

Press-Information

Wine and Viticulture in the Frankfurt Rhine-Main Region

Frankfurt (tcf). Few German cities are able to say that they dispose over their own vineyard. Frankfurt, however, is one of them. Thanks to the renowned “Lohrberg”, Frankfurters have a slice of the famous Rheingau wine-growing region on their very doorstep. The wines produced by the vineyards at “Hochheimer Stein”, “Hochheimer Hölle” and “Lohrberger Hang” are made from grapes cultivated by the City of Frankfurt’s time-honoured municipal vineyard. Frankfurt was presented with its own vineyard in 1803, thanks to Napoleon Bonaparte and his policies of secularisation. It was at this time that the City of Frankfurt took possession of the vineyards on the Lohrberg and in the Rheingau region, along with the associated processing facilities. For many years, the municipality managed the vineyard on its own. Then, in 1994, the city council decided to lease the estate to the Rupp family, themselves long-time wine-growers. Today, the estate is managed by Jürgen Rupp, a 10th-generation wine-maker who produces a variety of pleasant wines in the name of the City of Frankfurt. The wines can be found on offer at official functions, receptions and banquets hosted by city hall.

The municipal vineyards comprise a total of some 25 hectares. Most of this area is situated in the nearby Rheingau region, on the banks of the River Main near Hochheim. This excellent location yields grapes used to make Riesling, red and white Burgundy, Chardonnay and Cabernet Sauvignon. A very small part of the city’s wine-producing area is situated in Frankfurt on the slopes of the Lohrberg, part of the city district of Seckbach. Some 10,000 bottles of “Lohrberger” Riesling are produced from this harvest every year. The entire output amounts to approximately 200,000 bottles per annum, comprising 55 different varieties of red, white and sparkling wine.

The Lohrberg represents the easternmost part of the Rheingau’s wine-growing region; the grapes harvested from this location are pressed, bottled and stored in the municipal winery in Hochheim. The “Lohrberger” is available in three varieties: dry (“sec”), semi-dry (“demi-sec”) and as an extra-dry (“brut”) sparkling wine. This exceptional wine is available only at the winery’s official point-of-sale at the Römer, Frankfurt’s time-honoured city hall. The City of

Frankfurt is by far the largest consumer. However, more and more Frankfurt residents are also discovering these excellent wines for themselves. Commercial companies have found these wines to make excellent presents for business clients. And of course, no official reception or banquet for Frankfurt's guests of honour is complete without a drop or two of Frankfurt's very own vintage. Frankfurt wines are also available at various Römerberg restaurants as well as on board the river cruisers of the Primus Line.

The celebrated Rheingau wine-growing region is located between the cities of Wiesbaden and Lorch. The Rheingau plays a prominent role in Germany's wine-growing history and has gained much acclaim as the cradle of German wine culture. Viticultural tradition and modern technology, combined with excellent agricultural preconditions, ensure that Rheingau wines are of the highest quality. Over three-quarters of the harvest – some 78.3 percent to be exact – is used to make Riesling, followed by "Spätburgunder", a red burgundy, with 12.5 percent. Riesling is without a doubt Germany's most popular grape, alongside "Müller-Thurgau", a fairly light and sweet white wine. Riesling ripens rather late in the season and is thus very dependent on vineyard location. Rieslings are also known to have a very long storage life. They are pale in colour with nuances of green and gold; their aromas are diverse, offering subtleties of taste that include apple, grapefruit, peach, apricot, quince, pineapple, mango and herbs.

The Rheingau is also known as the place of origin for the "late vintage". True wine aficionados may be familiar with the curious old story about the messenger whose belated arrival caused the delay in the gathering of the grapes. By the time the courier carrying the Prince of Fulda's harvest order finally arrived in the Rheingau, the vintage of 1775 was almost raisin-dry. And thus, the first late harvest in the history of wine-making occurred quite unintentionally, yielding the "noble rot" that to this day enables Rheingau wine-makers to make a wine of extraordinary quality, bearing a most distinct aroma and taste.

The Rheingau offers numerous tourist attractions, which serve to acquaint visitors with the natural beauty of this region. One of the most popular of these is the "Rheingau Riesling Route", which meanders some 70 km from Lorch to Flörsheim. A further method of exploration is provided by the 120-km-long "Rheingau Riesling Trail". This hiking trail requires walkers and hikers to bring along appropriate footwear and a current hiking map.

The Rheingau is also known as the place of origin for Germany's first quality-tested wines. Over 100 years ago, a group of Rheingau wine-growers came together to introduce a special quality standard. Today, a brass sign signals a vineyard's affiliation with this elite establishment, entitled "Verband Deutscher Prädikatsweingüter" (VDP), or "Association of German Quality-Tested Vineyards". The VDP-Rheingau is Germany's oldest affiliation of renowned vineyards. The name guarantees for the quality of the wine, while also attesting to the associated vineyards' premier locations and cultivation of vines typical for the region. The 50 vineyards belonging to the VDP-Rheingau cultivate Riesling and Spätburgunder on some 1,000 hectares. Once a year, the association members organise the "Glorious Rheingau Wine Week", which this year will be held from 06 to 14 November 2004.

