



GERMANY

# Germany's Wine Romance

By Jeerawan Duangnam



When I was travelling in Germany, I wasn't surprised to see fields of barley running endlessly along the road; everybody knows that Germany is labelled as a beer country. Along the way, I soon learnt that not only is beer the staple brew that allures Germany's drinking scene but also their premium wines, especially from the southwestern parts.

Germany's romance with wine had stirred-up my curiosity and I soon found myself in a tour group travelling the wine route from Baden-Baden to Rhineland-Palatinate. For a wine beginner like me, there were so many things to learn and master and fortunately, there were plenty of vineyards and wine cellars along the way to help me practice.

Gazing at the slopes of green vineyards, I was drinking glass after glass of fine wine and having conversations with group members about the variety of tastes lingering on my palate. I started to feel like a character out of the movie, *Sideways* except we were not arguing about Pinot or Cabernet preferences; we were discussing (and tasting) the 'harmony' of the wine: red, white, rose and eiswein (ice wine) from the different vineyards.

My first stop in Baden-Wurttemberg is Germany's oldest viniculture school - Staatsweingut Weinsberg. The

school's teacher, Rolf Hauser explains to us what their students learn about wine. "This school not only teaches the art of making wine but also experimenting in new wine related products," he says. "After graduating, students normally work in a wine company or pursue their study at a sommelier school," he added. Hauser then presents us with the school's new wine product called, "Looping". A glass of Looping looks like any ordinary red wine but it is much deeper in colour. Rocking my perception that wine is only a classic drink, Looping is known as a wine cocktail or berry cocktail and is sweet, with a hint of black currant flavours. Though it only contains six percent alcohol, which is pretty minor compared to a red, you will soon find yourself

*Opening spread: The Lichteneck Castle in Huber's vineyard. Opposite page: Classic German's old house can be seen everywhere. This page: glasses of Looping wine cocktails.*





falling off your chair - especially if you drink it on a hot summers day with a group of red-toothed friends. Our tour group was next lead to witness how the wine was produced. The giant machine in the middle of the hall reminded me of what inside Nasa's Assembly Building may look like. The empty, shiny stainless-steel machines were sitting there waiting for the harvest season in autumn, where 300,000 bottles will be produced per annum.

