



LA RIOJA
Apeteece



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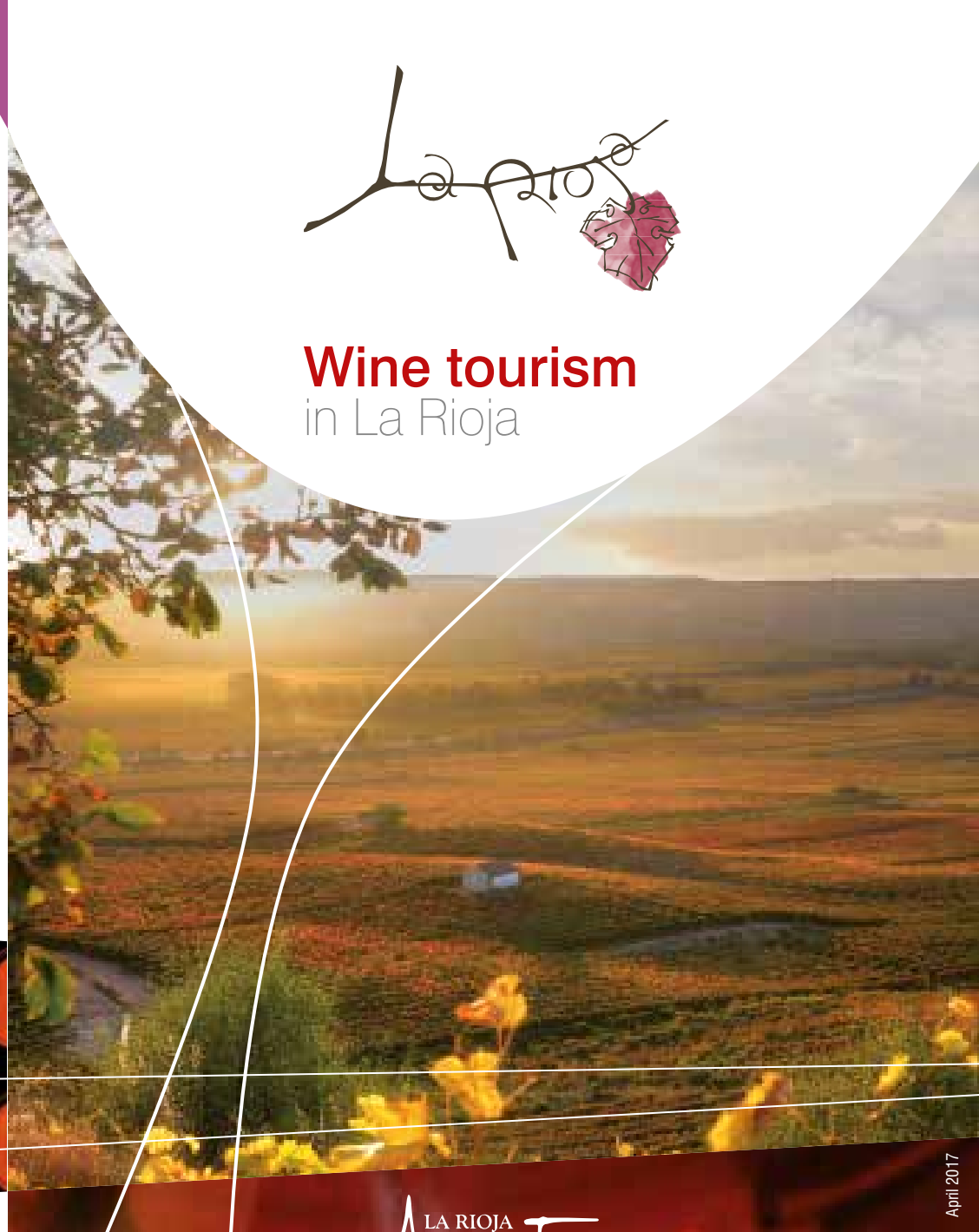
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Wine tourism in La Rioja



The Land with the Name of a Wine

La Rioja reminds one of wine, even in its name. Its geographical location on the Ebro Valley, its climatic conditions and the makeup of the soil have turned this a privileged area for growing grapes, making our wines inimitable. The passage of time has created a particular local culture based on making and aging wine and turned the people of this land into true specialists in this difficult art.



Battle of wine

This feast in Haro has been listed as being of National Tourist Interest. Every 29 June, feast of Saint Peter, the battle takes place in the Crag of Bilibio. It is an amusing battle which consists of pouring red wine on other fighters until everyone is completely dyed purple.

