

# Travel the world in good spirits, virtually

Slake your thirst for travel with online tasting sessions featuring myriad wines and spirits, with some hosts throwing in virtual tours to vineyards

Grace Ma

We are ambling among the vines of Bin Nun Winery, located on the foothills of Jerusalem in Israel.

It is a bright and breezy day and the grapes are starting to ripen, forming pretty clusters of green and purplish orbs.

In the 40 deg C summer heat, Bin Nun's co-founder and wine-grower Danny Yaniv points out a 3,000-year-old winepress.

Nearby is a mikveh – an ancient bath or pool – designed to purify those who were producing the wine, which was often used in Judaic rituals, he explains.

At this point, someone exclaims: "It's almost like we're on a holiday."

How true, for even though we are not physically at the winery, we can feel the rush of excitement as we follow Dr Yaniv around on our screens.

This 90-minute virtual tasting-cum-tour is one of many that have been initiated by wine and spirits retailers since last year to stay connected with their customers and sate their wanderlust.

The sessions are usually accompanied by a tasting kit of three to six samples comprising anything from 20ml whisky tasting drams to 100ml wine tubes. Sometimes, food like cheese, ham and chocolate are included.

Informal groups have also popped up, such as the ones formed by health-tech entrepreneur Sylvia Pang and wine student Tamara Dineen, both Singapore-based. They jointly organised the session with Bin Nun.

The duo started running virtual tastings during last year's lockdown to connect wine students and wine lovers in Singapore.

Sessions are priced between \$38 and \$78 a person, inclusive of five 60ml samples, and have featured a wide range of vintages around the world including emerging labels from Israel, China, Syria, Bulgaria and Armenia. Anyone can join the group by e-mailing [sgwinetasting@gmail.com](mailto:sgwinetasting@gmail.com).

Inter Rice Asia's "onnomi" sake-tasting series, which translates to "online drink" in Japanese, was inspired by the digital drinking trend in Japan early last year.

Inter Rice has since conducted nearly 30 sessions, priced from \$38 to \$188 in formats such as blind tastings, pairings and virtual tours.

Its director Adrian Goh, who also hosts the sake sessions, says: "Our goal is to make sake fun and more accessible to people, and to drink sake in different situations and environments."

Participants certainly love these virtual sessions for their welcom-



ing and educational vibes.

Learning and development consultant Ng Yi Xiu, 35, signed up for three sessions with Whisky Butler at a go and likes the "friendly and knowledgeable" hosts.

Real estate agent Dan Ho, 40, who has attended close to 30 virtual tastings, enjoys "meeting and interacting with the brand owners to talk to them about their products and tour their sites virtually".

Even experts like wine educator and qualified Master of Wine Tan Ying Hsien, 59, frequently signs up for these "critical" sessions to keep himself up to date with developments by established and new producers in the industry.

He says: "The tasting sessions put on by reputable wine merchants like Wine Clique help make up for the inability to visit producers or attend trade tastings abroad because of the pandemic."

"I enjoy them and will certainly continue to sign up for as many of these tastings that I can squeeze in."

Although it has been more than 1½ years since the pandemic started, most industry insiders feel that virtual tastings still fill a niche as international travel will take time to resume.

Mr Goh says: "I think the trend is here to stay because people have got used to it. They also love the access to brewery owners and brew masters because, as a normal consumer, it is almost impossible to do so."

Get your glasses ready as here are more than 10 options ranging from wines to craft beers that will lead you on a journey of discovery. Sante.

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\* Grace Ma is a freelance travel and lifestyle writer. An around-the-world cruise is on her bucket list, preferably with unlimited champagne on board.



Virtual tastings-cum-tours can take one to places such as Bin Nun Winery (above), located in the foothills of Jerusalem in Israel. PHOTO: BIN NUN WINERY

## Wine Clique

Wine Clique's sessions typically start with a live winery tour led by a representative – a wine-maker, technical director or the owner – who takes participants around the vineyard before driving back to the main building and the barrel room.

Sessions are priced from \$88 to \$225 a person, inclusive of delivery and four to six samples, and cover labels from France and South Africa to the regions of Tuscany and the Napa Valley. **Info:** Go to [wine-clique.com](http://wine-clique.com)

Cape Town winery Klein Constantia's Virtual Wine Tasting samples (above).



## Whisky Butler

Sign up for the \$98 Introduction To Whisky class, which includes five 20ml samplings of single-malt whiskies with varying flavour profiles and a crystal nosing glass (above).

The interactive session, hosted by founder Benjamin Tan, is friendly and encouraging, which

works well for beginners who may feel intimidated by the liquor.

Look out for its exclusive virtual tastings too – the sessions allow you to tap the minds of industry experts and sample rare drams at an affordable price.

