



36 HOURS IN MENDOZA, ARGENTINA

Start your tour of the city with a wine sampling at Vines of Mendoza ... The tasting room is owned by Michael Evans and Pablo Gimenez Riili, whose 1,000-acre cooperative vineyard in the Uco Valley gives those who dream of making their own wine the possibility of owning as little as three acres of vines, with access to a state-of-the-art facility and an excellent in-house oenologist.

ARGENTINA'S financial crash in 2002 was actually a boon for the local wine industry. The devaluation of the peso meant that winemakers in this northern region of the country could deliver high-quality vintages to the export market at very low prices, even while the cost of making wine was dropping. Real estate prices also fell, and investors rushed in to snap up prime wine acreage at a fraction of the cost in other regions. Ten years later the result is a vibrant wine scene with a great array of bottles for different budgets and palates, cutting-edge eco-sustainable cantinas and a new generation of innovative winemakers. The city of Mendoza itself makes a good base for a visit, with new hotels, restaurants and bars in the historic center, and a mix of architecture that showcases Art Deco alongside '60s modern (the vintage pickup trucks are also a throwback to another era). Just a short drive away are vineyards, adventure sports and resorts under the shadow of the Andes with wine lists that feature the best of the region.



Nicolas Wormull for The New York Times
In the vast Parque General San Martín.
By ONDINE COHANE



Nicolas Wormull for The New York Times
The tasting room at Vines of Mendoza,
where samplings include
a flight of Mendoza's famous malbecs.



Nicolas Wormull for The New York Times
Tango at the luxurious Park Hyatt.

6 p.m.

1. PREPPING YOUR PALATE

Start your tour of the city with a wine sampling at Vines of Mendoza. The tasting room features about 100 producers, and it's the only spot in the city where you can try so many in one place; the multilingual servers are well trained and knowledgeable. Samplings include a flight of malbecs, Mendoza's most famous grape, for 75 pesos (\$17.65, at 4.25 pesos to the dollar), or an overview of the varietals from the region, like torrontés, merlot, bonarda and a couple of the blends. The tasting room is owned by Michael Evans and Pablo Gimenez Riili, whose 1,000-acre cooperative vineyard in the Uco Valley gives those who dream of making their own wine the possibility of owning as little as three acres of vines, with access to a state-of-the-art facility and an excellent in-house oenologist. Tours and barbecues can be arranged at the tasting room. A hotel consisting of luxury lakeside villas at the vineyard will open in early 2013 (Espejo 567; 54-261-438-1031; vinesofmendoza.com). On May 1 the tasting room will move nearby to Belgrano 1094 and will have more space and sidewalk tables.

9 p.m.

2. THE ART OF GRILLING

This being Argentina, the city's most famous chef, Francis Mallmann, is a master of the simple art of wood-fired meat grilling. In the courtyard of his flagship restaurant 1884 (Belgrano 1188; 54-261-424-2698; 1884restaurante.com.ar), an array of different cast-iron grills (like the parilla, a barbecue grill, or a plancha, a cast-iron griddle) and wood-fired ovens are on sizzling display. The seven-hour-grilled lamb (cooked in a mold on the grill) with mashed potatoes (100 pesos) brings new meaning to the term tender. The setting is also quite romantic (although the servers could raise their game).

Midnight

3. NIGHT BIRDS

After-hours in Argentina gets going late, so don't be surprised if most people don't show up until after midnight for empanadas and cocktails at El Palenque (Aristides Villanueva 287; 54-261-15-429-1814), a bustling restaurant and bar based on an Argentine pulpería, or tavern, on Aristides Villanueva, the city's night-life artery. Well-heeled Mendocinos at outdoor tables sip on wine out of pingüinos, penguin-shaped pitchers (29 pesos).

Saturday

9 a.m.

4. PARADING THE PLAZAS

Much of Mendoza was reduced to rubble during the devastating earthquake of 1861, and the city's five airy plazas were built to provide some safe open spaces in the event of another disaster. They have become the cornerstones of the city, especially on the weekends. At the most popular, the Plaza Independencia, ice cream and yerba maté vendors sell their goods, while kids run around and locals relax on park benches listening to the bands that congregate. Wander from here

to the other four plazas to get a good sense of the city's layout. In the Financial District, the Plaza San Martín is dominated by a statue of the general who led Argentina to independence; Plaza Chile has the best children's playground; Plaza Italia is dedicated to the country that gave Mendoza so many immigrants (there is a statue of Romulus and Remus and a fountain with 1,400 ceramic tiles from the Cathedral of Bologna); and Plaza España, with its green spaces, is arguably the most beautiful of all.

11 a.m.

5. MORNING TIPPLE

About a 50-minute drive from Mendoza, past smaller towns and along country roads lined with vines, Achaval Ferrer (Calle Cobos 2601, Perdriel; 54-261-488-1131; achaval-ferrer.com) started out as a side project for three wine-loving friends, including the Italian winemaker Roberto Cipesso. But their wines, particularly their three malbec crus (each from different soils and altitudes) have quickly gained acclaim — especially the Finca Altamira 2009, which earned a 99-point rating from the wine critic Robert Parker. The tour and tasting offer an informed overview of a small, high-quality estate, and for 100 pesos one can sample about five wines from their cellar.

