



MY TRIP TO LEBANON

Travel is a real perk of this job – but definitely not relaxing. I've recently returned from a trip to the Lebanon where I was invited to visit the two estates whose wines feature at Barrica, writes our regular wine expert *Jane Cuthbertson*



We were invited to attend a family wedding during our trip to the Lebanon. The wedding itself was at an exquisite Cathedral in Harissa, bedecked with luscious pedestals of white roses. It was also at the top of a mountain road, and anyone who knows me will know that I don't like mountain roads! More on them later...

The reception for 380 guests was held around the pool at our hotel, overlooking the Bay of Jounieh – it was absolutely out of this world.

Throughout our trip the Lebanese people were amazingly generous and hospitable. One evening, we visited a local restaurant recommended by the hotel driver. After 10 minutes a waiter approached our table with a trolley laden with

delicious food, and returned with more dishes until we had 26 plates on the table – and there were only two of us dining! Then he proceeded to fill our table with fresh fruit, dates and sumptuous little Lebanese cakes. Now that's hospitality.

The first estate we visited was Clos de Cana on the slopes of Mount Lebanon. The owner, Fadi Gerges, wanted to regenerate the villages which had been abandoned after the civil war, bought vine stock from France and guaranteed a fair price if the farmers tended the vines under his supervision – the whole ethos of what he is doing there is fantastic and the tasting was great.

We also visited Domaine des Tourelles in the Bekaa Valley, established in 1868 and the oldest commercial vineyard in The Lebanon. Tourelles built

their reputation making Arack – a Lebanese spirit. Faouzi Issa, the winemaker and part owner, is passionate about keeping all the wine traditions of the Domaine alive. The day with him was one of the best visits and I am absolutely delighted that Faouzi has agreed to come to host a tasting at Barrica Wines later in the year.

The down side to my trip was that I have never been up so many mountain roads. On the final day we went to another vineyard further north above Batroun, and once again up a mountain road – which was at least fairly wide. When we left this vineyard later than planned and they recommended a quicker route down to the coast road, I didn't know at the top that it was used for rallying, had 17 hairpin bends, no fence, a sheer drop (on my side) and it was single track. On the

second bend we met a truck coming the other way – I still have dreams about that road!

All in all this was a phenomenal trip. We already stock an excellent range of Lebanese wine at Barrica Wines and this trip was an opportunity to learn more about our growers and experience their culture first hand. However we found a couple of new and interesting wines which will be in on the next shipment in the coming months – so watch this space – and in the meantime, just try something different! ■

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