**Info:** Go to [whiskybutler.sg](http://whiskybutler.sg)



## Fine Wines SG

Learn the basics of appreciating French, Spanish and Italian wines as well as whiskies at Fine Wines SG's two-hour sessions, which are conducted weekly in a lighthearted and interactive way by head wine educator P.K. Chua. The sessions are priced from

\$129, inclusive of five to six samples and one handmade Grass glass. It also offers the Wine and Spirit Education Trust certification, in case you want to deepen your knowledge before the next overseas wine holiday. **Info:** Go to [www.finewines.com.sg](http://www.finewines.com.sg)



### Brewerkz

Rediscover your backyard with home-grown craft brewery Brewerkz, which conducts private virtual tastings for a minimum of 15 persons starting at \$50 a person. Beer masters take you through the history of craft-brewing in

Singapore and the inspiration behind Brewerkz' locally brewed beers (above), such as Singapore's first carbon-neutral Islander Brew series, which has hints of Sentosa's edible plants like cocoa and jasmine. **Info:** Go to [brewerkz.com](http://brewerkz.com)



### 28 HongKong Street

From Mexico for mezcal and tequila to Kentucky in the American South for bourbon, take a trip with the experts at 28 HongKong Street, ranked No. 21 on Asia's 50 Best Bars list. Its newly launched digital cocktail workshops are personalised for a minimum group of five at \$98 a person. Each session, which ranges between 90 and 120 minutes, includes three 30ml pours, a signature cocktail and a pack of nuts. **Info:** Go to [28hks.com](http://28hks.com)

28 HongKong Street's Mezcal Negroni (left).



### Ewineasia.com

This online wine shop's virtual tastings take you from cult wines in California to organic vintages in Austria and the south of Spain. Prices start at \$50, including three to four 60ml samples. You will not

find commercial wine brands here. Instead, Ewineasia.com prefers to spotlight family estates with unique back stories such as Italian winery Cordero di Montezemolo (above). **Info:** Go to [ewineasia.com](http://ewineasia.com)



### Inter Rice Asia

Participants of Inter Rice Asia's fortnightly sake-tasting sessions, known as "onnomi", often rave about the fun, interactive elements and the wide variety of Japanese brewers including a premium label

that does not have a website and seldom grants visits. Virtual tours are sometimes included. The sessions cost \$38 to \$198 a person, inclusive of five samples of sake. **Info:** Go to [theartofsake.com](http://theartofsake.com)

Sake samples (above) of new labels from trend-setting Daishichi Brewery.



Samples of Italian wines at Angra Wine & Spirit.

### Angra Wine & Spirit

Angra's virtual experiences take you from sipping Syrahs in Australia and France in one week to savouring fruity reds by the magnificent Tuscan coast in another. Each interactive session allows direct interaction

with wine-makers and the chance to discover rare and premium wines that are not easily accessible. Registration for the Zoom sessions are free with tasting kits priced from \$60 to \$90. **Info:** Go to [angra.com.sg](http://angra.com.sg)



PHOTOS: 28 HONGKONG STREET, ANGRA WINE & SPIRIT, BAD DECISIONS, BREWERKZ, EWINEASIA, FINE WINES SG, GRACE MA, INTER RICE ASIA, ORH GAO TAPROOM, VIVANT, WINE CLIQUE

### Bad Decisions Imports

Run by beer advocates Christian Young, Chris Hallberg and Shuo Koh, this latest entrant to the craft beer scene has launched monthly online sessions to connect those in Singapore with the best independent breweries around the world, including under-the-radar gems. The session next month will feature craft beers from Poland, Germany, Estonia and Greece. **Info:** Go to [www.baddecisionsimports.com](http://www.baddecisionsimports.com)

New England India Pale Ales from American craft brewery Cushwa Brewing Co (left) for a virtual tasting conducted by Bad Decisions Imports.



Craft beers from Singapore, Estonia and the United States for a recent Orh Gao Taproom virtual tasting.

### Orh Gao Taproom

The craft beer "Sehssions" here are kept casual and intimate with a maximum of 10 persons, often with industry insiders joining in. Previous themes have touched on single-hop beers and adjuncts (ingredients that do not fall under barley, hops, yeast and

water) in beer brewing. Hop from Singapore to far-flung shores with the likes of brews from Estonia's Pahaste Brewery and a blueberries and pine-tinged star from local brewer Off Day Beer. Tasting kits cost upwards of \$38. **Info:** Go to [www.orphgao.sg](http://www.orphgao.sg)



### Vivant

Connect with responsible wine-makers around the world on Vivant's virtual wine experience platform, which has 30- to 50-minute interactive sessions taking you to regions such as Burgundy, Loire and Alsace in France. Optional tasting kits retail from

\$105 and come with six 100ml tubes designed for two persons. Delivery fees to Singapore can be hefty (starts at \$58), so consider a membership, which gives benefits such as 10 per cent off tasting kits. **Info:** Go to [vivant.eco](http://vivant.eco)

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