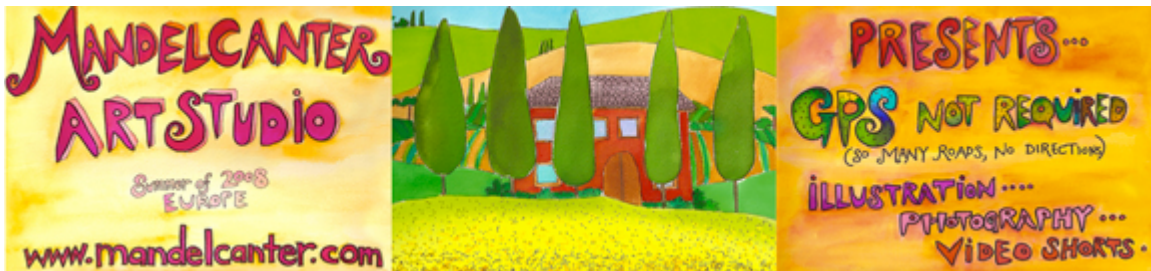


Mission Impossible

Free the Grapes!

No GPS required!



Jeff Canter-Writer

Suzy Canter-Photography and Illustrations

How to visit 6+ European ports of call and return home with 36+ bottles of wine.

I've often been able to bring back a few bottles of wine or cases from faraway places in my checked baggage/carry-ons without any hassles. That was until 9/11, and most recently additional surcharges for heavy/extra checked baggage. So here are some tips for any airline wine tasting/buying road trip. No amount of thought and discussion can cover every angle except one: Expect Breakage. Before you leave home (I know someone's thinking of Karl Malden holding an Amex card) or somewhere else and if your plans call for flying wine home. Think Bubble wrap and trash bags (less abrasive & staining to your clothing).

Now the Mission:

Day 1 Barcelona, Spain

Ahh Temprillo, Garnacha and something called tapas. A great melding of flavors.

Since this was to be a starting point we didn't pickup any wine yet, but we did pack some Malibu wine for the cruise. We left the port on [The Gem](#) with our sights set on Malta. I did some research and was hoping to go to [Marvsovin](#) and get the tour. Alas, tours were not available so we did the next best thing. Take a local bus, tour the old city of Medina, and stop when you see

vines. That worked great since we showed up at a winery called [Meridiana](#) just as the paying cruise ship customers were leaving. Funny thing is, we got to meet the owner and taste



wine. With the money not spent for the tour we bought 2 bottles Cab/Merlot blend (no one on the cruise/taste tour did). The owner even gave us a ride to the bus stop. Stopped in town and bought 2 more bottles (syrah) and then 2 more (Marvsovin syrah) in duty free. Back on board we were required to store the wine with the ship customs area. Good thing cause we'd drank some. 1 case down 5 more to go.

Day 2 Naples, Italy

A mad rush to catch the ferry to Capri since grottos were the first item on the agenda and finding wineries

the next. After a beautiful cruise around the island, we left the small harbor to go up to town via a mountain climb on the stairs from hell (95+ Degs). Should have taken the funicular but the queue was insanely long and time was running out. Saw plenty of small home



winegrowing vines on the hike but no wineries. After climbing and rehydration (6 euros for a coke come on!), we stopped at the local wine shop. 2 things Capri is known for – Lemoncello and White wine. Of course we needed to pick some up. Went back to the port of Naples and due to the heat plus the weight in my backpack (bottles of vino); we went back to the ship. No one stopped us, no one cared we had vino. Ah, the southern Italiano's couldn't be bothered with the trivia of duties or declarations (love it). Probably too busy with the 3 hour lunch break (love it). With the heat and the crazy drivers (ask me about the technique on crossing a large intersection in Naples). I'm short 4 bottles. That's no problem since we still have 4 more stops to make. Hmm, I'm sure to catch up.

Day 3 Rome

This is a cultural, nonstop, breakneck, sightseeing day. Not a winery in sight. With intense heat and massive amounts of walking all that can be found is GELATO, sweet glorious cream with intense flavor. I forgot the mission. Not a problem since tomorrow the fallback option is Tuscany. Now I'm 10 bottles short but I still have an ace in the hole to be revealed later (ok now-FRANCE).

Day 4 Livorno (Tuscany)



Today we explore in style. A rent a car. No bus, train, or Ferry. Just the open road and us. Its even waiting shipside, now off to get lost on the Tuscan wine roads. GPS is not required or is it? More about that later. I looked online to

find wineries close to the southern part of Livorno on the [Etruscan](#) coast wine road.



With the coast on my right, there were rolling hills of wheat, olive trees, and vines.

There were lots and lots of them. So finding a winery should be no problem.

Even online the info said just show up. But first find a nice medieval village and have an espresso so Suzy can draw.



