

WINETRAVEL

Exploring the Margaret River Wine Region in Australia

Stunningly beautiful and increasingly recognised as one of the world's top wine regions Margaret River & Australia's southwest are well worth the journey. **Ranjan Pal** visited three exceptional wineries

The southwestern coast of Australia remains a place that not many may have visited, even among Australians. A five-hour flight from Sydney, Perth has the distinction of being the most isolated major city in the world. Wine lovers willing to travel to this remote corner will discover a secret treasure – Margaret River, cradled between the Indian and Southern (Antarctic) oceans – with an emerging reputation of being one of the finest wine regions in the world.

Geographical isolation has worked in its favour: this stunning stretch of land has managed to preserve an almost untouched natural beauty and unique biodiversity. Here, the Mediterranean climate with its heavy winter rainfall, dry ripening season and cool sea breezes meets low-nutrient ancient soils formed around granite bedrock, ideal formula for producing high-quality grapes. One statistic captures it all. Although it produces only 2% of Australia's total wine output, Margaret River accounts for 25% of the country's premium wines by value.

Voyager Estate: Steeped in Sustainability
Our first stop in Margaret River was Voyager Estate, one of the region's pioneering wineries, established in 1978 by Michael Wright. The name recalls the great era of European exploration along the West Australian coast

during the 16th and 17th centuries.

With over 100 hectares under vine, evenly split between white and red varietals, the estate's flagship wines are Chardonnay and Cabernet Sauvignon – grape varieties that have come to define the region's reputation. In the words of chief winemaker Tim Shand, "Chardonnay is what gets us out of bed in the morning, followed closely by Cabernet Sauvignon. Chardonnay here has all the precision and class that you might expect, with a little extra flavour from our maritime climate."

What sets Voyager apart is its unwavering commitment to sustainability. This dedication was recognised in 2023 when the estate earned organic certification from Standards Australia – an endorsement of their chemical-free practices and focus on healthy soils, and a distinctive selling point for their wines. They leave no stone unturned in their pursuit of a more sustainable future. As we toured the winery, I was both intrigued and interested to see that Voyager has introduced ducks and sheep to the vineyards – not only to manage snails and weeds but also to provide natural fertiliser. They have also been experimenting with concrete fermenting vats to reduce their reliance on oak barrels and be more sustainable.

Photos courtesy: Voyager Estates



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Clockwise from above: A fish dish from Voyager's seasonal menu, Voyager Estate Cellar Door and the Estate's Discover Voyager vehicle for tours



At the end of the tour, our hosts treated us to a delightful seven-course lunch at their award-winning restaurant, recently named Regional Restaurant of the Year by the Western Australia Good Food Guide for 2025. The menu paired Voyager's certified organic wines with dishes made entirely from estate-grown and locally sourced seasonal ingredients. Head Chef Travis Crane said, "Given our intense focus on sustainability, we are proud to say that our food tells the story of our region, its people and produce, and ultimately our wines."

The dishes that stood out for me were the Shark Bay scallops with jalapenos and sea greens served in a passion fruit sauce paired with a 2024 Sauvignon Blanc Semillon. The wine was crisp yet textured, savoury and refreshing. This was followed by Voyager's flagship 2023 Chardonnay whose intense floral and citrus fruit character was perfectly complemented by the estate-grown charred pumpkin, leek and lavender. Finally, the pièce de résistance was the Lamb and Smoked Bacon with sheep cheese, pickled grapes and charred eggplant purée. This went beautifully with the 2020 Cabernet Sauvignon, a youthful wine with good structure and an abundance of fruity notes.

Fraser Gallop Estate: Vineyard-first wines

Just half an hour to the north of Voyager Fraser Gallop Estate is at the heart of Margaret River's Wilyabrup valley (20km) north of the town of Margaret River. Established in 1999, it is a completely different type of winery. Much smaller in size with only 20 hectares divided equally between Cabernet Sauvignon and Chardonnay, the winery is named after its founders, Heather Fraser and Nigel Gallop, whose vision was to produce world-class wines based on a low-intervention, vineyard-first approach. Since it is a single vineyard site with mature vines planted in 1999, the winemaking is focused on restraint, allowing the character of the terroir to shine through rather than



Ellin Tritt, the winemaker at Fraser Gallop, producing wines that are pure expressions of the season and the vineyard. Below: View of Fraser Gallop Estate in Margaret River's Wilyabrup Valley with neat rows of vines in the foreground

overly shaping the wines in the winery.

