

FULL TO OVERFLOWING

There are hundreds of cellar doors within an hour's drive of Adelaide. Christine Salins raises a glass – and a sweat – on her mission to visit as many as possible during one long weekend.

This assignment sees me sipping, swirling and spitting my merry way through some of South Australia's finest wineries and has truly made me the envy of all my friends. Sure, it's a tough job, but someone has to do it.

According to the South Australian Tourism Commission, there are 200 cellar doors within an hour's drive of Adelaide's CBD. Just how many I can visit in one long weekend remains to be seen, but I'm up for the challenge. I'm going to tackle three of the state's 17 regions – McLaren Vale, Adelaide Hills and the Barossa – and I believe that having a tour guide is essential, if only to travel responsibly.

John Baldwin, a local tour operator and my chauffeur for the weekend, twirls his handlebar moustache while he steers me gently through the South Australian wine story in his 1962 Daimler limousine. It's a story of tradition and innovation, dogged determination and blessed luck.

The area's vineyards were established in the 1830s. Today, a third of Australia's winemakers are located in South Australia, the state producing 519 million litres of wine (43 per cent of the country's total) in 2009.

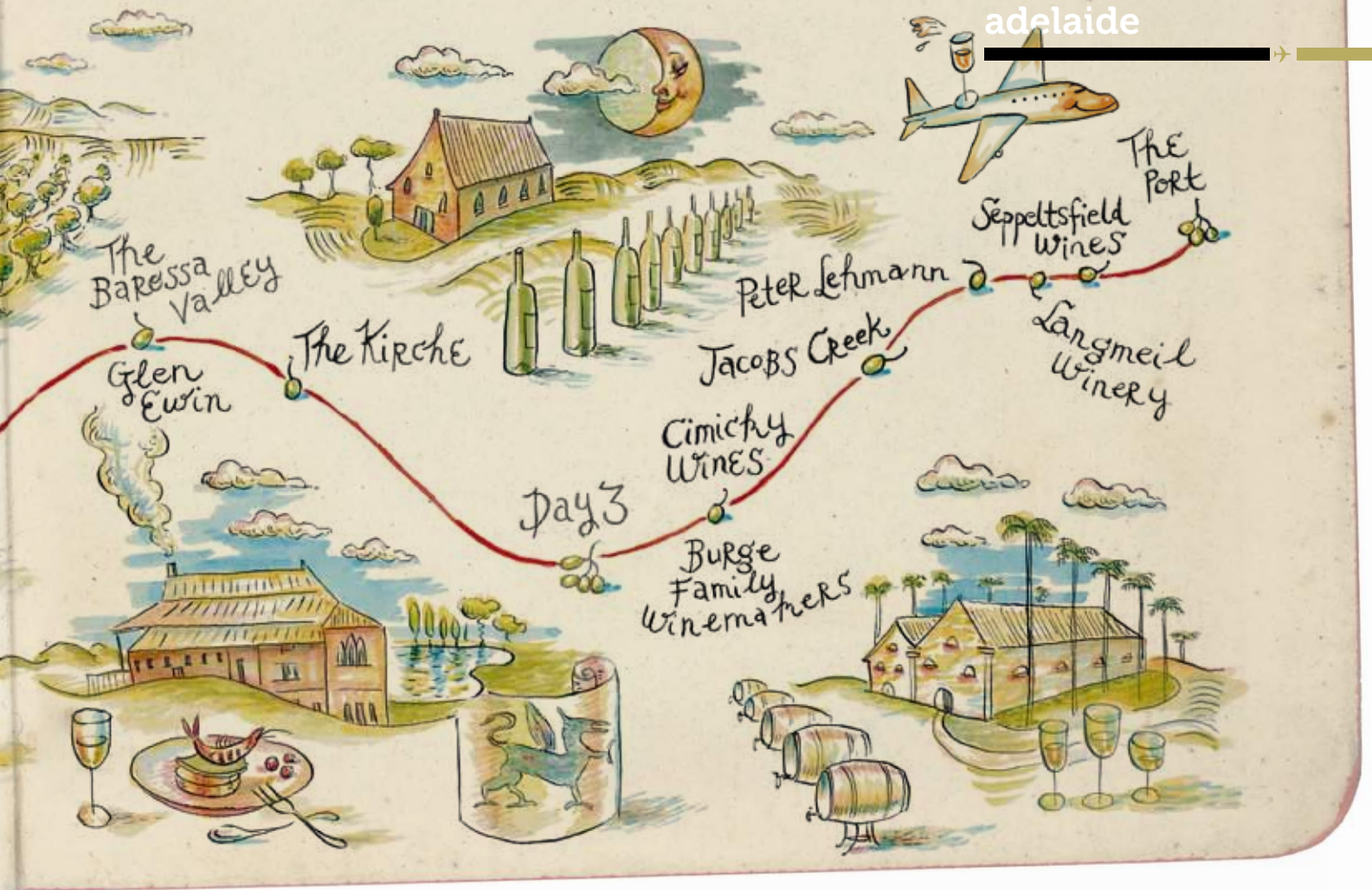
DAY 1: MCLAREN VALE

12:00

On the way from Adelaide airport to McLaren Vale, an hour's drive south, I learn the area has around 70 cellar doors, so I should be able to make a dent in my imposing list of 200. The landscape is a patchwork of vineyards surrounded by olive trees and rolling hills and the Mediterranean-like climate is ideal for growing shiraz, grenache and chardonnay.

13:30

I've only just started and already I'm behind. After a long lunch at award-winning Fino restaurant (in my defence, it does have



a great wine list that includes standouts from South Australia and Europe) I arrive at Primo Estate, a classy cellar door with contemporary decor, including floor-to-ceiling glass. The wine is unashamedly expensive but everything here screams quality, from the dense, rich reds they produce to the lovely big tasting glasses. I'm an admirer of Primo's flagship wine, Joseph Moda, and I also taste the Joseph Angel Gully Shiraz and the Nebbiolo. Owner and winemaker Joe Grilli makes his wine in the Italian amarone style, drying the grapes in the sun to achieve concentrated flavour before crushing them, which is why his wines are such a knockout with sweet tannins and intense fruit flavours.

