

COVER STORY WINE TOUR

*Juicy grapes growing at the
KRSMA Estates' vineyard*

THE VINEYARD IN YOUR BACKYARD

A COUPLE OF HOURS FROM FABULOUS HAMPI LIES ANOTHER FASCINATING SITE: THE KRSMA WINERY. **RANJAN PAL** RAISES A TOAST TO ITS AWARD-WINNING WINES

Once the seat of the greatest of South Indian civilisations, the ruined city of Hampi is a fascinating place to visit. Four dynasties of the Vijayanagara Empire ruled a vast kingdom over a period of more than two centuries (1336–1565 AD). And wine was very much part of everyday life. The Rama-yana tells the story of how King Sugriva's private vineyard on the outskirts of Hampi was plundered by a marauding band of *vanaras* who were celebrating Hanuman's successful search for Sita.

Driving two hours to the north of Hampi, us modern-day visitors were rather more welcome as we wound our way slowly up the small hill where the KRSMA winery is located. Named for a union of the first names of the founders Krishna Prasad and Uma Chigurupati (Krs-Ma), the story of how this winery came into being is rapidly becoming the stuff of legend.

The young Krishna first tasted wine as a schoolboy through the local bishop who had imported some from the Vatican. Hooked at first sip, he then began to experiment by producing them in his backyard. Then the business of real life took over and he spent the next two decades building up a very successful

granules business before returning to his passion in 2007 with his wife. The opportunity came in the form of the distress sale of a parcel of land that was under wine cultivation by a local farmer's cooperative at that time.

While the limestone, mineral-rich soil

were daunting. Water had to be pumped from three kilometres away, the rocky nature of the ground meant no topsoil and trained manpower was scarce in this remote outpost. Little by little, through sheer grit and determination, Krishna and Uma overcame these obstacles and the proof of their blood, sweat and tears now stands in a wine that has won accolades on the world stage. A remarkable achievement given that they have been around less than a decade.

We are given a quick tour of the fermentation tanks and laboratory and the barrel cellar before settling down for a vertical tasting of the Sauvignon Blanc (2013, 2015 and 2016 vintages). The first thing that one notices is the distinctive logo which speaks of refinement and sophistication, referencing the Vijayanagara Empire itself. As far as the wine itself went, I liked in particular the most recent vintage, which was a pale lemon hue, had an excellent balance and structure, with a neat acidity which made its presence felt without being overwhelming, and a medium-long finish.

After the tasting we are taken down to the vineyards, which cover a total



A view of the vineyard; and (below) freshly processed wine



KRISHNA AND UMA OVERCAME THESE OBSTACLES AND THE PROOF OF THEIR BLOOD, SWEAT AND TEARS NOW STANDS IN A WINE THAT HAS WON ACCOLADES ON THE WORLD STAGE

WINE TOUR

IT HAS BEEN A WONDERFUL END TO THE DAY AND WE LINGER OVER THE WINE, AS STORM CLOUDS SCUD ACROSS THE SKY. WE ARE RELUCTANT TO BREAK THE SPELL BY LEAVING, BUT LEAVE WE MUST



Cabernet Sauvignon 2012, one of their wines; and (below) fresh wine being poured in a glass

of 160 acres and of which 50 are being harvested while 50 are under plantation. The greenery is a refreshing contrast to the arid landscape all around, making it a veritable oasis in the Hampi Hills. The couple is proud of having raised the water table with their irrigation efforts and thereby sparking a resurgence of cash crop cultivation in the area.

Pre-monsoon showers have begun in the region and we look up at the lowering sky. The Cabernet Sauvignon tasting awaits us and, with the breeze picking up, we decide to move to the small lawn outside the stone winery building. But the wind is too strong, shattering a couple of wine glasses. Sprawling indolently on the grass with a glass in hand seems a



much better idea! We taste the 2012, 2014 and 2015 vintages and it is immediately clear that the first is KRSMA's pride and joy with the unique minerality of the

soil coming straight through the wine. Made in the classic New World style, it is redolent of dark fruit, and the tannins have softened sufficiently to create an excellent balance.

