



# TRAVEL

With Lori Rackl, lrackl@suntimes.com



## SWEET MATCH

Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario, is all about Icewine at the moment. But next month, the focus shifts to chocolate. The town's 22 wineries will be pairing wine and chocolate during February week-ends. Sample some with a \$30 touring pass by calling (905) 468-1950 or visit the Web site [niagaraonthelake.com](http://niagaraonthelake.com).



## SOLO AT SEA

So long, single supplement: Norwegian Cruise Line this week started selling what it says are the industry's first staterooms designed and priced for single occupancy. When it launches in July, the 4,200-passenger Norwegian Epic will feature 128 studio staterooms with about 100 square feet of living space (and a shared lounge reserved for solo travelers). Prices start at \$799 for the ship's week-long Caribbean itineraries: [epic.ncl.com](http://epic.ncl.com), (866) 234-7350.



## SPOTLIGHT ON SPRINGFIELD

The Travel Channel's Adam Richman treks to Springfield in tonight's episode of "Man v. Food." Tune in at 9:30 p.m. to watch Richman take on the Firebrand Chili Challenge (at left), try his luck with the Horseshoe and visit the place that invented the corn dog.

# NIAGARA CALLS

**DRINK IT IN | Southern Ontario's Icewine festival showcases one of Canada's most cherished products**



Jackson-Triggs Niagara Estate Winery chills its "liquid gold" at the 15th annual Niagara Icewine Festival on Friday.

**N**IAGARA-ON-THE-LAKE, Canada — "Liquid gold," the Canadians proudly call their Icewine. The rich, aromatic and pricey nectar is the foie gras or truffles of the wine world. A good Icewine is a true pleasure to drink — and a rhymes-with-twitch to make. "Picking grapes at [5 degrees Fahrenheit] in the middle of the night: not fun," said Michele Bosc of Chateau des Charmes, one of nearly 75 wineries in the Niagara Peninsula appellation, where Icewine is king. As the name suggests, Icewine is made from frozen grapes. These icy ovals need to be pressed as soon as they're picked, usually by hand, overnight, when temperatures stay consistently cold. High-powered presses crush the frozen fruit to squeeze what precious little liquid remains — about one-tenth the amount you'd find in a regular wine grape. In the right hands, the result is a concentrated, intensely flavorful drink that strikes a perfect balance between sugar and acid, producing a wine that's fruity and sweet without being cloying.

While a few stubborn Austrians and Germans might beg to differ, no place on the planet turns out better Icewine than this patch of southern Ontario, where the beloved beverage is celebrated each January at the Niagara Icewine Festival, now in its 15th year.

Roughly 150,000 Icewine enthusiasts pack their parkas and head to Niagara wine country in the winter for a slew of special events in various towns and wineries.

The festival, which continues through Jan. 31, features winemakers' dinners, seminars, ice-carving demos and outdoor tents full of opportunities to sample local Icewine, like the Shiraz version from Wayne Gretzky's Niagara winery, named No. 99, of course.

Niagara Peninsula's unique microclimates, soil and geography make for good grape growing in general. More than 30 varieties are planted across 13,600 acres, rendering this Canada's largest wine-producing region.

These optimal conditions helped lure the Reif family to Niagara more than 30 years ago. Klaus Reif, owner of Reif Estate Winery, is a 13th generation winemaker from Germany who brought with him his Icewine-making skills — and thick accent. "Icewine was done for zee first time in 1796 in Germany in Franconia," Reif explained. "It was vinter



Klaus Reif moved from Germany to Ontario, Canada, 23 years ago to carry on the family business: winemaking.



Oenophiles hit the streets of Jordan last weekend to sample wines from the Niagara Peninsula's Twenty Valley. | LORI RACKL-SUN-TIMES PHOTOS

and zee monks forgot to pick zee grapes, so zey vent out and got zem and pressed zem right away.

"If this is true, I don't know," Reif confessed. "But it's a great story."

And Reif makes a great Icewine. His 1987 version using Vidal grapes — a thick-skinned fruit particularly suited to Icewine — won a spot on Robert Parker's Top Ten wine list.