15:45

One down, 199 to go. Pirramimma, owned by the Johnston family since 1892, is my next stop. The cellar door, which is in one of the original buildings, is rustic and homely.

Pirramimma is known for its petit verdot, which seduces me with its floral nose and sweet, spicy flavours. For a boutique winery there's a large range on offer, including six sparklings, several fortified wines and a gutsy grenache tannat shiraz.

16:30

The sun will soon be setting, so with only two cellar doors crossed off my list, I'm pleased that my next stop, Kay Brothers, is just a 10-minute drive from Pirramimma. Winemaker Colin Kay, the grandson of one of the founding partners, is proud of his 2006 Hillside Shiraz made from a vineyard planted in 1892. I hit the jackpot when Kay pours me a glass of his Rare Muscat. It is sticky and luscious and warms my throat.

17:30

I'm beat by the time I check into McLaren Vale Studio Apartments. Each apartment is named after a different McLaren Vale wine. ▷

Everything here screams quality, from the dense, rich reds to the lovely big tasting glasses.



I enter my apartment to find a jolly painting of magpies on the wall and a bottle of d'Arenberg's The Laughing Magpie Shiraz Viognier for me to enjoy. I've managed to cover only three cellar doors so far and I'm starting to think I'd need a year, not just a long weekend, to do the region justice.

DAY 2: ADELAIDE HILLS

09:15

The trees lining the roads are ablaze with autumn colours on my 45-minute drive north-east to the Adelaide Hills, one of the country's premium cool-climate wine regions, where chardonnay, pinot noir and sauvignon blanc reign supreme.

10:00

An old waterwheel still gently turns outside the cellar door at Petaluma's Bridgewater Mill restaurant. I kick off the day with a glass of 2007 Croser sparkling, which is one of my favourite bubblyies. Petaluma's chardonnay is also great and its gewürztraminer is a revelation with its musk aroma and peach notes.