She does a sketch a day along with lots of video and photo shoots. While sitting and waiting in the café I turn on the GPS, just to see if there are any POI's (points of

interest) nearby. Of course I had to bring my GPS since you know how famous (crazy) Italian engineering is. I search for a winery and bingo back on the mission track, only 15 meters to my right. Turns out that under the café is a shop with pourings of local Tuscan wines and olive oil samples (shout out to Joyce).

I let Suzette (working on my French as Suzy is now being called) know I'm on the wine trail and she should take her time drawing since the village of [Campiglia Marittima](#) has lots of detail.



Into the tasting room I go. I'm sampling some beautiful, fruitful, flavorful juice. Names so romantic and exotic. However, I still feel the need to taste the vino in a winery.

My host who is now my paisano (best friend) points me to [Petra](#) winery. Of course I leave with 2 bottles and now off to an unknown spot, sooooo I must use the GPS. The mission is defiantly on. The Tuscan countryside is just flowing in hues of unbelievable colors with scents of pleasure. I begin to understand the Tuscan psyche. One minor detail, okay two. First, the Italian lunch hour

is fast approaching. Secondo, Petra is an appointment only winery. Now I'm forced to use the Cellarmasters VP bag of tricks called Suzette, because NO is not an answer for her with the intercom of this opulent estate.



The gate opens and we are in. The secret Suzette reveals is: When someone answers the intercom to tell you that it's a private estate, you have to respond that you are there to

buy wine. We drive up the grand winding road to the tasting room. They were so nice and apologetic that we couldn't tour the facility but more than made up for it by pouring many fine samples of exquisite vino and olive oil tasting. We bought 3 bottles of red and 2 bottles of Olive oil. I'm finally catching up to the bottle



count. So on to the next winery & the GPS is required. But first it's lunchtime. We drive and stumble upon a hotel restaurant called [Fattoria Belvedere](#),
(photo by Jeff)

We order pruschutto et melon, a big, fat, red glass of wine the size of Texas, and a plate of pasta. I'm enjoy sweeping views of the valley below but it's hot like 95+degrees so as not to cook my precious cargo I leave the car running with the AC ON. It's a small price to pay. I've succumbed to the 8 euro/ 12 dollar a gallon price. After all, it's Tuscany so I'll overlook the pain of the pump.

Off to the next winery.



Now my 2 cents on GPS travel. It doesn't always give you the quickest route. It picked a backcountry road so that we got stuck behind tractors, motor homes, and trucks. We pass by an awesome medieval town called [Volterra](#). I make a note to return there someday. Now because of the long slow route from the GPS, it's a race not to the winery but to the cruise ship. I finally get on the autostrada and drive like a true Italiano, Californiano maniaco. We are way off and south of Firenze (Florence). The GPS reads 2 hours 10 mins to go. The boat leaves in 2 hours and 30 mins and I need gas. So much for seeing the leaning tower of Pisa. Oh and wait rush hour in Firenze is fast approaching. Panic is a real possibility except I'm driving a Toyota like it's the Ferrari I always wanted (imagine that). I can only say that the leaning tower of Pisa was straight from my perspective since driving at 150kph, it was but a blur. Suzette never saw a thing cause her eyes were closed the whole way. Now the port in Livorno is huge. I stop and get gas as only if by a miracle I ask the guy behind me for the directions to the ship. He is an agent for the port and is to check the final papers so the ship can leave. We have just 15min (nice to see he's on time). He takes us through a special gate and thank god the rent a car is dropped off shipside. We are the last 2 people on the ship and then BAM security needs to put our wine in the customs hold again. That's a good thing because we would absolutely have drunk it. New tally is 5 bottles and olive oil. Still short 5 bottles but France is next.

Day 5 Monaco/Nice, France

Not much here except café au lait, PASTRIES (yummy), and Huge Yachts.



We walk the old village and see the farmers market but no wine today. We are still traumatized from the day before and we go shipside early. Now I'm short 11 bottles except I have my ace in the hole.

Day 6-15 Barcelona, Spain/ Agen, France

End of the cruise. Now its time to drive up to the south of France, near Bordeaux. My mother's birthplace. My ace in the hole. We are off to see my Aunt and cousins. This is catch up time. But the weight of the baggage is starting to affect the MPG of the car. One side note on the drive up the Costa del Sol you must go to Figeres. Stop and see the [Dali Museum](#). I arrive at my cousins and am showered in hugs and kisses. Wine and champagne appear everywhere. I have been given a few bottles for my birthday.



The next few days go by like a time warp. We go to [Buzet](#).

They have a buy one case get one case free. The bottle count is going way up.

I stop at my grandmother's village of [Mezin](#) and visit the coop to pickup more wine and [Armagnac](#), a local specialty.



The village at one point was at the center for making corks and has a cork museum [Musee du Liege](#), which my cousin is the president. We get a private tour. Must be in the genes. I have save the best

surprise for last. I make a day of going to Pauillac to see the premier grand class wine (think top of the line NAPA). We get lost on the GPS due to the fact I mispronounce Pauillac and stop to have a local man spell it in the GPS – Pouillac (wrong). Wasted a lot of gas and time.

