



# Loire Valley

This 175-mile region is dotted with 300 châteaux — former playgrounds and bucolic havens of escape from Paris for French royalty. Now on the UNESCO World Heritage List, the Loire Valley boasts the country's longest river (the eponymous Loire river, which has a moderating effect on the terroir), the cradle of the French language and a site of world-class winemaking dating back to Roman times.

Current statistics cite 3,700 winegrowers and 57,400 hectares of vineyards, with nearly 30% farmed either sustainably or organically. The Loire often lurks in the shadows of its showier cousins Burgundy and Bordeaux, but that can be welcome news for oenophiles who prefer varietally bottled offerings to blends, comprised of grapes whose aromas, flavors and crisp acidity shine through and pair effortlessly at the table.

"Chenin blanc is extremely aromatic with notes of orchard fruits and honeysuckle, nice structure and — depending on the style — can have a luxuriously silky mouthfeel," says Rebecca Carey, regional food and beverage director for international hospitality company Lore Group in Washington, D.C. Look to appellations including Anjou, Saumur and Vouvray for high-quality chenin, but also seek out melon de bourgogne and sauvignon blanc, especially mineral-driven versions from Sancerre.

On the red side, cabernet franc (locally called Breton) is grown mainly in Anjou-Saumur and Touraine — most famously in the village of Chinon. Youthful styles are light, refreshing and juicy, with aromas of cherries, raspberries and violets that open up nicely with a slight chill and pair well with barbecue, while more mature offerings are bigger, bolder and more complex.

The Loire is also France's number-one producer for AOP sparkling wines outside Champagne: Crémant de Loire is the region's traditional method answer to Champagne. Cabernet franc-based rosé tends to have higher acidity, more restrained fruit and lower alcohol than their Provençal counterparts, which make them a fun find for rosé-all-day drinkers.

"The winemakers here are some of the most humble in France, and the price tags reflect that," Carey says. "It allows the consumer to have great products at great prices."

## Loire Valley Bottles to try:

**2020 Le Charmel Loire Rosé (\$12.99):** Bright, crisp and fresh with hints of fresh strawberries and white peaches.

**2016 Domaine Xavier & Agnes Amirault Le Fondis (\$45.99):** A 100% full-bodied cabernet franc with mature red fruit, a smooth and elegant palate and lengthy finish.

**NV Gratién & Meyer Crémant de Loire Brut Rosé (\$16):** Red berries, mouthwatering acidity and a creamy fine mousse.

**2020 J. de Villebois Sancerre (\$37):** A lively and herbaceous sauvignon blanc with minerality and a clean finish.

