



EXPERIENCING LA DOLCE VITA



• ADAM MONTEFIORE

There is a great deal of doom and gloom in the global wine industry these days. Sales are on the downturn. The next generation just seems to be less interested in wine than their forebears. Paradoxically, at the same time, wine tourism is blooming. Woe betide those wineries that do not invest in wine tourism, and it seems, though, that they are in each famous wine region in turn.

In Israel, the opposite is the case. I believe the younger generation is interested in wine. They want to be more knowledgeable and are drinking more. The W (WSET) Wine School has educated a whole new generation. Time after time, I see wine bars with every table full of young people drinking wine, which had never been the case previously. Furthermore, the Jewish and kosher markets overseas continue to support Israeli wine. It is like an extension of the home market. Though times are tough, their support has considerably softened the blow of international trends. Boycotts and threats have not worked.

At the same time, incoming wine tourism here understandably collapsed. My late wife used to work in tourism. I remember only too well that minutes after the most minor terrorist attack, the cancellations for the following year would begin. Well, we have had a terrible few years. Tourism was first decimated by the COVID pandemic, then came the Simchat Torah massacre on Oct. 7, 2023. A two-year war followed, along with 12 months of daily attacks on the North. These knocks came in swift succession. Now there is an international campaign of defamation of all things Israeli. As a cumulative result of all these things, there is far less incoming tourism. However, on an optimistic note, Israelis, finding increasing hostility abroad, are now more likely to spend their leisure time within the borders of Israel. Zimmers

and wineries are benefiting from this.

However, you can't take the traveling Jew out of an Israeli, and we as a people love to travel. Israelis have a travel-lust, and the worse things are at home, the more they want to travel to experience the dolce vita. A visionary newish start-up presses all the right buttons. This is Vinspiration, a wine, culinary, and cultural travel company that was founded in 2018 by Guy Haran. It has a very professional team of eight full-time staff and an extended team of 30 wine professionals. It organized, arranged, or led no fewer than 120 tours in 2025. This was a 25% increase on the previous year.

The destinations cover 27 of the world's wine regions, from the most famous (Bordeaux, Burgundy, Piedmont, Tuscany) to the more exotic (Austria, England, Slovenia, Crete). What began as a European love fest now reaches the world, including venues such as California, South Africa, and Mexico. A tour, as far as Vinspiration is concerned, could be anything from one day to a month. Clients range from a couple

looking for the holiday of their dreams to a group tour. Vinspiration has a boutique approach, caring for each detail and adapting to suit the wishes of the client. Everything is personal, intimate, yet with absolute professionalism.

Seventy percent of the tours it arranges are for individuals. Thirty percent are group tours. Though mainly for Israelis eager for the most authentic wine and food experiences, Vinspiration is international and also caters to those seeking its expertise from abroad. The group tours are always led by a wine professional who is both an experienced guide and specialist in wine and food in that particular region. The list of these guides is a "who's who" of the Israeli wine scene.

Haran is the modest, soft-spoken visionary and mastermind behind this incredibly successful initiative. He has both drive and determination and an intense attention to detail, covering the smallest, most detailed points. This is submerged within a polite, not



VINSPIRATION OFFERS intimate meetings and tastings with winemakers at Chateau Montlabbert.

GUESTS OF Vinspiration are taken to special venues to experience the local cuisine.

A TUTORED tasting by Guy Haran, founder of Vinspiration.



pushy man with refined European-style manners. He is extremely wine knowledgeable and worldly. He has his finger on the pulse of what is going on in the world of wine and all the trends of international wine tourism. Of course, Israel is a village in wine terms, and though we make a great deal of noise on social media as though we were giants, wine and wine tourism here are still comparatively insignificant in the worldwide scheme of things. We have a lot more to learn than to teach, something that is apparent to me in every wine region I visit. Haran has the knowledge and the worldliness combined with modesty and humility, along with a focused curiosity. It is a winning combination.

He initially had plans to become a lawyer but slipped into the drinks world, which captured his interest to our great benefit. He opened the Jerusalem branch of Zman Amity, Israel's best school for bartenders. Gradually, wine took over. He became the sommelier at the iconic King David Hotel, then the 1868 Restaurant, and was part of the founding team of chef Haim Cohen's Yaffo-Tel Aviv Restaurant. He continued his wine journey at Ish Anavim, the Grape Man, an independent center of Israeli wine culture offering tastings, festivals, competitions, and wine tours. It was the perfect wine induction for someone who wanted to make a difference. These days, he lectures at the W (WSET) Wine School and offers tutored tastings of Israeli wines abroad, making him one of our leading wine ambassadors.

