

ORANGE WINES

ElMundo de los Vinos Naranja / The World of the Orange wines / Il Mondo dei Vini Orange



Slovenian wine tour

4 June, 2019

What if one day we would want to go on a wine tour through a European country that was small both in size and in wine production? A place that was yet-to-be-discovered, but which at the same time excellent wines were elaborated? A good choice for this would be **Slovenia**.

The first thing would be to choose our destination airport. Another good thing about **Venice** is its airport, that for such a small town is served by a large number of airlines that come from almost anywhere in the world. Once there, the only thing left to do is rent a car and go to neighboring Slovenia. Our destination is just an hour and a half from the airport, following the A4 motorway in the direction of **Trieste**. Other arrival possibilities are the airport of Trieste or the farthest one of **Ljubljana**, although Venice is the one that enjoys better connections (and better prices as well).

During our trip we will spend a few days in one of the four wine regions of this small country with just over two million inhabitants sharing borders with **Austria, Italy, Hungary** and **Croatia**. Though it is not widely known, Slovenia has a great wine tradition with a number of wineries exporting their wines all over the world.

Primorska is the easternmost Denomination of Origin and it is divided into four areas: **Vipavska Dolina** (Vipava river valley), **Kras, Slovenska Istra** and **Goriška Brda**. It is the latter one where we will enjoy its wines and people. The center of this area is **Nova Gorica**, a city that on the map looks more like a neighborhood of the Italian **Gorizia**, since between them there is no division, with the Italian part being the largest. You can go changing countries from one street to the next one without even realizing it.

For our stay, we will choose three wineries that also have a bed and breakfast, which will make moving around the area much easier. An area that occupies just 20 square kilometers and where the longest travel distance for us will be around 10 kilometers.

Exiting the highway in **Villesse**, the evening falls over the horizon. Three kilometers after crossing the geographical border between Italy and Slovenia, there is only one small abandoned building that once served as a border post. There we find **Kozana**, which more than a village, is a small group of houses surrounded by vineyards. The road crosses vineyards where we see different ways of working the vines: trellis, simple guyot, double guyot... Passing a gas station (it should be noted that whenever we need to refuel, it is better to do it in Slovenia and not in Italy, where gasoline is of average about 30 cents per liter more expensive) we have the detour that takes us to **Guest House Kabaj Morel**, owned by **Katja Kabaj** and **Jean Michel Morel**. Married to Katja many years ago, Jean Michel is one of those extremely charismatic French winemakers whose wine origins we have to look for in **Bordeaux** and **Languedoc Roussillon**. After their marriage, they decided to take care of the cellar of her family and then they added the bed and breakfast. Besides wine, they also make their own prosciutto. Jean is one of the few winemakers in Slovenia who uses the **Kartuli** method to make one of his wines. This method involves burying large terracotta amphorae, which Jean brought from **Georgia**, to age the wine. In them he elaborates a blend of **Malvasia**, **Rebula** and **Sauvignon**. Once deposited into the amphora along with the skins, the must rests until the next vintage is ready to begin the same process. Then Jean empties the amphorae and passes the wine to oak barrels, where it remains other year. After bottling, the wine ages another year before going on the market.

Jean works mostly with white varieties that he macerates on the skins: **Pinot Bianco**, **Pinot Grigio**, Rebula, **Chardonnay**, **Sauvignon**, **Friulano** and Malvasia. The **Merlot** is the red that Jean elaborates the most, and he also makes a few bottles of a pretty good **Pinot Noir**.

The village is very quiet, without sounds other than those of nature, and the house is fully surrounded by vineyards that you can see from your window. Sleeping here is very pleasant and the copious breakfasts Katja prepares for you make you get ready to enjoy the new day.

Jean is an excellent host and always delights visitors with a glass of wine in their hands, and Katja shows off her hospitality and kindness at the slightest opportunity. And the best thing is that in order not to have to move after visiting the winery, we can eat in their restaurant where they also offer their wines by the glass.

In the afternoon, after having rested the meal and planned our next few days, we will make a small ride of four kilometers. Being winter, the sun is slowly hiding behind a small hill partially covered by broken clouds on a February afternoon. **Medana** is a town located in a place destined to vineyards and the elaboration of great wines. Behind them, less than an hour away, they have the protection of the **Pre-Julian Alps** that prevents the cold north currents from reaching here. In front, less than 25 kilometers away, is the **Adriatic Sea**, which offers its sea breeze. And occasionally, the **Burja** (**Bora** for their Italian neighbors), a wind that comes from the northeast that blows hard (in many occasions with gusts exceeding 200 km/h) that keeps humidity away from the vineyards. The other important characteristic of this area is the soil. Vineyards settle on marl and sandstone originated in the Eocene rich in marine sediments. His name is **Opoka** (**Ponca** in Italian, **Flysch** in Friulano), and we can find many labels of the wines of the area that include both its name and its style.