It has been a wonderful end to the day and we linger over the wine, as storm clouds scud across the sky. We are reluctant to break the spell by leaving, but leave we must. Luckily, the wonderful wines from this estate are available freely at good liquor stores in Bengaluru. Next stop.

The KRSMA Estates is located in Julakunta village in Karnataka's Koppal District, 70km/2hrs north of the World Heritage Site of Hampi. 08536-275260, www.krsmaestates.com

THE CUP RUNNETH OVER

MANEK S. KOHLI
SNIFFS OUT A
FEW MORE WINE
HOLIDAYS IN
INDIA. HIC TO
THAT!



COURTESY: GROVER ZAMPA VINEYARDS

SULA VINEYARDS It pioneered wine production in the Nashik region and, subsequently, revolutionised the Indian wine industry. Today, it is not only a market leader, but an estate worth the visit. In February, head down for the famous Sulafest music extravaganza. Otherwise, enjoy a luxurious stay in one of their Sky Villas, while indulging in tours and tasting sessions. *Sky Villa starting from ₹27,000 a night, taxes extra; [sulawines.com](#)*

It produces the fine Zampa and is especially proud of its La Reserve. While accommodation isn't provided, a day-long tour including lunch and wine tasting guarantees a heady experience. ₹850 per head on weekdays and ₹1,000 on weekends. [groverzampa.in](#)

FRATELLI WINES Three pairs of brothers came together to give birth to Fratelli Wines in 2006. Located in Solapur district in Maharashtra, the 240-acre estate brings in the best of Italian and Indian winemaking traditions to produce Chardonnays, Sauvignons and other fine wine varieties. *Day visit from*

GROVER ZAMPA Another prolific wine estate and one of India's oldest, its 410-acre vineyards are located in the Nandi Hills near Bengaluru.

₹1,500 per adult and overnight stay packages from ₹11,000 per couple. [fratelliwines.in](#)

CHATEAU D'ORI It's just been nine years since its first harvest and the estate has already come a long way. The vineyards have been nurtured under the guidance of renowned oenologist Athanese Fakorellis. *Overnight stay package is ₹6,500 and includes meals, wine tasting and a tour. [chateaudori.com](#)*

YORK WINERY AND TASTING ROOM Here's a Nashik wine estate that seems right out of a painting, with its picturesque location and

stunning view of the nearby dam. You can enjoy a meal in their restaurant known as 'Cellar' and assimilate various wine flavours at their tasting room. *Wine tasting starting at ₹150 per person for five varieties; no accommodation. [yorkwinery.com](#)*

VALLONNÉ VINEYARDS At this very picturesque estate in Nashik, you can sip your wine while dining at a lake-facing restaurant by the well-regarded Malaka Spice. After that, you may retire to your room, which promises a breathtaking view. *Rooms begin at ₹5,000 per night. [vallonnevineyards.com](#)*

SOMA VINE VILLAGE Calling it a 'vine village' is a bit modest. After all, Soma boasts of a resort with attractions such as an adventure park, a spa, numerous dining options, entertainment rooms and some classy pool villas. Tours and tastings take place seven days a week. *Overnight stays begin at ₹6,000 for a standard room, taxes extra. [somavinevillage.com](#)*

BLACKBUCK VINEYARD Located in Karnataka, Blackbuck is a humble wine estate for both the connoisseur as well as anyone looking to relax. It provides executive rooms that include meals and free wine tastings.

Of course, a tour of the estate and a visit to Blackbuck Forest makes it a rather sweet deal. Oh, and you can actually take part in grape stomping here! *Rooms from ₹4,000 including taxes. [blackbuckwine.com](#)*

HERITAGE WINERY Here's another wine estate that shows how Karnataka's climate and soil conditions are just perfect for wine production. Its wine education tour has a lot to offer—a tour around the vineyards and winery, wine tasting and even grape stomping. *Tour charges are ₹250 per person, while grape stomping is ₹500. [heritagewinery.in](#)*