"Bergstrasse", the other famous regional wine-growing area, is about as far from Frankfurt as the Rheingau, albeit in a different direction. The geographical region east of the River Rhine between Heidelberg and Darmstadt is known to be a warm and temperate spot, perfect for wine-growing. Protected from the chilly easterly winds by Odenwald forest, Bergstrasse, which literally translates into "Mountain Road", is known to celebrate the return of spring while other German regions are still mired in the throes of winter. The florescent bloom of nature, featuring a blossoming abundance of almond, fig, apricot, peach and cherry trees, annually returns to Bensheim and its surrounding region as early as March. Bergstrasse, after all, is popularly known as "Germany's Springtime Garden". Hence, it is no surprise that the slow-ripening Riesling makes up over half of the total vineyard area on Hessian Bergstrasse. For over two decades, Hessian Bergstrasse had the distinction of being Germany's smallest wine-growing region, until – after Germany's reunification – Saxony and Saale-Unstrut joined the fray. Bergstrasse's wine-growing area, situated between Darmstadt and Heppenheim, was established in 1971, comprising a total of only 450 hectares.

Hessian Bergstrasse comprises two separate areas: The Starkenburg region begins south of Darmstadt with vineyards in Seeheim and Alsbach. It ends just south of Heppenheim, on the border between the federal states of Hesse and Baden. The lesser known part of Bergstrasse is the "Odenwald Wine Island", only some 50 hectares large, near Gross-Umstadt in the rural district of Darmstadt-Dieburg.

The “Bergstrasse Wine Route” takes visitors through the heart of the wine-growing area of Hessian Bergstrasse. The scenic landscape offers magnificent views of Odenwald forest and the Rhine Plain all the way to the Palatinate Forest. Numerous informative signs along the route provide detailed information on the vineyards and the wine-growing region as a whole. Every year, on May 1st, local wine-growers host the “Vineyard Walk”, during which participants are taken on a tour of the area, which features numerous wine stalls offering samples of the respective wineries.

There are countless reasons and occasions for celebrating along Bergstrasse. A colourful variety of castle and costume festivals, parish and town fairs and club celebrations ensure that life never gets boring. During the first week of September, the city of Bensheim hosts the “Bergstrasse Wine Festival”. The nine-day wine party features, among other things, dozens of wine stalls on the mediaeval marketplace, representing the region’s myriad vineyards. The “Odenwald Wine Festival” in Gross-Umstadt, held on the first weekend following the 15th of September, is an equally popular attraction. And then there’s the “Bergstrasse Wine Market”, a 10-day wine extravaganza performed in Heppenheim’s old town centre on the last weekend in June.

Only a proverbial stone’s throw from Frankfurt’s city districts one finds the renowned wine-growing region of Rhine-Hesse, Germany’s largest wine-growing district. Its name is somewhat misleading, as the region does not actually belong to the state of Hesse. In fact, the name refers to the region’s one-time affiliation with the Grand Duchy of Hesse-Darmstadt. Today, Rhine-Hesse is part of Rhineland-Palatinate. The ancient Romans busied themselves in the cultivation of wine throughout many parts of present-day Germany. The oldest known document verifying their wine-growing efforts refers to a vineyard in Rhine-Hesse. A full third of the area making up Rhine-Hesse is used to grow grapes, totalling some 26,000 hectares, which in turn represents a fourth of Germany’s total wine-growing area.

With an estimated 1,700 hours of sunshine per year, Rhine-Hesse ranks as one of Germany’s warmest regions. The many vine varieties found here – “Silvaner”, “Müller-Thurgau”, “Riesling”, “Bacchus”, “Huxel” and “Scheurebe” – are enough to excite even the most poised wine enthusiast. Rhine-Hesse is surely better known for its white wines, but the region also offers a few fine drops of “rouge”, including a light and fruity “Portuguese”, followed by the

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“Spätburgunder” and “Dornfelder” varieties. A good harvest for the approximately 6,000 Rhine-Hessian wine-growers yields over two million hectolitres of wine, a fair return from the over 120 million grape-vines cultivated by the Rhine-Hessian vineyards.

Contact:

Tourismus+Congress GmbH Frankfurt am Main, Kaiserstr. 56, 60329 Frankfurt, Germany, Phone: +49 (0)69 / 21 23 41 37, Fax +49 (0)69 / 21 23 07 76, eMail: kohr@tcf.frankfurt.de, Internet: www.frankfurt-tourismus.de.