jeep or a trike.

Cruising around the Barossa on a trike with the crisp autumn breeze in my face was indeed a novel way to take in the valley's sights. A mine of information, Tscharke gave me a quick history lesson as we rode past picturesque little hamlets all the way up to Menglers Hill Lookout, where a panoramic view of the valley below awaited us. It was also where we chanced upon a busload of tourists who stopped to take pictures, not just of the view, but of our much-envied ride!

From Menglers Hill, we made our way to our next destination – the historic Seppeltsfield (www.seppeltsfield.com.au) winery, instantly recognisable by its iconic date palm-lined



IMAGE: SATC/SVEN KOVAC

what winemakers do. Once a year, they come together and have a play around with different percentages to come up with the style they like," explained Mattschoss, as I proceeded with the experiment at hand, jotting down on a worksheet the percentage of each wine variety I was adding to my special blend.

With knowledge of the previous year's blend, I had erroneously assumed that the task would be a simple one. Fortunately, I was given three opportunities to create my very own GSM masterpiece. The key to a good blend is dependent on the quality of grape from the year's vintage, and the delicate balance of flavours of the three components. Once I was finished, Mattschoss revealed the percentages of this year's GSM: a blend that was 78 per cent Shiraz, 12 per cent Grenache and 10 per cent Mataro. Though a brief session cannot turn a novice into an expert



FROM TOP: Bottles of Seppeltsfield Raspberry Cordial, a South Australian classic made following the winery founder's personal recipe that's over 100 years old.

A Barossa institution, the Barossa Farmers' Market is the place to go for seasonal produce and good eats.

Beef eye fillet with parsnip puree, leek confit and tarragon butter for lunch at Jacob's Creek, which offers menus that marry quality local produce with premium wines.

A visit to Seppeltsfield's Centennial Cellar is a must for a taste of truly unique tawny port, said to be the longest lineage of single vintage fortified wines in the world.



The open road beckons during a tour of the valley on trike.



avenue. The winery was established in 1851 by Silesian emigrant Joseph Ernst Seppelt, a tobacco merchant who upon discovering the land was not suited to growing tobacco, turned his hand to winemaking instead. But it was not until his son, Benno, took over the reins in 1868 that the winery began to really make a name for itself. By 1900, B. Seppelt and Sons as the company was known then, was the largest winery in Australia.

Seppelt senior had embarked on building a grand three-storey cellar before his death, and though he did not live to see his vision come to fruition, his son Benno saw it through. To celebrate the construction of the cellar, which took 11 years to build, Benno decided to put his best barrel of port into the cellar and declared that none of it could be bottled for a century. The cellar was completed in 1878 and from that year on, a barrel of every year's vintage was added to the cellar not to be released for a hundred years. It was not until 1978, that a 100-year-old tawny port – the fortified wine the company is renowned for – was released.

As part of Seppeltsfield's 'Taste Your Birth Year' experience, visitors are rewarded with a tour of the atmospheric Centennial Cellar and a tasting – direct from the barrel – of tawny port from their birth year. I was also given the chance to taste this year's 100-year old release – imagine sampling a century-old wine surrounded by barrels containing, what is said to be the longest continuous line of fortified wine in the world – suffice to say, it was truly love at first sip!

THE COOK AND THE CHEF

Beyond the gorgeous Shiraz and delectable tawny port the region is celebrated for, the valley is fast-becoming a gourmand's heaven

FROM TOP: The beautiful Cnadenfrei St Michael's Lutheran Church along Seppeltsfield Road, Marananga has served the local community for over a 150 years.

Matteo Carboni teaches his Italian cooking classes with gusto, whipping up delicious meals while entertaining students.

Maggie Beer's Farm Shop is one of the valley's top attractions and also where the Australian Broadcasting Corporation cooking show *The Cook and the Chef*, which featured Beer and chef Simon Bryant, was filmed.



with the availability of good produce and adventurous chefs keen to pair all that fine wine with gastronomic pleasures to match. This is after all, Maggie Beer's Barossa. The doyenne of the Australian culinary scene has called the valley home for decades now. Maggie Beer's Farm Shop (www.maggibeer.com.au) is a must-visit for a peek at the kitchen featured in the TV series *The Cook and the Chef* (Maggie starred as the Cook), to participate in a cooking demonstration presided over by Beer herself or to pick up a bottle of her famous *verjus* (juice of unripe grapes). Another foodie hotspot is the Saturday morning Barossa Farmers' Market in the town of Angaston. The bustling market is a favourite among local chefs and the place to go for seasonal produce or to sample the local *mettwurst* (German-style smoked sausage).

Angaston is also the home of Fiona and Matteo Carboni who run the charming Casa Carboni, an Italian cooking school and *enoteca* (wine bar). The couple moved to the Barossa in search of the good life – a place to raise their children and wonderful produce to cook with – and found it here. Matteo Carboni, who hails from the Emilia-Romagna region in Northern Italy, is a deft hand at dishing up traditional Italian flavours using the best local produce.

Welcomed into their kitchen, with good-humoured Carboni as my teacher, I learned the basics of making fresh pasta and light-as-air potato *gnocchi* and discovered how easy it was to prepare to-die-for *tiramisu* with farm-fresh eggs and *mascarpone* as the main ingredients. The class was a whole lot of fun with Carboni supplying cooking tips, as well as an endless stream of anecdotes to keep me entertained while I was knuckle-deep in pasta dough. For me, the best bit was savouring the meal I cooked over a bottle of wine with the Carbonis and my fellow classmates.

'TIL WE MEET AGAIN

I'd come to the end of my Barossa journey at Casa Carboni, but I took away much more than traditional Italian recipes and the many bottles of wine I'd smuggled into my suitcase. I left the Barossa with a renewed appreciation of the region's food and wine, its breath-taking scenery, the hard-working ethos of its people and their love for the land they call home. Though my sojourn was brief and I'd barely skimmed the surface of what the Barossa has on show, the valley certainly left me besotted with her charms. 🇺🇸

travel 3Sixty's tour of the Barossa was made possible by Tourism Australia and the South Australian Tourism Commission. For information on the region, visit www.southaustralia.com

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