11:00

I've been promised a sublime ChocoVino experience at Hahndorf Hill Winery and it lives up to the claim. Sauvignon blanc, chardonnay and shiraz are seamlessly

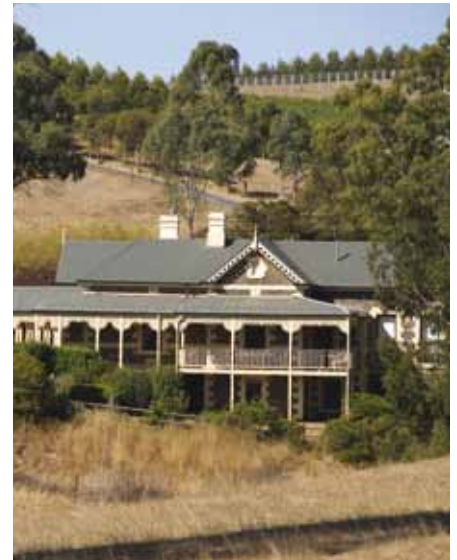
matched with chocolate by owners Larry Jacobs and Marc Dobson, who have sourced more than 40 chocolates from around the world to match with their fine wines. My favourite is the lemon and ginger dark Belgian chocolate that brings out the chardonnay's exquisite citrus notes.

12:00

An enthusiastic Ben Tolstoshev welcomes me to The Lane Vineyard, one of the country's most sophisticated wineries, which is owned by his mother and stepfather, Helen and John Edwards. They use an infra-red scanner to assess every grape to ensure its quality. I linger longer than I had planned as Tolstoshev wants me to try the oysters in their award-winning restaurant. They go beautifully with the crisp, zesty Gathering Sauvignon Blanc Semillon, but it's the subtly oaked chardonnay that takes my fancy. Tolstoshev reckons it's one of John's favourites too: "He says it's the duck's guts." I'm finding it difficult to tear myself away from this gorgeous spot, especially when Tolstoshev's enthusiasm is so infectious.

15:00

Now I really have to pick up the pace. After a quick lunch at Bistro 25 in Hahndorf I call into Nepenthe's cellar door, which is in an idyllic spot surrounded by stately gums.



Clockwise from top left: Imbibe the serenity at Bridgewater Mill; The chocolate and wine are fine at Hahndorf Hill; Feel at home at classy Lane Vineyard. Opposite, from left: Stock up on local wines at Glen Ewin Estate; Receive a royal reception at Cimicky Wines.



I opt for savagnin, a refreshing white that is light and easy-drinking and is about all I can manage at this point.

The biggest seller here is sauvignon blanc but I opt for savagnin, a refreshing white that is light and easy-drinking and is about all I can manage when, at this point, I'd rather be curling up for an afternoon nap.

16:00

Two friendly Irish wolfhounds greet me at Glen Ewin Estate, which produced jam for more than 100 years before the Wauchope family bought the property in 1991. Its new cellar door, The Gatehouse, stocks more than 80 wines from boutique wineries in the Adelaide Hills that don't have cellar doors. "Here you can try them all in one place, and we can dispatch them to anywhere in the world," says Bill Wauchope. Would I be cheating if I tried a whole lot in one hit?

17:00

I arrive in the Barossa within 40 minutes and look forward to sampling the local wines tomorrow. Tonight I'm staying at The Kirche, a former Lutheran church that owners Charlie Melton and Virginia Weckert have transformed into luxury accommodation neighbouring their cellar door. Weckert has cooked a splendid chicken stuffed with tarragon and leek, and Melton's grenache shiraz mourvedre blend, Nine Popes, is the perfect match with its hints of cinnamon and licorice.

DAY 3: THE BAROSSA

09:30

It's the final day of my assignment and I've covered just nine cellar doors out of a possible 200. Time to get cracking on my tour of the next region, the Barossa, where 20 per cent of all Australian wine is made. Shiraz from the Barossa Valley floor and riesling from the higher, cooler Eden Valley are the flagships, but the Barossa also produces fine semillon, chardonnay and grenache. Rick Burge, of Burge Family Winemakers, welcomes me with a glass of semillon, an exuberant wine that tastes just like fruit salad in a glass.