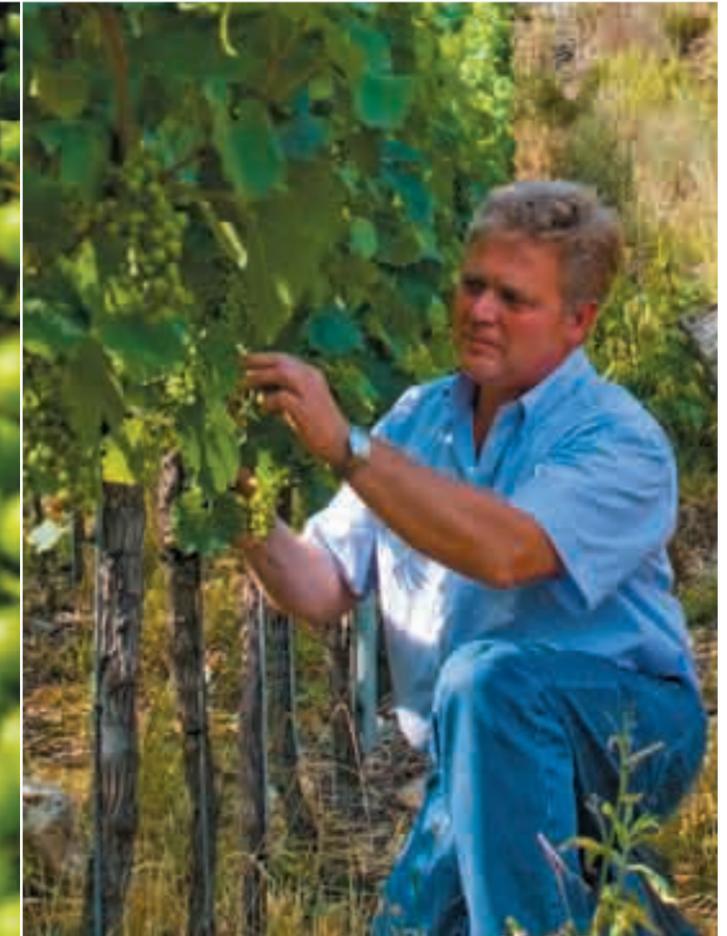
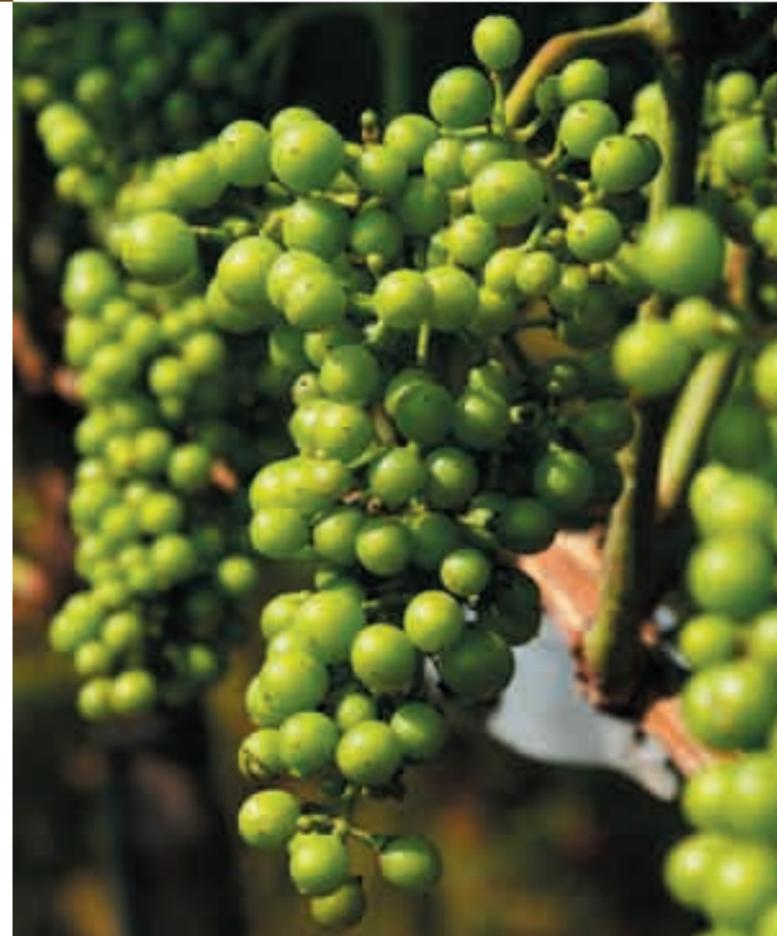
In terms of production numbers, one of Germany's leading wine cooperatives, **Grantschen**, make a whopping 1.7 millions litres per annum. Grantschen has around 200 members, comprising of small vineyards that produce quality grapes. Grantschen produce the wines from these grapes, package and distribute them to the various restaurants and wine retailers around the region. On the second floor of the Grantschen building, there was an inviting restaurant where we all had dinner with the Secretary of the State for the Economic Affairs Ministry, Richard Drautz, who kindly brought bottles of wine from **Drautz-Able** for some further wine tasting - I happily accepted.

The following day, it was time to hit the vineyard and see what all the grape fuss was about. Our coach drove us over hill after hill and we eventually went through the famous, Black Forest Malterdingen, which is paralleled between France's Strasbourg and Switzerland's Basel. We stopped at Cisterciensan, a small village that has been cultivating Pinot Noir for more than 700 years. In the

**The steepness of area provides intense sunshine and maximises the sun's reflection. Wine from this friendly region, tastes deliciously warm, deep, fruity, soft and full-bodied.**

*This page: The barrels line-up to be bottled. The opposite page: The Baden's pride in clockwise; oak barrel at Huber's, the wine princess demonstrated the way to enjoy an aroma from a glass of wine, Mr Huber checked the grapes that await to be harvested and a close up of baby Pinot Noir grapes.*

beginning, Cisterciensan monks brought the Pinot Noir making tradition from Burgundy to the region. The large Cistercienser monastery, where the monks managed their vineyard work, is about eight kilometres out of the village. Today, the vineyards are still there, under the name of **Bernhard Huber's Vineyards**. Owner, Bernard Huber, walked with us to Schlossberg, to show us the castle ruins of Lichteneck laid out on the top of the hill. On the slopes, bulging grapes soak up the sun until August-September when they are harvested and pressed by the wine-growers.





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*This page: Mr Renzelmann on his wagon presenting his green masterpiece. The opposite page: clockwise, the right temperature and lighting that makes wine taste perfectly, Mr Wolfgang Hella and his property.*

The steepness of area provides intense sunshine and maximises the sun's reflection. Wine from this friendly region, tastes deliciously warm, deep, fruity, soft and full-bodied. So far I am truly impressed, it must be the combination of nature, culture and fine wine that makes this Baden-Baden wine route so charming.