Medana is also one of the main villages in Slovenia for the production of wine. In 1787, during the reign of **Maria Theresa, Archduchess of Austria and Queen of Hungary and Bohemia, Empress** and wife of the **Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire Francis I**, a classification was created to establish the best places for winemaking. In a range from I to VIII, Medana was classified as I, equivalent to a Grand Cru.

It is in this village located next to the Italian border where we will find our next accommodation: **Klinec Inn**: cellar, bed and breakfast and restaurant, all in one. The first thing we will do is go to the terrace, because though it's winter, the afternoon is nice and the sunset well deserves it. The day has been sunny and warm, unlike the previous day when it snowed and rained, so being on the

terrace is a pleasure that we can afford. At our table, a glass of **Rebula 2014** from **Klinec**, a great white wine macerated on the skins, and the remains of a plate of prosciutto (also homemade) and cheese. In the restaurant of Klinec Inn, the family of **Simona** and **Aleks Klinec** continues its celebration, which I guess has started before lunch and will continue well past midnight. Medana does not even reach a hundred houses and already has a dozen wineries inside the city limits.

Our glass of Rebula 2014 is a wonderful example of the wines we find in both Goriška Brda as in Klinec. For the most part, about 75%, are white wines made with local varieties Rebula (**Ribolla Gialla**) and Friulano, and then Pinot Grigio, Pinot Bianco, Malvasia, Chardonnay and Sauvignon of the foreign varieties. Many producers use maceration on the skins in the vinification of their wines, because traditionally it was the way families had to preserve their wines for consumption. When Slovenia was part of the former **Republic of Yugoslavia**, the means to acquire chemical products to protect wines and vineyards were scarce, so the development of organic and natural wines was the norm. And this is still the case today, with wines whose period of contact with the skins extends from a few days for varieties such as Pinot Grigio until two or three months of the Rebula, a variety whose thickness is ideal for long macerations.

The wines elaborated with red varieties are almost always single varietal Merlot. Occasionally we find some **Cabernet Sauvignon** and the no longer common **Cabernet Franc**, but the normal thing is that these varieties only participate in some other wine in small percentages. The background of Aleks' wine labels shows the document of the aforementioned wine classification.

The winery well deserves the visit and tasting of their wines. So elegant and beautifully crafted wines that will delight those who enjoy them.

Here at Klinec Inn we will stay a couple of days, since the next two wineries we will visit are just within walking distance.

After a fantastic breakfast at the Klinec's and having recovered our strength (well, tasting wine does not finishes our energy, but you know what I mean),

it is a good time to take a short walk through Medana. Of course, we must be careful not to leave the town, which is not too big and before you know it, it is well behind you. Then, we will head south, where 600 meters past our accommodation, on the road that leads to **Cegla** in Italy, there is a sign indicating that we are in another **town**, Ceglo (called almost like its neighbor), although it is more a thing of public administration than of physical limits, since they are not old-style towns. Actually, both Medana and Ceglo belong administratively to a larger town: **Dobrovo V Brdih**.

Our first destination today is **Movia Wines**. This is the realm of who probably is the country's most media recognized winemaker: **Aleš Kristančič**, at the helm of a large family-owned winery since 1820 and dedicated to making out-of-the-ordinary wines. Together with his wife **Vesna**, Aleš is one of the winemakers who make more bottles and labels in the country, and he is especially known, in my opinion, for three of its wines, two of them sparkling: Rebula-based **Puro**, and Pinot-Noir-based **Puro Rosé**. Both are marketed without disgorging because, according to Aleš, in this way the wine can live up to 100 years. The third wine is **Lunar**, a very special Orange wine made with Rebula and/or Chardonnay, depending on the vintages, which will be macerated on the skins for about eight months and bottled without filtering or decanting. The wine is cloudy, which is what Aleš is looking for. Both their website and others sites offer videos of how to decant Lunar and how to do to test decanting half the bottle and leaving the other half with the sediments to see the differences between them. It is highly recommended because it gives the feeling of trying two different wines. And we cannot forget its spectacular Rebula, but I said that I would only mention three wines...

