

**Pascale Bernasse, French Wine Explorers, on *Wine Wanderings*
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On YouTube: <https://youtu.be/DnJHMyC07II>

Tricia Conover DipWSET, Editor, *Wine Wanderings*

Welcome to Wine Wanderings. Today, I'm joined by **Pascal Bernasse, President, French Wine Explorers.** In 2016, I took three of the French Wine Explorers tours, including Bordeaux, Burgundy, and Champagne [regions]. Today, Pascal will be talking to us about tips for wine touring, pitfalls to avoid when collecting fine French wines, and her favorite places to tour in France.

Welcome, Pascal.

Pascale Bernasse, President, [French Wine Explorers](#)

Thank you, Tricia, it's nice to see you again.

Tricia Conover DipWSET, Editor, *Wine Wanderings*

It's great to see you. Can tell us about your firm, French Wine Explorers?

Pascale Bernasse, President, French Wine Explorers

French Wine Explorers helps French wine lovers become connoisseurs with engaging programs and immersive tours. That helps you live a “life well lived.” That's what we do and how we do it. I actually acquired this company 15 years ago, and we are known for providing really unique experiences in regard to our tours in France.

Tricia Conover DipWSET, Editor, *Wine Wanderings*

Well, I certainly found that out. When I took your tours, they were wonderful. Pascal, where are your favorite places to wine tour in France? What are special about those?

Pascale Bernasse, President, French Wine Explorers

That's a loaded question! Because that's like asking, “what's your favorite wine? Who are your favorite children? What's your favorite perfume?” I always tell people that my favorite wine tour destination is just like my favorite wine. It's usually the one I'm about to have [next]. I get really excited and really moved by a wine that I enjoy. It's usually the next one. What I always tell people is, “My favorites are all of them.” But if I were to start afresh, and I didn't know where to go, I would start with the classical music of French wine, which is Bordeaux, or Burgundy. My heart sings for both of those regions. It may sing a little bit more for Burgundy. Then the third region that I really want to reconnect with is the Loire Valley, which is where I'm from, my mother is from, and my husband is from. I just absolutely love Sancerre; I think it's one of the

best values [for wine] out there. That's the destination that I really want to reacquaint myself with.

Tricia Conover DipWSET, Editor, *Wine Wanderings*

Pascale, what are your best tips for wine touring?

Pascale Bernasse, President, French Wine Explorers

That is such a great question. Let's make it a little bit more general so that everyone can benefit whether they're going on a wine tour or just traveling in general. First, travel is different than it was two years ago. What you need to do is you need to ensure success before you get there, which is something you didn't really have to do [before the last two years]. Nowadays, it really is necessary. The first thing is to make sure your trip is properly protected, i.e., you've got the right insurance for your trip, including what we call "Cancel for any reason insurance." "**Cancel for any reason insurance**" means if the sky isn't blue enough, and you just don't feel like going you can cancel up to 48 hours prior and get some of your non-refundables back, maybe not all, but that insurance policy is really important if you plan a trip 12 months in advance, and you're nervous. So that sort of eliminates the fear and encourages you to be able to be excited about your trip.

The second thing is, and this is on the travel side, is to take nonstop flights only; a connecting flight, as you've probably seen on the news, is a little bit tricky right now. So, to ensure that you don't have a nightmare, get a nonstop flight. And a lot of the flights nowadays are refundable. So it makes it easier to commit and the prices are really good. The third thing is, you want to focus on what we call slow travel. And slow travel is really getting a sense of place. And you can only do that if you take your time, and you're intentional. And I think this is the future of travel. Because it's not enough to travel and to say oh, I've been there, I've done that, I saw this estate. It's nice to be able to say that it was transformative in some way or another because traveling, well, it requires a lot of you. And so you want to make sure you get a return on that investment, not only financially but emotionally. So those are the three things that we feel are important when we put a tour together for our clients. Great tips.

Tricia Conover DipWSET, Editor, *Wine Wanderings*

I agree with every one of them. What are some pitfalls to avoid when collecting French wine... not only when touring for [Fine French Wines], but just in general when collecting French wine?

