

TRAVEL WEEKLY

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Aboard the Insignia: Epicurean extravaganzas

Cruise editor Johanna Jainchill recently spent 10 days aboard the Oceania Insignia on a Mediterranean cruise. The following is the last of three reports on her observations and experiences.



As the Insignia visits some of the great culinary areas of Italy and France, it's not a bad place to try two of Oceania's new shore excursions that focus on local food and wine.

Oceania rolled out these eating and drinking extravaganzas for this summer season in the Med, in conjunction with Food & Wine Trails, a California-based company that arranges epicurean tours.

They do not come cheap. At between \$249 and \$299 per person, the tours were the most expensive ones offered in their respective ports. But the excursions felt more like custom tours because they were guided by a local wine expert and did not exceed 20 people. Plus, with the weak dollar, it would be easy to spend as much or more for a similar dinner or wine tasting experience in Western Europe.

The two excursions, one out of Sorrento and the other out of Livorno, offered very different examples of how to taste wine and different vineyard styles.



Antonio, the owner of the vineyard at the family-run estate of Azienda Sorrentino, used fresh tomatoes in a home-cooked meal.

The Best of Pompeii Wine Experience, out of Sorrento, was combined with a guided tour of the ruins of Pompeii. After an hour-long tour under an unrelenting sun, we were ready to eat and relax. The family run estate of Azienda Sorrentino is situated on the southern slope of Vesuvius, the volcano that had buried Pompeii thousands of years before.

The afternoon there felt like being invited to a Napolitano family's home. Antonio, a Sorrentino uncle that owns the vineyard, showed us the vines he proudly tends as our guide, Piera, translated for him. While on our walk through the vineyard, he picked fresh tomatoes that grow alongside the vines, and later served them for lunch.



Ricardo gave the group a crash course on Italian wine over two tastings.

There was little discussion of the wines' character as Antonio kept four varieties of the vino flowing. The vineyard's namesake matriarch, Angela Sorrentino, cooked a three-course meal that included regional specialties like a local provola cheese.

The Best of Terriccio Wine Experience from Livorno was starkly different. Our guide, Ricardo, was a very serious sommelier who gave the group a crash course on Italian wine over two wine tastings.

The focus was the wines of Castello del Terriccio, an expansive estate of olive trees and grapevines overlooking the Etruscan Coast. Bettina, our guide, showed us the hot, dry rows of grape vines, and then the cellar where the wine is kept in oak barrels. We were offered a taste of cabernet sauvignon straight from the barrel.

We tried several varieties of the estate's wine, and only after the tasting did we enjoy the wine along with a multi-course meal cooked by a chef of the estate's owner. The meal consisted of fresh mozzarella and tomatoes, pesto and zucchini lasagna, and cold veal with a tuna fish sauce.

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