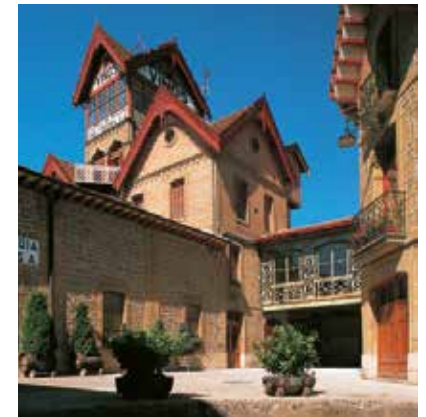


The **culture of wine** is deeply-rooted in Riojan towns. Wine has become a differentiating factor for this autonomous community.

Over time, we have gone from family cellars dug out of the earth or live rock, many of which still exist throughout La Rioja, to the large winemaking centres, such as the **Railway Station Quarter** in Haro, where the largest number of hundred-year-old bodegas in La Rioja can be found.

A parallel culture has developed in Rioja around winemaking and associated tasks, with wine as companion to feasts or as the star product. Every feast in Rioja is closely linked to wine. This tradition is more noticeable in September. With the start of the grape harvest, Logroño celebrates its **Harvest Festival**, honouring the hard work of grape growers that brings such enjoyment for the whole of La Rioja. The highlight of this famous feast is the offering of the first must of the harvest to Our Lady of Valvanera, patron saint of La Rioja.

To speak of La Rioja is to remember its wines but also all the tourist and leisure activities that this land's most famous product has to offer.



Winery in Haro.



Grape Treading, Feast of San Mateo, Logroño.

The history of Rioja wine

In La Rioja you can enjoy guided tours of stone fermentation pools.



Wine is an art that dates back to time immemorial in this land. **The Romans** already appreciated the wine from this region as exceptional and fostered grapevine planting, although they did not introduce this crop in the area. The Phoenicians made wine and so did other celtic peoples before them, such as the Berones, who traded the wine of Ancient Rioja.



Museum of the Culture of wine.

Stone fermentation pools

This is where the grapes were treading and pressed, allowing growers to make wine right at the vineyards. Growers who did not have their own winery only had to take the must home to make rosé wine, as making red wine requires fermenting the must with grape skins in containers.



Fermentation pool in the Riojan Sonsierra.

Later, the **religious communities** took on a major role in recovering traditional winemaking practices after a substantial part of the vineyards were grubbed up during **Arab** rule.

*"quiero fer una prosa en román paladino,
"I wish to make prose in the plain romance,
en cual suele el pueblo hablar con su vezino
that people use to talk to their neighbours,
ça non so tan letrado por fer otro latino
as I am not so learned as to use a different Latin,
bien valdrá, como creo, un bon vaso de bon vino"
that will be well worth, I believe, a glass of good wine"*

D. Gonzalo de Berceo
(Milagros de Nuestra Señora, 13. Jh./ Miracles of Our Lady 13th century!)



Hut in La Rioja Alta.



Underground cellar in a traditional bodega.

In **1560**, the winemakers of Logroño, created an **anagram** which served to guarantee the quality of their wines. This anagram was burned into the wineskins that were sold outside the town.

The owners of the **wine cellars in the Rúa Vieja**, the main street of Logroño's old quarter, requested that carriages be prohibited from circulating in the area. The Town Council agreed to this and passed the relevant by-law in **1632**, to maintain the quietness of the cellars.



Old tools in a winery.



Vines below San Lorenzo Mountain.



Vineyards on the shore of the Ebro, between San Asensio and San Vicente de la Sonsierra.



Bottle ageing.

During the second half of the 19th century, there was an outbreak of a grape vine disease across Europe —the **phylloxera**. It razed French vineyards in 1867 but, since it was not detected in La Rioja until 1889, French wine merchants came to La Rioja in search of wine.

In 1880, a large part of Riojan towns had established trade relations with French winemakers. They acquired wine to compensate for their scarce production while teaching their Riojan colleagues the “Bordeaux method” of making and ageing wine, so Rioja wines improved in both aromas and flavour.

In 1892, a **Viticulture and Oenology Station** was founded in Haro to study improvements, quality controls and testing of exports.

After a lengthy process, the name **Rioja** was finally protected in Spain in 1920 and, in 1925, it was established as the **first Designation of Origin in Spain**. In 1926, the Control Board of the Rioja Designation of Origin was constituted. Over the years, this institution has become the body that regulates and controls Rioja wine and ultimate guarantor of its quality.



Discovering the world of Rioja wine.

Grape growing

The vineyard



Vineyards in Sojuela.

The situation of La Rioja, its climate and its soils make it an ideal, privileged location for growing grapes.

The **experience** of grape growers and winemakers have resulted in the natural selection of grape varieties that proved to possess the best qualities of adaptation to the Riojan climate and soils while at the same time capable of producing wines of the highest quality.



Vineyards at an early blooming stage.



Traditional harvesting using a pruning knife.