Pascale Bernasse, President, French Wine Explorers

This is also a really important question, especially in particular, when it comes to French wine. Anybody who has tried to buy an older vintage of Burgundy or Bordeaux in particular. With Burgundy, you will get sticker shock. What we don't want to do is we don't want to purchase wine, only to find out that it doesn't resonate with our needs. **The first thing and the thing that really is the most important is what we call "provenance."** What I mean by that is, if you're buying French wine, fine French wine, let's just use Burgundy and Bordeaux as the

example [consider provenance]. As those are the two regions that are the most collected, you must know where that wine came from. If you buy an older vintage, and I mean anything five years or older, and in particular, the really old vintages, you have to know where that bottle has been. Because, as you and some of your viewers may know, there was a period when a lot of the fine French Burgundian wines in particular were forged and were fakes. The market was flooded with fakes. If you're not sure where the wine has come from, you may or may not want to buy that wine. Some wines from Burgundy could be up to \$25,000. Imagine buying wine at that price, only to find out that it's not what it's supposed to be. So, provenance, where it came from [is key]. Your best policy to make sure that it's authentic. And that it hasn't suffered along the way. What I mean by that is, let's say you want to buy an older vintage wine that you see at a wine shop. It's one of your favorites. But it's been sitting under a light because it's been highlighted at the wine store for a period of time. It could have cooked under the light! Or, for example, let's say you purchase one from a private seller. Very often we have clients who do that. If the wine was stored in absolutely perfect conditions, that's great. But what happened to the wine before it got there? **If you're unsure, I would say “Buyer Beware.”** That's really the first place to start when it comes to collecting older vintage wines.

Tricia Conover DipWSET, Editor, *Wine Wanderings*

It's such a smart tip. It's just like in collecting Fine Art – provenance. How it's stored and how it's kept is so important. Pascale, what was your first **wine AH-HA moment**?

Pascale Bernasse, President, French Wine Explorers

Well, you know, it's so funny, Tricia, because when we acquired this company, I had a travel background and a small business background. But I didn't necessarily have a wine background. I grew up in a dry house; my parents really didn't drink, although my mom loved a good Châteauneuf-du-Pape. I had very limited experience in French wine, fine French wine in particular. When we acquired the company [French Wine Explorers], I went around the country of France to meet with suppliers and introduce myself. I will never forget at Hotel Le Cep [you probably stayed at Hotel Le Cep] when you [visited.]

Tricia Conover DipWSET, Editor, *Wine Wanderings*

Yes, I did stay there. It's a beautiful hotel.

Pascale Bernasse, President, French Wine Explorers

The owner is very charming. He comes out and he says to his sommelier, “Can you give me a bottle of Montrachet?” He said it all in French. We were like, okay, whatever. We didn't really know anything about anything. But we were game. It was like two in the afternoon, perfect time for a Montrachet. I tried it. At the time, I knew nothing about that wine. I knew nothing about its price point, the producer, and that vintage. But I fell in love. To this day, and that was 15 years ago, I'm trying to recreate that moment for myself. It was more than just **an Ah-Ha moment. It was like the floodgates had opened.** I finally understood how wine can really make a difference in your everyday life. If you just put in a little bit of effort, the return-on-investment is great. I'm so grateful to Jean Claude to have brought out that really special bottle of wine. In fact, it was so funny because we took a tour of the hotel, and I said, “Let's go back to where we were sitting and grab that bottle.” Of course, it was gone. But a lot of our clients want to have

that Ah-Ha moment. That's really what drives us to put together our programs because we felt like that really put us on a path of joie de vivre, living and eating and drinking well, that we want to share and replicate for our clients.

Tricia Conover DipWSET, Editor, *Wine Wanderings*

Your AH-Ha moment was a Montrachet! How perfect! Pascale, thank you for joining us on *Wine Wanderings*. I appreciate your joining us.

Pascale Bernasse, President, French Wine Explorers

Oh, it's my pleasure, Tricia. It's always a pleasure to speak with you.