10:30

Cimicky Wines' cellar door looks like a chateau with vine-clad walls. I get a royal welcome from golden retrievers Dudley and Sam. Charles and Jennie Cimicky make only reds and their 2006 Shiraz took out four trophies, including Best Wine at the Barossa Wine Show a few years ago.

11:30

People come from all over the world to see the home of Jacob's Creek wines, so I decide to visit too. The creek itself is not as impressive as I'd hoped, but the visitor's centre is a standout in the Barossa, being ▶



I sample a glass of their Freedom Shiraz, a big, rich red that tastes like sunshine in a bottle.

contemporary and surrounded by glass. Often, visitors are surprised to learn that Jacob's Creek does not only premium labels but also some great boutique varieties, some of which are available only at the cellar door. I'm bowled over by the graciano, a Spanish red that is smart and vibrant.

13:30

After lunch at 1918 Bistro & Grill in Tanunda I'm off to Peter Lehmann Wines, which has one of the Barossa's busiest cellar doors. It's shoulder to shoulder as I line up to taste the cheeky new Barossa Blonde. The low-alcohol Princess Moscato is crisp and lively with a touch of sweetness.

14:00


Langmeil Winery claims to have the oldest shiraz vines in the world, dating back to 1843. The estate was a pit stop on the way to the coalmines in Kapunda in the mid-1800s and it retains many of its historical buildings, including the blacksmith's shop. I sample a glass of their Freedom Shiraz, a big, rich red that tastes like sunshine in a bottle. I'm flagging but I soldier on. So many cellar doors, so little time left.

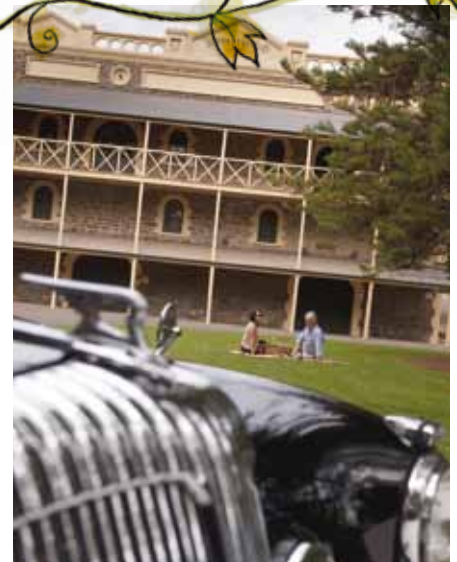
15:30

The road to Seppeltsfield Wines is lined with date palms, offering a grand entrance.

This is the only winery in the world where you can find a fortified wine from your birth year. Benno Seppelt laid down a barrel of tawny port in 1878 and said that no-one was to touch it for 100 years. The Para Vintage Tawny has been barrelled every year since. I'm invited into the Centenary Cellar where all the prized barrels are housed and it doesn't take long for me to locate the barrel from my birth year. Taking a sip delivers one heavenly mouthful – burnt toffee, raisin fruit and dark chocolate combined – that is as old as I am. I'm not sure if it's the excitement of tasting such a rare wine or the frightening realisation of how old I am, but it snaps me out of my postprandial stupor.

16:00

The Seppeltsfield tawny port is a high note on which to end this whirlwind tour. Though it's been exhilarating and exhausting, I've managed to visit just 15 out of 200 cellar doors. That said, it's been a valiant effort and I'm determined to come back and sip and swirl my way through the rest. To think that Adelaide folk have all of this within an hour's drive – they're a lucky lot, indeed. 



Clockwise from top left: Enjoy great food and wine at the Barossa's first bistro grill, 1918 Bistro & Grill; The owners of Langmeil Winery are proud to have the oldest shiraz vines in the world; Sip tawny port as old as you are at Seppeltsfield in the Barossa.

Getting there :: To book your Virgin Blue flight to Adelaide visit www.virginblue.com.au or call 13 67 89 (in Aus).