Rioja wine grape varieties:

Tempranillo

Indigenous to La Rioja, it is considered a preferred grape variety and, for some years now, it has been the grape that occupies the largest area.



Garnacha tinta

The wine obtained varies greatly depending on environmental and growing conditions.



Mazuelo

Its French origins are internationally recognised. It makes tannin-rich wines that are quite rough on the palate.



Graciano

A minority indigenous grape, it is the most aromatic of all.



Viura

The main white grape grown in La Rioja. It provides wines that can be aged, a traditional practice with white wine in Rioja.



Malvasía

A white grape variety that provides young wines with a fresh, fruity aroma while its aged wines have a golden hue.



Garnacha blanca

A rustic variety, that behaves in much the same way as the Garnacha Tinta.



In January 2007 the Control Board of the DOPa Rioja authorised new white grape varieties: 'Chardonnay', 'Sauvignon blanc' and 'Verdejo', as well as the following native white grape varieties 'Maturana blanca', 'Tempranillo blanco' and 'Turruntés'. The inclusion of the minority red grape varieties, 'Maturana tinta', 'Maturano' or 'Maturana parda' and 'Monastel' was also approved.

The ages of the vineyard



Grape harvest in Azofra (Rioja Alta).



Traditional wickerwork basket.

The Harvest is a true regional feast when families gather together to collect the fruit of the vines in a jolly, hospitable atmosphere.

The grape harvest begins late in La Rioja, usually in late September, and continues on till mid October. Friends and relatives team up with professional grape pickers to put in long work days that last from dawn to dusk. When the time comes to deliver them, the bodega takes in the grapes while the grape pickers chat about wine and anecdotes of past harvests around a traditional meal.

But the harvest is just the culmination of a long year of hard work at the vineyard. After the fruit is

picked, the vine rests, taking on coppery, red and yellow hues that make late October one of the best times to visit La Rioja. Finally, the leaves drop off and the time for pruning arrives. The winter sets in and the snow appears on the hills that surround and protect the vineyards.

After a few months' rest, spring arrives and the vines begin to "bleed" as the sap starts to circulate and seeps out of the pruning cuts. The buds burst and later, in May, the vines bloom, when the suckers are removed.

The clusters form little by little and grow green until the magical moment of veraison, when the grapes begin to change colour in early summer and gradually darken to a deep purple at harvest time. It is only a question of deciding when to **visit La Rioja** to enjoy contemplating one of these unique moments or helping the locals in caring for their vineyards. It is certainly an experience.



Vine pruned in winter.



Newborn cluster.



Grapes after veraison.



Vineyard tasks —sucker removal.

The winemaking process



Once the grapes arrive at the bodegas, the time for vinification begins. First the type of wine to be made —white, rosé or red— has to be decided, as each is made differently, with different periods and guidelines.



Red wine.



Rosé wine.



Organic white wine.

To make **white wines**, the grapes are drained and the must extracted, leaving the skins and pips behind and fermented in fermentation tanks.

To make **rosé wines**, the grape is destemmed and lightly crushed and then drained, where the must is allowed to macerate with the skins. The must is then decanted and sent to the fermentation tanks.

There are two basic ways of making **red wines**. The most common consists of removing the stalks in destemmers before fermentation, which results in wines that are very suitable for extended ageing. If the whole clusters are fermented, the resulting wines are more suitable for drinking in their first year. In both cases, the must is pumped from the bottom to the top of the tank during fermentation while the temperature is maintained constant. The purpose of this is to extract the compounds in the skins that provide colour, structure and aromas.

Organic Riojas

Organic wines are also made within the Rioja Designation of Origin. These are natural wines from grapes that have been grown whilst maintaining the utmost respect for the environment, from vineyards with moderate yields that are exclusively fertilised with organic matter, never using synthetic chemicals.



The **ageing process** characterises and differentiates Rioja wines from those of other regions in the world. After staying in Bordeaux-type oak barrels, they spend a certain amount of time in the bottle

Aged wines are divided into:

Crianza

Wines which are at least in their third year, which have spent at least one year in barrels and a few months in the bottle.



Reserva

Select wines from the best vintages which, given their excellent characteristics, have been aged for three years, with at least one year in barrels.



Racking.

Gran Reserva

Wines selected from exceptional vintages, which have spent at least two years in barrels followed by a further three years in the bottle.



Over the last few years, different wines have appeared which do not fit into traditional vinification and ageing standards. These are known as **signature wines** or terroir wines or garage wines... where vinification is freer in its times and adheres to the oenologist's wishes, always taking into account the special characteristics that each type of grape can offer.



Tasting a signature wine.

Enjoying the senses

Now that you know the secrets about the history of Rioja wine, grape picking, vinifying, and ageing, the final step is to enjoy its qualities.