In the same cellar we can have lunch in its restaurant accompanied by his wines. The food is very well prepared. And of course, the vineyard views from the terrace are spectacular and also very funny, since Movia vineyards are divided between Goriška Brda and the **Collio** italiano.

Another option to lunch or dinner is to go back to Medana, where we can find restaurant **Belica**, a good place to enjoy local food and local wines. This will allow us to do a siesta before our second visit of the day.

After lunch, either in Movia or in Belica, we will walk along the same road barely 100 meters to find opposite Movia another of the big Slovenian wineries. **Marjan Simčič** is one of those great winemakers who take full advantage of his vineyards. Vineyards that, like those of Movia, are spread between Italy and Slovenia. From the terrace of his winery, he tells us about a hut in his vineyard just fifty meters away, which is located in Italian territory. Marjan works the Rebula like nobody else and his Chardonnay is also something serious. Of its red wines, especially Merlot and Pinot Noir stand out. All of them, the ones we have tasted from the 2014 vintage, are very elegant, though it is a vintage that due to bad weather during harvest season does not have a good reputation. Even so, the wines of that year are great and have won several awards and mentions. The visit is very worthwhile since Marjan's style is very personal, both in his wines and when guiding the visit through the winery. Both he and his wife Valerija are outstanding hosts that are really nice to meet, I must say.

After spending a more than pleasant time with Marjan, it is a good moment to call it a day and carefully plan the next one. Visiting these two wineries in one day gives us the opportunity to taste many wines, so we must be careful and above all moderate; we have a long journey ahead. Luckily, it is not necessary to travel much, since our next Destination is close.

The last stop and inn will be in a town about 10 kilometers far from Ceglo. In **Kojsko** we will find our final destination on this wine trip. Of all the winemakers we have visited so far, **Janko Štekar** is the most special one. He is a natural winemaker and he also owns along with wife Tamara a bed and breakfast. They elaborate their own prosciutto and oil, like many of his neighbors. Janko's production is around 10,000 bottles a year coming from vineyards in front of his house. It is an area that requires a lot of work, with a ravine shape that in the past allowed the erosion by the rains to cause a lot of damage to the soil, with a loss of almost 15 centimeters per year. For that reason, Janko always leaves a green cover in his vineyards serving as protection. He works naturally, like many Goriška Brda producers, because that was how things were always done at home. Janko does not use oak but chestnut and acacia barrels. He is also man of much conversation. He sits with

you during breakfast while he explains you about the origins of his country and his family. **Tamara**, Janko's wife, is also an exceptional hostess.

We are in an area that has traditionally been changing hands depending on who won the wars. Austro-Hungarian Empire, Italy, Yugoslavia and finally Slovenia since the late 90s of the last century. It was a period in which borders were moving from one place to another. Janko tells that her grandfather was born Austrian, his father was born Italian, he was born Yugoslavian and his son was born Slovenian. And all of them were born in the same house, a house offering nowadays excellent wines, especially Chardonnay, Rebula and a fabulous Pinot Grigio that has a reddish color that you love. Janko only works with the Merlot for the red wines.

The three accommodations I have mentioned allow us to also visit other wineries that are not far away. In fact, all of them are within a radius of 10 or 15 kilometers, so it is always possible to make several visits in the same day. It must be said, though, that the Slovenians are very generous and kind during visits, so a good advice to follow is to visit no more than two wineries a day. You've been warned.

In that radius I mentioned we could visit **Edi Simčič, Stemberger, Ščurek Wine, Matjaž Kramar** and **Jakončič Winery**, all of them without leaving Goriška Brda. Passing Nova Gorica to the east we enter the **Vipavska Dolina**, where in less than 30 kilometers we find **Kristina Mervič, Miha Batič, OUO, Mlecnik, Burja Estate, Guerilla** and **KmetijaHedele**, among others. Not all of them are orange winemakers, which will give some more balance to our findings.

It's time to finish our first wine tour of Goriška Brda and start preparing the next one. It may be a good idea to rent bicycles to continue our tour of the wineries in the area. The roads do not have long slopes and the greatest distance we can travel is between Kabaj and Štekar.