1 p.m.

6. TWIN PAIRINGS

Bodega Ruca Malen's surprisingly elegant restaurant (Ruta Nacional, kilometer 7, Luján de Cuyo; 54-261-413-8909; bodegarucamalen.com) faces the Andes at the edge of one of the property's vineyards and involves a five-course daily tasting menu, 320 pesos, pairing the vineyard's wines (as well as some other favorites of the owners) with seasonal and local plates. The combination is excellent and, despite the number of courses, not overwhelming. A small plate of chorizo with criolla sauce and Argentine cereal, for example, comes with a glass of Yauquen malbec cabernet sauvignon blend 2010; beet root cooked in honey and cinnamon with burned goat cheese, with a Ruca Malen syrah 2008; and a medallion of grilled beef with baked onions, olives, raisins and Arauco olive oil perfumed with lavender from the estate's garden, with Ruca Malen malbec 2010 and Kinien malbec 2010.

4 p.m.

7. DEEP DETOX

Even if you aren't staying at the new Entre Cielos resort and vineyard (Guardia Vieja 1998, Vistalba; 54-261-498-3377; entrecielos.com), it is worth stopping at the spa and the six-station hammam, 20 minutes from the city center. After multiple steams and scrubs, your skin will glow and most of the alcohol you've consumed at tastings and lunch will exit your system. The menu includes lymphatic drainage massages and facials. If you want to continue the vineyards tour instead, stop at Bressia (Cochabamba 7725, Agrelo, Luján de Cuyo; 54-261-524-9161; bressiabodega.com), a short drive away and home to distinctive, more Old World-style blends (like Bressia Profundo).

9 p.m.**8. REGIONAL STAPLE**

Think of the lomo as Mendoza's answer to the Philly cheesesteak — a grilled sirloin sandwich with melted cheese, fried egg and mayo. At the old-school city institution Don Claudio (Tiburcio Benegas and Aristides Villanueva; 54-261-423-4814), the dish is served in a bright, canteen-like space, with large bottles of ice-cold Quilmes, the country's favorite beer. The lomo will put you back only 41 pesos and the brew 15 pesos, so consider it a cheap date. Later, head to Plaza Pellegrini and watch locals perform tango alfresco.

Sunday**10 a.m.****9. BRUNCH STOP**

Maria Antonieta (Belgrano 1069; 54-261-420-4322; mariaantonietaresto.com) is the chic new dining spot in town that serves fresh, seasonal dishes that are a refreshing change from the dominating steak joints. Besides house-made muffins and freshly squeezed juices like strawberry and grapefruit, breakfast choices include huevos al agua (poached eggs). The cheerful whitewashed interior and sidewalk seating make good choices for whiling away a couple of hours with a coffee and the paper, and there's free Wi-Fi.

Noon**10. GREEN ESCAPES**

Rent bikes at Bikes and Wine (54-261-410-6686; bikesandwines.com) and head to Parque General San Martín, a green oasis of more than 1,200 acres (Central Park has less than 900) designed by the landscape architect Carlos Thays in 1896. On Sundays picnicking families stream through the huge cast-iron gates and head to spots like Cerro de La Gloria, with its glorious view across the city and foothills of the Andes. Want to get closer to the mountains themselves? Argentina Rafting (54-261-429-6325; argentinarafting.com) has kayaking, mountain biking and hiking day trips for \$73, and Discover the Andes (54-261-156-571-967; www.discovertheandes.com) offers hikes like the Vallecitos trek (with stunning views) for \$200, with lunch.

IF YOU GO

In town, the Park Hyatt Mendoza (Chile 1124; 54-261-441-1234; mendoza.park.hyatt.com) is still the city's most luxurious hotel, with a great central location and a good wine bar, although rooms seem somewhat dated for the price. Doubles from 1,122 pesos (\$264) plus tax.

The sweet new B&B Casa Lila (Avellaneda Nicolás 262; 54-261-429-6349; casalila.com.ar) is run by a friendly couple; \$140, with tax.

In the heart of the wine country, the year-old Entre Cielos (Guardia Vieja 1998, Vistalba; 54-261-498-3377; entrecielos.com) has a vineyard and spa; rooms are spacious and very comfortable. From \$380, plus tax; includes a

hammam session and breakfast; \$266 low season.

Cavas Wine Lodge (Calle Costaflores s/n, Alto Agrelo; 54-261-410- 6927;cavaswinelodge.com) sits in the shadow of the Andes and is a popular spot for honeymooners and those on wine tours; \$605, plus tax, with breakfast; \$360 low season.

This article has been revised to reflect the following correction:

Correction: April 15, 2012

A picture credit last Sunday with the 36 Hours column, about Mendoza, Argentina, misspelled the given name of the photographer. Nicolas Wormull, not Nicholas, took the pictures of a park, a couple dancing the tango and a wine tasting room.

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