There is no other sensation like gazing upon the different **reflections** of a wine in an elegant glass. These reflections will vary depending on the ageing process, the producer, the age and the grape variety. Discover the hundreds of aromas it contains, without tasting it, trying to guess each hint of oak, red berries, cinnamon, or the landscape surrounding the vineyard. Try the taste, letting the wine explode against the palate to discover magical sensations of differing flavours that are at the same time one and unique, the incomparable and inimitable flavour of a Rioja wine.

The best way to discover this world is to sign up for one of the **winetasting courses** organised in La Rioja. You have courses for all levels, from the most basic, for beginners, to specialist tastings for wine lovers who know this art well.



Colour is essential in assessing a wine.

The aromas

If you swirl the wine vigorously in the glass, its aromas will burst forth in all their strength...



With aromas of cinnamon, fruit... Which Rioja do you prefer?

Experiment, try, enjoy and choose. In La Rioja you can discover great, consecrated wines, winemakers who are famous for their quality across the world, small personal bodegas that will let you know the different variants of the same product —Rioja wine, a product that acquires a different personality in each bodega.

A game for the senses.



Winetasting mat.

Activities among the vineyards



Bicycling is a good alternative to discover the beauty of the vineyards.



Visiting a wine bar.

Wine has provided La Rioja with a unique setting to practise numerous **sports and leisure activities**. The seas of vineyards that cover this land provide the perfect landscape to enjoy numerous open-air activities. You can start with a hot-air balloon ride, to see from the sky what is awaiting you after you land.

After the flight, we can move around the land —on horseback, on foot, by bicycle... Any means is good to visit the vineyards of La Rioja. You can even take a canoe on the River Ebro. The beauty of our vineyards can be enjoyed any time of the year.

Do not miss the opportunity of taking a guided tour of a vineyard, where they will explain the agricultural tasks and chores carried out there year-round. You can even participate in them and help harvest the grapes or prune the vines.

If what you want is to enjoy a tour of a bodega, without concerns, nothing better than the Vinobus. There are different routes that will take you, accompanied by a guide, to discover two bodegas and some curious anecdote about wine and Riojan culture.

After all this activity, you are certain to be needing a well-deserved break. Choose a hotel or a country guesthouse. Many offer wine tourism programmes that will allow you to sleep among the vineyards or enjoy organised tours, tasting courses... There are hundreds of unique places in La Rioja.



Visiting a bodega.



On horseback amidst the vineyards.



Hiking route.



Taking the Vinobus.

Feeling wine



Vinotherapy treatments.

In La Rioja you can “feel” wine, without drinking it. In this land, wine is the main topic of conversation, of small and great celebrations, a way of life that only those who have spent some days here can understand.

To feel wine **on your skin**, the best is a vinotherapy treatment. The polyphenols that are hidden in the grapes are an ally of the newest beauty treatments offered in the spas of La Rioja. In addition to its anti-ageing properties, they are a delight and help you relax your body and your mind.

Another great way of feeling wine is to **pair** it with its best companion, Riojan cuisine, both in its most exclusive facet —with a top level meal in which each dish is accompanied by the wine that best complements its flavour and texture— or in the more mundane but equally tasty version of combining Rioja wine with the tapas offered by the bars of Rioja —in the Calle Laurel in Logroño or anywhere else in this land. Discover the



Pairing Rioja wine and Rioja cuisine.



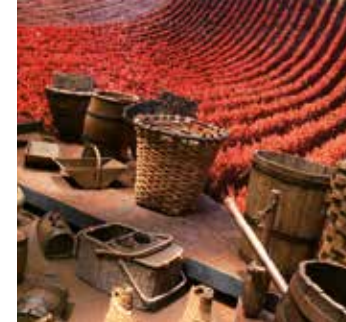
Pears in Rioja wine.



Rioja wine is always on the lists of local restaurants.



Vivanco Museum of the Culture of Wine.



Old harvesting tools.

pinchos (tapas) with curious names that offer the best of Riojan cuisine.

Another perfect way of pairing wine is **culture**. Art moves to the bodegas and, among the barrels, you will find unique works for the lovers of painting and sculpture.

The best showcase of the combination of culture and wines in La Rioja is undoubtedly the Vivanco Museum of the Culture of Wine, in the small medieval town of Briones. The museum houses thousands of secrets related to wine, a must for anyone interested in the long cultural life of wine, from ancient Egypt to modern day.

The elephant trail

If you arrive in La Rioja on a Friday afternoon, visit the Calle Laurel or Calle San Juan in Logroño or the Calle de la Herradura in Haro. Tasting the specialities of each bar, together with a glass of house Rioja is the best way to begin a visit to La Rioja and get to know the culture of wine.



Calle Laurel in Logroño.



A world to discover, art among the barrels.