"Vidal Icewine iz a true Icewine," Reif said. "I describe it as, when you taste it, somebody hits you with a 2-by-4 on zee back," Reif said.

Good thing Reif's job is winemaking, not marketing, which the festival does very well. During the last half of January, restaurants break out

Icewine-inspired menus. Hotels offer Icewine packages. Wineries sell special food-and-Icewine pairings for \$10 Canadian. Unfortunately for us Yanks, that works out to about \$10 U.S. at the current exchange rate.

This year's festival kicked off Friday with the Xerox Icewine Gala at Fallsview Casino. (The Niagara Falls casino resort has a Chicago connection: Real estate mogul Neil Bluhm and the Pritzker family are the main owners of the company that developed and manages the property.)

Some 700 people turned out for the \$175-a-ticket event, where more than two dozen vineyards filled up guests' glasses with premium wines



Hockey great Wayne Gretzky's wines — from his No. 99 Estates Winery in Niagara — were poured at the fest.

sporting the "VQA" label, a guarantee that 100 percent of the grapes are grown in Ontario.

Elaborate food stations served up everything from sushi and short ribs to Canadian cheese and salmon ice cream, which tastes infinitely better than it sounds.

"We've been coming to the Icewine Festival for years, and it keeps getting better," said Jay Becker of Baltimore, Md., during a winemaker's dinner Saturday night at Chateau des Charmes. Under a chilly night sky, guests were greeted with a glass of Icewine-infused hot chocolate, ladled out of a kettle over a fire. They then headed inside to



Niagara-on-the-Lake's Prince of Wales hotel

## IF YOU GO

**GETTING THERE:** Niagara wine country is about a 45-minute drive from the airport in Buffalo, N.Y., or 75 minutes from Toronto. Niagara Airbus has shuttle service from both cities' airports and also offers wine tours; [niagaraairbus.com](http://niagaraairbus.com).

**ICEWINE FESTIVAL:** Jan. 15-31 at various locations in the Niagara Peninsula. The Web site [icewinefestival.com](http://icewinefestival.com) lists a schedule of events, ticket information and other details.

**TIP:** A Discovery Pass entitles you to food and wine pairings at six wineries during the festival. It costs \$30 and is available at the wineries or by calling (905) 688-0212.

**STAYING THERE:** In the village of Jordan, Inn on the Twenty is a boutique property with romantic rooms, a spa and a top-notch restaurant owned by the same family who runs Cave Spring Cellars; (800) 701-8074, [innonthetwenty.com](http://innonthetwenty.com).

Niagara-on-the-Lake's Prince of Wales hotel is a luxurious, Victorian-style landmark serving

an opulent afternoon tea. It has a spa and special Icewine Festival packages; (888) 669-5566, [vintage-hotels.com](http://vintage-hotels.com).

The Hilton at Niagara Falls recently opened a 53-story, all-suite hotel tower — the tallest in Canada. Two-bedroom deluxe suites have glass-enclosed whirlpool tubs where, if you crane your neck, it's possible to see the thundering falls. The property is connected to the Fallsview Casino Resort and entertainment complex; (800) 445-8667, [hilton.com](http://hilton.com).

**ONTARIO WINES:** Get a free guide and wine route map at (800) 263-2988 or [winesofontario.ca](http://winesofontario.ca).



an opulent afternoon tea. It has a spa and special Icewine Festival packages; (888) 669-5566, [vintage-hotels.com](http://vintage-hotels.com).

The Hilton at Niagara Falls recently opened a 53-story, all-suite hotel tower — the tallest in Canada. Two-bedroom deluxe suites have glass-enclosed whirlpool tubs where, if you crane your neck, it's possible to see the thundering falls. The property is connected to the Fallsview Casino Resort and entertainment complex; (800) 445-8667, [hilton.com](http://hilton.com).

**ONTARIO WINES:** Get a free guide and wine route map at (800) 263-2988 or [winesofontario.ca](http://winesofontario.ca).

of Commerce at 905-468-1950 for weekend packages starting at \$150 a person, including accommodation and VIP passes to the cocktail event.)

