

BOOK AND FILM REVIEW

Ellen Wallace: *Wine Hiking Switzerland: Explore the Landscape of Swiss Wines*

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Switzerland has been a tourist destination since the 18th century and is famous around the world for its stunning landscapes—mountains, valleys, lakes and rivers, its public transport system, and its products, including cheese and watches.

In sharp contrast, the wines produced in Switzerland are hardly known outside of the country. Due to its limited production from 14,628 hectares of vineyards (FOAG, 2022), and comparatively high production costs (and hence prices), little more than 1% of production is exported. As Masset and Weisskopf (2019) have shown, Switzerland is a highly localized market where wine is produced and consumed locally. So, there is no better way to learn about Swiss wines than to travel to Switzerland and taste its wines on the spot. Ellen Wallace has now written a book that combines hiking in Switzerland as a tourist activity with visits to some of the best wineries in the country.

Wallace is an American wine and travel writer, as well as a wine judge, who has been living in Switzerland and learning about Swiss wines for decades, leading to her first book on this topic in 2014, *Vineglorious! Switzerland's Wondrous World of Wines*. She recently became a member of the *Mémoire des Vins Suisses*,¹ an association of highly regarded wine writers, wine producers, sommeliers, and other experts in Switzerland. The association's aim is to show the high quality of Swiss wines by storing wines from its members for aging and presenting these aged wines at public tastings.

Wallace wrote *Wine Hiking Switzerland* in her native English, making it destined for an international, English-speaking readership, both at home and abroad. The book has been translated into German and French, both national languages of Switzerland. The book's publisher, Helvetiq, started in 2008 with its successful Swiss citizenship test quiz and later published its Beer Hiking series, for example, *Beer Hiking New England*. Applying the concept of "hiking to a production plant,

¹See www.memoire.wine

meeting the producer and enjoying the product” to wine led to *Wine Hiking Switzerland*, the first book in this series. *Wine Hiking Oregon* is scheduled for release in May 2023.

The first part of the book explains how it can be used to embark on one of the 50 hikes suggested by Wallace and provides useful links and information about hiking in Switzerland, including equipment, weather forecasts, official maps, and information about public transport. Also included, of course, is general information about wine and particularly Swiss wine culture, how to taste and describe wine, and how to read a Swiss wine label. Most of this is addressed to consumers with limited wine knowledge and is consistent with Wallace’s aim to “encourage people who don’t normally read about wine to better understand that it’s not just a drink, but the point where the land and its bounty, plus people and history come together—culture in its richest sense,” as she stated in an interview. It is helpful that the publisher offers a free downloadable GPX file on its home page for each route described. The file can be connected to a smartphone app, so the user can rely on the route displayed on the map app, instead of reading the very detailed description of each route in the book.

In the main part of the book, Wallace describes “one winery, one wine, one hike,” that is, one wine for each of the 50 different wineries and the hike that leads to the winery. She chose “artisanal wineries,” because this is where nature—with its vineyards, mountains, lakes, rivers, and the work of the vigneron—are all intertwined according to Wallace. Some of the chosen wineries are among the best producers in Switzerland, and many of them are members of the *Mémoire des Vins Suisses*.

The featured wineries are located in the countryside and in towns (or their suburbs), such as Basel, Sion, Lausanne, and Geneva, providing a variety of lengths of hikes (6.8 km to 22.6 km, most are around 10–13 km), difficulty (easy, moderate, or difficult), and scenery. Most of the wineries are located in the cantons of Valais, Vaud, Geneva, and Ticino, where 75% of the Swiss vineyard area is found (FOAG, 2022). However, there are hardly any wineries featured in Neuchâtel or Schaffhausen, although *Pinot Noir* is widely planted there. Wallace seeks to present the great diversity of grape varieties grown in Switzerland. Hence, her choice of wines includes many indigenous varieties, such as *Cornalin*, *Humagne Rouge*, and others in the canton of Valais, and *Räuschling* in the canton of Zürich.

The author designed the hikes using stops of the exceptional public transport system as starting and ending points, and including official hiking trails. The suggested path of each hike is accurately explained and introduced with information about the duration and interesting sights along the way, with charts profiling the altitude of each hike. Throughout, the text is illustrated with simple drawings, as well as photos of villages, vineyards, and landscapes.

Wine Hiking Switzerland is a personal and informative book by Wallace, and in the final part, she shares her five most loved wineries and hikes, providing statistics about her hikes (and even mentioning her physiotherapist, who nursed her tendonitis while she was writing the book). This is a practical guide to discovering Swiss wines. It reflects the diverse landscape of Swiss wines and helps appreciate the fragmented Swiss industry. Supplementing other recently published books about Swiss wines, such as Thomas (2021) and Vaterlaus (2021), *Wine Hiking Switzerland* adds the

aspect of outdoor recreation and leisure. The book indeed provides “the most active way to discover Swiss wines,” as a subtitle notes.

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