I was introduced to Baden's Wine Princess (they also have Wine Queens), Corina Benz, who is much like a beauty queen except they are experts in wine. The duties that Benz is required to do during her year is to meet people and introduce the wine of Baden. Benz told us that there were about 30,000 wine families in the Baden Region and these small vineyards were like the little puzzles that completed the big picture of Baden. After sampling

a few glasses of wine from Bernhard Huber's Vineyards, Dr Heger and Freiherr von Gleichenstein wineries, Huber reminds us to grab a jacket because the temperature in the cellar was 14°C - a perfect temperature for fermentation. He walked us through the production rooms where half of the wine is prepared in steel tanks and the other half was kept in oak barrels. Huber says the fine notes and aroma of the wine comes from, "when wood marries wine."

So far, I had been lucky - the wine had not yet given me a hangover, especially after I lost count on how many wines I had sampled. Before leaving the Black Forest for the vineyards on the Rhine, we dropped in at the Hex vom Dasenstein wine cellar for some wine shopping. The shop was a wine lover's paradise, wines of all colours from their own harvest and curiously, there was even sexy lingerie for sale. If you have more time, you can buy a bottle of wine and drink it on the terrace on the second floor of the store and enjoy the picturesque views of the mountains. On a sunny day, ask the staff to point out the Dasenstein rock formation where the 'witch of Dasenstein' (Hex vom Dasenstein) lived a reclusive life as an outcast.

My wine journey on the Rhine continued to Rhineland-Palatinate where we met Sylvia Benzinger, Germany's Wine Queen of 2005-2006. The Wine Queen, travels the world to showcase Germany's wines and we were honoured to meet her for a private sampling of 2006 J!. This wine was a Riesling, by young wine maker, Julia Benzinger. For the girl in me, it was love at the first sight as soon as I



saw the bottle - a big black label with a neon pink J!. The label was clearly evident of the shifting trends in wine - appealing to a younger generation.

Back in the coach we take a 20-minute drive to Bad Dürkheim, where Dirk Renzelmann owns vineyards and a restaurant. To my delight, he kicks off his tour by getting behind the wheel of a tractor, towing us behind in a covered wagon across the plantation. We taste his Zumstein wines and test the wine terms we had learnt on each other - I casually throw in "the church window" or "the girl legs" (the clarity and colour of the traces of wine on the glass after you swirl it).

We then reached Ahr Valley, the most beautiful district on the Rhine. The picture perfect mountains were riddled with sloped vineyards, looking as though the mountains had dreadlocks. We get to our last stop at Wolfgang Hella's house, a wine-maker from Mayschoss. The grapes here are grown in soil renowned for its fertility and he produces bottles of Deutzerhof wine.

Accompanied with tasty slices of bread, we all raised our wine glasses and made a toast using the German expression, "zum wohl" (to your health). I have learnt many terms and expressions on my journey and I have especially come to like, "Rain grow grass but wine grows the conversation." This expression holds a lot of truth, looking at all the visitors around me, it was a combination of German, Thai, Austrian, British and Indian; all from different cultures and all interacting with each other on the one thing they all had in common, the love of wine. 🍷



### How to Get There

Exploring the wine region in Germany has never been this easy. LTU International Airlines ([www.ltu.com](http://www.ltu.com)) operates eight flights per week from Bangkok to Germany and is scheduled to increase to 15 flights per week in November. The airlines have been awarded as the Best German Airline in the Aero International Worldwide Security Ranking, and provide a unique travel experience - especially when flying in Business Class. LTU provide the business class traveller with extra services such as; separate check-in and a business lounge, a five-course menu on board and luxurious and adjustable leather seats with a footrest. It is all the extras that LTU provide that make this a comfortable long haul journey.



### l+t's wine recommendations

#### Staatsweingut Weinsberg

[www.lvwo-weinberg.de](http://www.lvwo-weinberg.de)

Looping- a wine cocktails with a kiss of blackcurrant.

#### Grantschen

([www.grantschen.de](http://www.grantschen.de))

Grandor Rotwein - a premium wine from the Grantschen outlet.

#### Drautz-Able

([www.wein.com](http://www.wein.com))

#### Huber

2005er Chardonnay - It's good with Asian dishes, especially Thai food.

2006er Muskatteller Kabinett - Fruity flavour with only eight percent alcohol.

#### Dr Heger

2005 Heger - It's an aperitif for a pre-dinner drink or match it with a fish dish.

2003 Ihringer Winklergerg - It's a Pinot Noir grape with an oak barrel note.

#### Freiherr von Gleichenstein

2005 Grauer Burgunder- A dry wine, leaving oak aromas on the palate. Good with white meat, fish and spicy foods.

#### Hex vom Dasebstein

Baden 2005 Amour - Wine for the sweet tooth.

#### Benzinger

2006 J! Riesling - a very true Riesling taste with a gorgeous aroma of exotic fruits.

2005 Geisskopf Grauer Burgunder - The wine matured for 6 months in oak barrels and is very concentrated in taste and aroma.

2004 Cabernet Merlot - A blend of three varieties, Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc and Merlot and goes well with spicy food.