Each year, the festival also includes some opportunities for hardy Icewine fans to venture into the vineyard and pick and press the grapes firsthand.

No thanks. I prefer to stay out of the fields and sit by the fire, getting hit with a 2-by-4 on the back by a glass of Vidal Icewine.

*Information for this article was gathered on a research trip sponsored by Ontario Tourism and the Wine Council of Ontario.*

## LIBERTY TRAVEL Unbeatable

### CARIBBEAN SALE FREE NIGHTS!

**Dominican Republic** ★★ ★★ FROM \$495\*  
INCLUDES 4 nights, Allegro Puerto Plata, all-inclusive & hotel transfers. **BONUS** buy 1 night, get 1 free.

**Puerto Rico** ★★ ★★ 1/2 FROM \$585\*  
INCLUDES 4 nights, Rio Mar Beach Resort & Spa, A Wyndham Grand Resort & hotel transfers. **BONUS** buy 1 night, get 1 night free. Plus save 25% on golf, spa tennis & more.

**Barbados** ★★ ★★ 1/2 FROM \$585\*  
INCLUDES 4 nights, Amaryllis Beach Resort & hotel transfers. **BONUS** buy 3 nights, get 1 free.

**Dominican Republic** ★★ ★★ FROM \$625\*  
INCLUDES 3 nights, Dreams Palm Beach Punta Cana, Unlimited-Luxury® & hotel transfers. **BONUS** buy 2 nights, get 1 free.

**Aruba** ★★ ★★ 1/2 FROM \$659\*  
INCLUDES 3 nights, Renaissance Marina Hotel, adults-only & hotel transfers. **BONUS** buy 2 nights, get 1 free.

**Jamaica** ★★ ★★ FROM \$679\*  
INCLUDES 4 nights, Holiday Inn SunSpree Resort Montego Bay, all-inclusive & hotel transfers. **BONUS** buy 1 night, get 1 free.

**St. Lucia** ★★ ★★ FROM \$789\*  
INCLUDES 4 nights, Coconut Bay Beach Resort & Spa, all-inclusive & hotel transfers. **BONUS** buy 1 night, get 1 free.

**St. Thomas, USVI** ★★ ★★ FROM \$799\*  
INCLUDES 4 nights, Bolongo Bay Beach Resort & hotel transfers. **BONUS** buy 3 nights, get 1 free. Plus \$100 resort credit.

**Jamaica** FROM \$1145\*  
INCLUDES 4 nights, Sandals Whitehouse European Village & Spa, The Luxury Included® Vacation & hotel transfers. **BONUS** save up to 55%, buy 1 night, get 1 free.

1.866.910.9608  
[libertytravel.com](http://libertytravel.com)

\*Conditions apply. Special promotions valid on new bookings only. Prices are per person, based on double occupancy accommodations. Tour and land packages only include round-trip motorcoach airfare from Chicago and do not include meals unless otherwise indicated. Savings reflect land prices only and vary by resort and travel dates. Availability is limited. Seats may not be available on all flights and rooms. Rates and/or package prices on airlines, cruises and tours are subject to holiday blackouts, peak periods, surcharges, and cancellations. Charges may be applicable up to the full price paid depending on the fare and/or package and when it is canceled. Other restrictions may apply and vary by resort, cruise and airline carrier. Contact Liberty Travel for further details. Airfare taxes and fees: Air fuel surcharge included in pricing. Air inclusive prices do not include government imposed taxes and fees of up to \$148, including a September 11th Security Fee of up to \$10 U.S. or international government imposed taxes and fees of up to \$60. The above description of packages are served by a variety of carriers. Caribbean Sale: Valid for travel 3/15-8/31/10; must be booked by 2/2/10. Liberty Travel does not assume responsibility for any errors or omissions in the content of the offers displayed. Applies to genuine written quotes from North America. All non-refundable businesses and vendors. Quotes must be presented prior to purchase. Subject to availability. Valid for travel occurring within North America. The Price Beat Guarantee Policy is not applicable to this offer. See [www.libertytravel.com](http://www.libertytravel.com) for more details.