The wine tourism bug bit him early on. It started with a father-son visit to Bordeaux in 2011. In 2018, he arranged a private tour to Alsace, and he was hooked. Tours to Bordeaux, Piedmont, and Portugal followed in 2019. The Vinspiration roadshow was underway, and the growth was led by returning satisfied clients, word of mouth, and the Israeli hunger for European culture. Now the world is Vinspiration's oyster.

Haran is unshakably optimistic and bullish. To claims of woe and doom, he explains that everything is up to us. It is up to his generation to seize the day and make this happen. To this effect, he has also focused on wine tourism in Israel. He consults for Israeli wineries and regional councils that want to develop their tourism. He has advised the Judea Wine Region and has shaped from scratch the whole development of the Negev Wine Region with impressive results.

He was the prime driver in the Israel wine book he published in 2021, *Wine Journey: An Israeli Adventure*. It is a wine tourist's almanac and guide book in Hebrew and English, written and produced by Haran with winemaker-educator Roni Saslove, wine photographer



David Silverman, and designer Itamar Gur of Studio Gur. It lists wineries of all sizes, from the giants to domestic garagistes, and covers the map of Israel from Metulla to Eilat. It is a soft-cover book that can comfortably fit into a rucksack and be your knowledgeable friend as you search for wineries to visit, places to eat, and nearby attractions. Wherever you go, there is wine content of interest. This book was so successful that it was updated and reprinted in 2025. No wine lover, gourmet tourist, or person curious about Israeli wine should be without it. As I have preached for many years, whether your interest is agriculture, history, archaeology, technology, peoplehood, culture, religion, gastronomy, or just wine, you can really get to know Israel through the prism of its wine regions, wineries, and wines.

Now, in Israel, it is true we may not have agri-tourism as naturally as in Italy, where restaurants, accommodation, and wineries lie in easy coexistence in beautiful surroundings. We do not have a developed wine route like California's Napa Valley, which is as if designed and developed with the prime objective to encourage wine tourism. Nor do we have the spectacular views of South Africa's Stellenbosch. But we do have great opportunities for agri-tourism. There are wine routes covering the North (Golan and Galilee); the coastal region (Mount Carmel); the center of the country (Judea Wine Region); the central mountains (Judea and Samaria); and the South (the Negev). We also have vineyards and regions of great beauty. However, what we have above all else is unique. The people and places of Israel have a long, deep relationship with the fruit of the vine. Our region was the cradle of the grape and wine culture. Wine has been part of our story since the birth of the Jewish people in biblical times to the founding of the Start-Up Nation of today. Wine represents authentic Israel.

Then there is the wine culture capital of Israel: Tel Aviv. The city that never sleeps is a culinary destination for foodies, showing the talent of local chefs who have wowed patrons with their wares in all the major food capitals of the world. The unique Israeli cuisine, which is a fusion of Israel, Arab, the Levant, Eastern Mediterranean, and North Africa, is a must for anyone with a smidgen of interest in the culinary world.

Whatever the haters and antisemites are spouting at any given time, without doubt in my mind Israeli wine represents the beautiful Israel, with all its variety and contradictions, across the full spectrum. Certainly, wine is part of our narrative.

As Haran has taught me, tourism is vital for Israel,

GUY HARAN is a wine educator, broadcaster, author, and wine tourism expert.

COOKING CLASSES and the opportunity to participate and learn are always a popular and fun activity of the gourmet tours.

VINSPIRATION ALWAYS includes wineries of high quality and great beauty and authenticity in its tour programs.

and wine tourism is essential for wineries. He explained how it will help to advance Brand Israel... because export and wine tourism are two sides of the same coin. He believes tourism, both incoming and local, is the key to increasing sales, consumption, and marketing Israel as a quality wine-producing country.

Of course, Guy Haran and Vinspiration are ahead of the game and up for the task. They have a program offering a curated tour of Israel. They call it "Israel: Remember & Celebrate" and describe it as "A Journey of Memory, Renewal, and Hope." It is a journey "designed for leaders and communities seeking to reconnect with Israel through shared experience, taste, and meaning." The itinerary includes meeting chefs, artists, and social visionaries. The core is wine, meeting winemakers, and anything that may be classified as gourmet.

So in the meantime, Israelis are queuing up for Vinspiration tours abroad. The more venues that are added, the more food and wine lovers are flocking to subscribe. Vinspiration is also providing a basis and infrastructure for the return of tourism to Israel. In Vinspiration's words, "Let's craft your next journey of memory, renewal, and discovery. Whether you are planning a leadership mission, a community experience, or a meaningful return to Israel - we are here to bring your vision to life through taste, story, and connection."

All credit to Guy Haran and Vinspiration. Keep on-wards and upwards. Wine tourism is crucial, and your success is our success!

The writer is a wine trade veteran and winery insider turned wine writer, who has advanced Israeli wines over four decades. He is referred to as the English voice of Israeli wine. www.adammontefiore.com