Where to sleep

KABAJ GUEST HOUSE

Šlovrenc 4, 5212 Kozana, Slovenia

www.kabaj.si

+386 41 454 002

KLINEC INN

Medana 20, 5212 Dobrovo V Brdih, Slovenia

www.klinec.si

+386 40 663 322

KMETIJA ŠTEKAR

Snežatno 31a, 5211 Kojsko, Slovenia

www.kmetijastekar.si

+386 40 221 413

Where to eat

BELICA

Medana 32, 5212 Dobrovo V Brdih, Slovenia

www.belica.si

+386 53 042 104

Where to taste

MARJAN SIMČIČ

Ceglo 3b, 5212 Dobrovo v Brdih, Slovenia

www.simcic.si

+386 53 959 200

MOVIA ALES KRISTANČIČ

Ceglo 18, 5212 Dobrovo v Brdih, Slovenia

www.movia.si

+386 59 930 930



Klinec



Kabaj



Klinec



Klinec



Klinec



Klinec



Classificazione dei vini delle Contee di Gorizia e Gradisca in riguardo alla loro bontà.
Redatta nell'anno 1787 dalla Cesarea regia superiore commissione delle unite contee di Gorizia e Gradisca.

Klinec



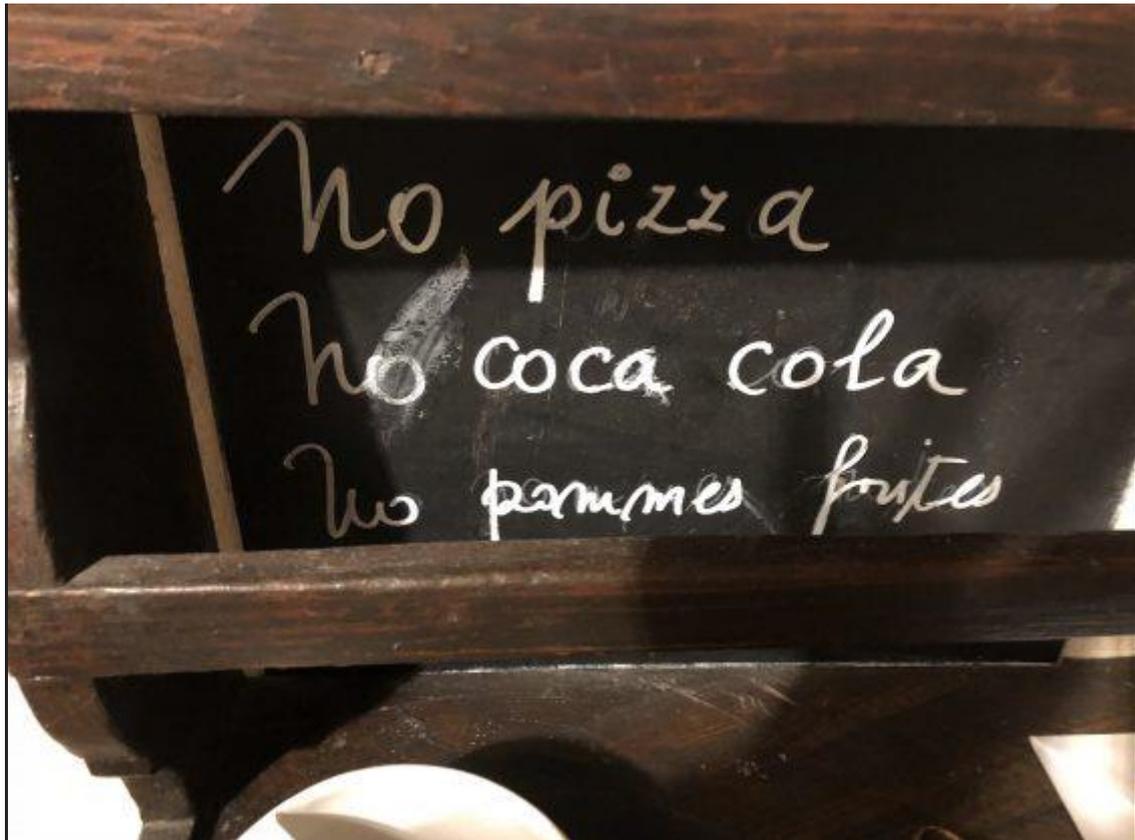
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Cases