We joined Fraser Gallop's young winemaker, Ellin Tritt for a casual barrel room lunch paired with the excellent signature Chardonnay and Cabernet Sauvignon. Ellin has worked all over the world but is now back home in Margaret River, where she enjoys the region's natural beauty and the close-knit environment of a small team. She considers it a rare privilege to craft wines that are both distinctive and transparent — pure expressions of the vineyard and the season.

Ellen said, "We are best known for our Parterre Cabernet Sauvignon. It captures the essence of Wilyabrup with power, perfume and structure wrapped in finesse. It is layered and long-lived, yet remarkably drinkable when young. For the white wine, the Parterre Chardonnay is a personal favourite — fine, focused and savoury with real energy on the palate. It's a wine that evolves beautifully over time."

As we get ready to exit the barrel room, she ends by saying, "I am genuinely excited about the future of this region and the story we're telling through these wines."

Heather Fraser and Nigel Gallop's vision was to produce world-class wines based on a low-intervention, vineyard-first approach

Ampersand Estate — Don't Miss the Gin!

The final leg of our wine journey takes us round the very tip of Southwest Australia so that we are now facing the great Southern Ocean. We have reached the Pemberton wine region and our destination is a winery with the unusual name of Ampersand Estate. We are greeted by the charming co-founder Corrie Scheepers, who explains, "The ampersand symbol, '&' represents connection, and for us that means the connection between premium wines & stunning landscapes, exceptional hospitality & authentic storytelling, as well as tradition & innovation."

Geographically, the region is further inland than Margaret River and more heavily forested. The slightly cooler climate allows it to produce a wider range of varieties. Their best wines, in fact, are the Esperluette (French for 'ampersand'), a Bordeaux-style blend of Merlot, Cabernet Franc and Petit Verdot, and the juicy yet delicate Pinot Noir, which was named Western Australia's favourite wine in the 2025 Top-Up Wine Awards.

Corrie escorts us to the tasting room



Photos courtesy: Fraser Gallop Estate



Ampersand Winery, situated within the Southern Forests in the Pemberton region. Below: A selection of the estate's range of premium, award-winning wines



where a surprise awaits us. Laid out in a row is a range of gin and vodka bottles branded, “Rainfall” and a plate of snacks. Not what we would expect visiting the oldest winery in the region! He explains with a smile: “Ampersand is about telling a broader story of the land and giving people more ways to experience it. Wine speaks to one tradition, but gin, specially when built around native botanicals and community values, opens up another chapter.”

We sample the gins, each of which has a unique flavour. The base spirit is made in a reflux column, copper still using Pemberton potatoes and pure rainfall and then infused with a variety of local ingredients ranging from seasonal berries, heritage fruits and different varieties of honey to native botanicals. Ampersand has also introduced innovative gins infused with fortified wine and Pinot Noir, which makes for a truly unique tasting experience. Their ambitious long-term goal is to produce a single-estate gin, where every ingredient is sourced entirely from the Ampersand estate.

Ampersand was recently named one of Western Australia’s top two winery stays, and our group has the pleasure of being put up at their premier residence, The Homestead. Situated along the Donnelly River on the edge of the Peerabeelup forest, this luxurious villa has five bedrooms with king-size beds. The private amenities include a spacious lounge and library for relaxing and a large outdoor deck with a view of the river. Fortified by substantial tastings of gin, we weave our way up the gentle slope back to the Homestead in the gathering dusk.

Meanwhile, the engaging Argentine-born chef, Facundo Salas has already fired up his grill and the enticing smell of sizzling beef hints at the wonderful dinner to come! And what a meal it turns out to be, a fitting finale to our visit to Western Australia.



An eclectic line-up of Ampersand vodkas and gins

“Wine speaks to one tradition, but gin, when built around native botanicals and community values, opens up another chapter” – co-founder, Corrie Scheepers

Facundo, assisted by his wife Olivia, started us out with Berenjena, an eggplant dish with equal parts of Escabeche, an acidic sauce made with vinegar and spices from the Basque Country and Babaganoush garnished with rosemary salt, which was a perfect match for Ampersand’s sparkling Chardonnay. Being a confirmed carnivore, I was pleasantly surprised by the Grilled Vegetable Risotto with Burnt Pumpkin finished with a cumin aioli that was paired with their 2024 Chardonnay. But the pièce de résistance was the premium cut of Scotch fillet served with Pemberton potatoes and Chimichurri sauce and paired with the award-winning Espereulette, which blew us away! We barely had room for dessert but the traditional Argentine-style crepe with Dulce de Leche and burnt sugar combined with the Ampersand fortified provided the perfect ending to a memorable meal. ♦