So we finally stumble back on course and into a glorious, prestigious Bordeaux chateau called [Château Prieuré-Lichine](#). As we walk to the tasting room I'm praying (Prieure) for please not another appointment only place. Out walks this dude with another couple and asks if we would like a tour. ABSOLUTLEY, I even get



to translate to Suzette. We enjoy this highlight and go for like 2 hours and then end up in the tasting room. We are styling. Pours are flowing. Laughter and good times ensue. Suzette is now a local.

We leave with 2 bottles of top shelf stuff.

As our trip is almost over I realize that the Easyjet flight to Paris is not going to let us travel with 36+ bottles at 150lbs plus our 4 pieces of luggage.

How to ship 36+ bottles. HELLO FEDEX.

With my generous airline discount I decide to bubble wrap/box 5 cases. I'll also ship a couple of suitcases (total of 3 pieces) with wine in them; we'll have more room to pickup Spanish wine. We are driving back to Barcelona; it's just a short stop in Toulouse for the wine drop off and then on our way. Even with my discount it was still too expensive \$300.00 but I let it go because FedEx will get it home (YA think So) NOT! It turns out that one small detail left out (to which I am painfully made aware of at a later date) is that a private party CAN Never ship wine internationally and/or even domestically (US). I go on my way to Barcelona happy knowing I shed the weight and the wines are going home. Please take the time to stop at [Carcassone](#) (a medieval castle and village that has a summer concert series- ZZtop anyone?). They also have great wines.

Also, check out [Girona, Spain](#).

A cool town where there is a beautiful church, a Jewish quarter and vibrant nightlife.



The legendary town Rabbi bequeathed his home to the city, which they turned into a really cool looking bar.



We arrive in Barcelona to take our flight via Paris. At the airport we get 2 bottles of wine (garnacha). We have a couple of days in Paris. We drink the Spanish wine. Go figure in Paris drinking Spanish wine. It must have been all the food, wine and oh ya PAIN, major Pain. I got an infected tooth and for 5 days I'm in agony of which wine and food seem to help. I get to NY and go for immediate Emergency Dental surgery of which the details are too painful to reminisce. I forget about my wine and FedEx.

Day 22 New York

I finally awake from the dental stupor and start to wonder where the heck is my wine.



I call FedEx, they call me. It's being held By BATF. What is going on? I've been advised that while there will be no charges filed (just kidding). There will also be no wine entering the US. FedEx assures me they'll handle it. The shipment goes back to Paris where it is put into French Customs Limbo. The NY Dds finally releases me to go back to Agoura Hills.

Day 26 Agoura

My wine is in the twilight zone and cannot be found. FedEx again assures me they'll handle it. I need to micro manage this. So, in the meantime I've called Wades Wines thinking they can help me. They Can't. An Internet search leads me to [Patrick](#) at Adventures in Wine. He is my savior. They work with FedEx and are importers who are located in the SF Bay area. He agrees to help me. I inventory all of my wine, pay a small fee and wait.

Day 30

FedEx calls. My wine is en-route. I'm excited but out of town, with only a teenage son home to sign for it. It'll be safe; he hasn't acquired the taste yet. Of course he's not home and yes they leave a we'll be back note with please call (it's the weekend). SOOOOOO close.

Day 32

I call the local FedEx office. Diane advises me that I need to pick up my wine since there is a problem, BREAKAGE! Oh nooooooooo. I go to the office and find I am short 7 bottles (Red wine from Buzet) plus the Petra olive oil and some Pate. The classic line of the day is from Diane "I think it wasn't packed properly". To which I reply "the shipment left the south of France, went to Paris, went to Memphis, went back to Paris, went back to Memphis and broke from Memphis to LAX or en route to Canoga Park. I think it was well packed and was mishandled. Please give me a claim form (which still won't cover the replacement). Even though the insurance will cover the loss, the replacement is impossible. "Yes Mr. Canter" Diane said "Your claim # is,

Please call The Memphis office at 800-go-fedex”.

Moral to this short story gone long.

Take your wine with you on the airplane; pay the extra airline/heavy baggage checked fee. When you arrive pay the customs duties (if req'd). Declaring the cost to US Customs is cheap, especially if you bring in under \$500.00. Just bring or buy bubble wrap/trash bags and extra suitcases with wheels. Costco suitcases are strong; hold 2-boxed cases of 6 bottles plus cloths and have a lifetime money back guarantee. It will still cost less, a lot less than FedEx (even with the employee discount). And maybe only a couple bottles will break. All my checked in (6+ bottles) were fine with 1 breakage (a bottle of flavored vinegar from Carcassone.

Total cases sent 6(36+ bottles) plus olive oil.

Total cases arrived intact 5+(30+ bottles) plus 1 olive oil.



Mission Possible more than 42 bottles BUT casualties/cost were high.

Until the next Mission Impossible.

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