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Vineyards



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Wooden eggs



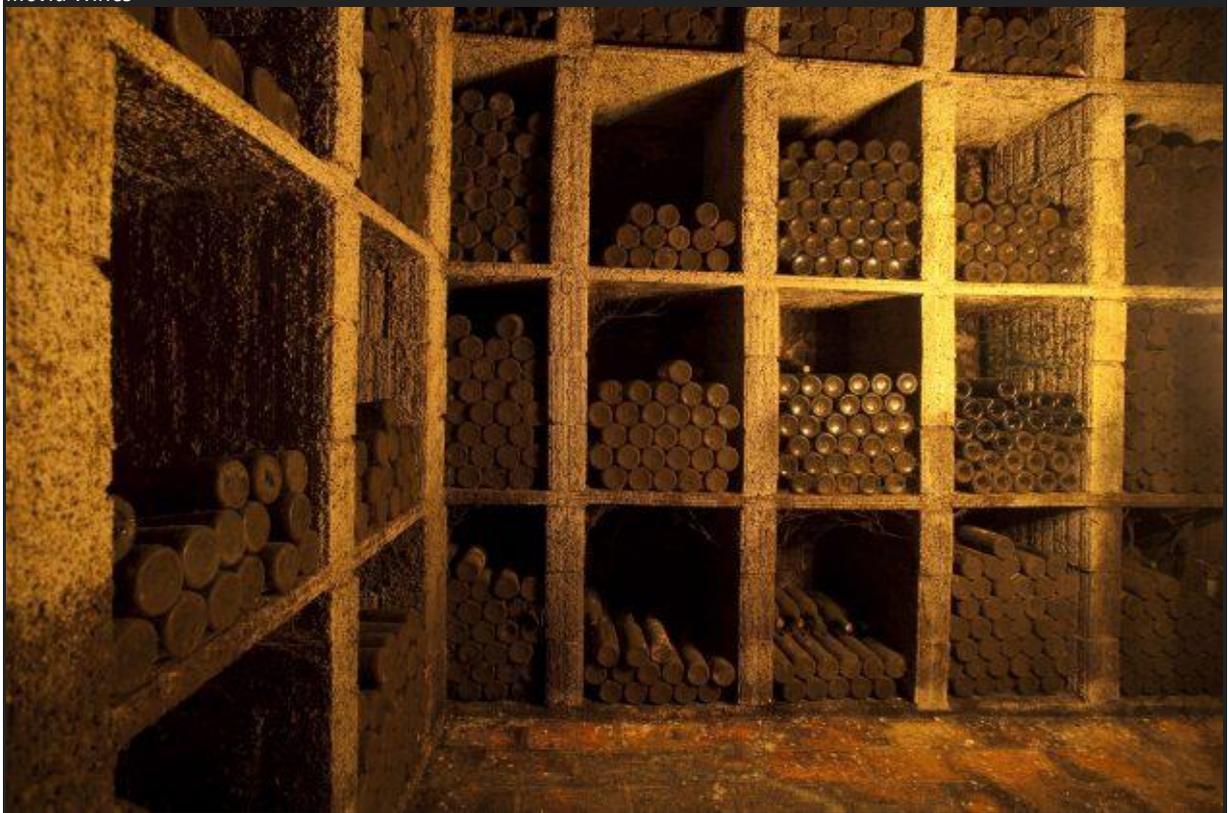
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Movia



Movia Wines



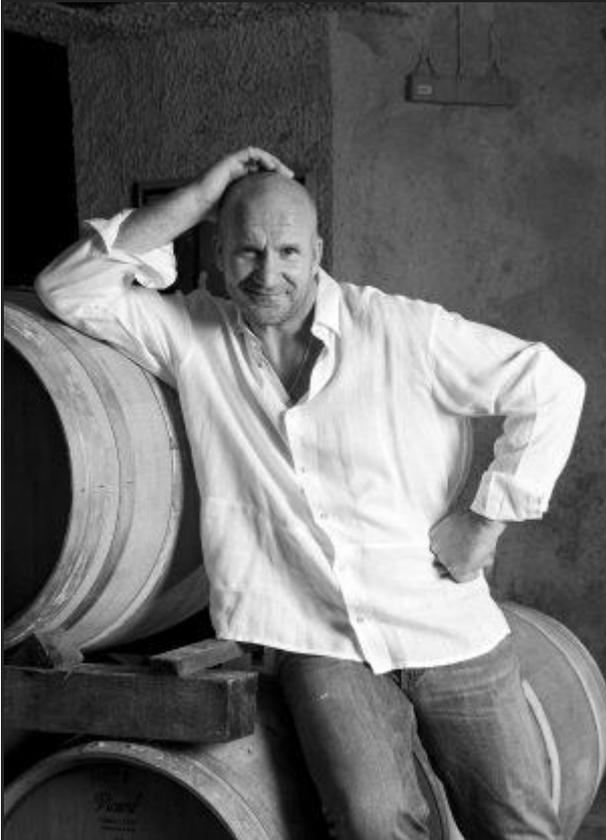
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