From classic regions to lesser-known corners, our editors select this year’s best in wine, food and cultural adventure.

A sense of place—the sights, sounds, smells and spirit of a travel destination—can endear that area to a person forever. For wine lovers, there is no better way to cement that connection than to explore the world around those vines. As the wine market becomes ever more global, packed with offerings ranging from the most storied wine regions to the most offbeat, so does the wine traveler’s itinerary.

Each year, our editors travel the world to experience the best wine and food, and in turn, discover the most exciting places to visit. Our list for 2013 represents the wide swath of cultural and culinary experiences on the must-see list. Whether your tastes lean toward the rustic climbing trails of South Africa’s Stellenbosch or a tour of a Puglian castle, this list promises outstanding travel experiences and unforgettable wines.

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North & South Forks of Long Island

Fingered by sandy beaches and bustling fishing villages, rolling farmland and forest sanctuaries, Long Island wine country is unlike any region in America. The North and South Forks of the island, collectively known as the East End, extend into the Atlantic Ocean like a two-finned fork, with picturesque Shelter Island wedged between the spears. Just a two-hour drive from Manhattan, it’s a unique amalgam of metropolitan influences against a core of hearty, agricultural tradition. Family-owned farms, artisanal food producers and small-production winemakers mingle amongst tony Hamptonites, sharing the wealth of the region’s land, sea and vines.

WHERE TO DINE
Conceived by four veterans from some of Manhattan’s most lauded restaurants (Aureole and Gramercy Tavern, among others), The North Fork Table & Inn in Southold combines a farm-to-table philosophy with a menu that’s innovative and impeccably executed. Noah’s in Greenport is casual yet elegant, impeccably executed. Noah’s in Greenport is casual yet elegant, impeccably executed. The Jedediah Hawkins Inn in Jamesport offers the ultimate in Victorian luxury and on-site access to the renowned Luce & Hawkins restaurant. For a downtown vibe and harbor views, the Harborfront Inn at Greenpoint will place you within steps of restaurants, nightlife and the North Ferry, which connects to Shelter Island.

OTHER ACTIVITIES
To travel between the North and South Forks by ferry, it’s necessary to drive through Shelter Island, a sleepy inlet occupied by the Mashomack Preserve, hiking trails and beaches. During the summer, Crescent Beach transforms dramatically into a beach-tumping, miniature St. Tropez, thanks to hotelier André Balazs’s beachside bar and boutique hotel, Sunset Beach.

PROMINENT WINES
Encouraged by similarities in maritime climate and northerly latitude with Bordeaux, Long Island used to be predominantly Merlot country. Indeed, there is an abundance of well-crafted Merlot here. In recent years, Cabernet Franc has shown great promise, delivering aromatic wines with brambly red-cherries and violet notes. A number of standout Chardonnays shines balance and complexity, as does a handful of high-quality Sauvignon Blancs and traditional method sparkling wines. There’s even a Chenin Blanc of note.

WHERE TO TASTE
With the bulk of the region’s 50-plus wineries situated in the North Fork along Route 25 (Main Street) and Route 48, winery hopping is a breeze. Top producers like Paumanok Vineyards, Macari Vineyards, Shinn Estate Vineyards and Farmhouse, Lenz, Bedell and Sparkling Pointe are all located on the North Fork, each with unique tasting rooms open to the public. In Peconic, The Winemaker Studio by Anthony Nappa Wines is a cooperative tasting room offering an unusual collection of private-label selections from local winemakers like its owner, Anthony Nappa. It also features limited-production and library choices from area wineries. The South Fork is home to only three wineries, but with outstanding producers like Wolff Estate Vineyard and Channing Daughters, it’s well worth a day trip.

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