

# Southern Italy

The heat of Southern Italy means that it is best known for full-bodied red wines made from grape varieties such as Aglianico, Primitivo and

Negroamaro. However, in common with the rest of Italy, there is a great deal of variety to be found here, from perfumed whites made from Fiano to the restrained and elegant reds made from grapes grown at altitude on the slopes of Mount Etna. This chapter will cover the regions of Campania, Basilicata, Puglia and the island of Sicily.

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## CLIMATE AND GRAPE GROWING

The area of southern Italy extends south of Lazio, down to the tip of the country, and includes the peninsula of Puglia, together with the island of Sicily (Sicilia). The climate is hot and dry inland, becoming humid near the coast. Many of the vineyards are located on slopes within the Apennines, the altitude providing some relief from the heat. Sea breezes cool the vineyards located on the flatter terrain of the Puglian peninsula.

Agriculture is the principal economic activity in the south, with grape growing particularly important in the regions of Puglia and Sicilia, where significant volumes of wine are made. Traditionally, vines were bush-trained low to the ground with leaf cover protecting the grapes from sunburn. Old vines are evidence of this but cordon training and trellising are the most common methods used today. These newer techniques allow for mechanisation on Puglia's flat plain.

## CAMPANIA

Campania is home to more DOCGs than any other region in the south. A varied landscape with mountains, valleys and coastal plains means that a range of black and white grape varieties can be grown here. **Fiano** and **Greco** arguably produce the best white wines in the region. Both are popular southern white varieties, grown in many other regions, but many of the best examples come from the Campanian appellations of **Fiano di Avellino DOCG** and **Greco di Tufo DOCG**. Fiano produces wines with medium acidity, medium to full body and aromas of stone fruit, melons and mango. It is often made to be drunk young but better examples are matured in oak and can be aged in bottle, developing aromas of wax and honey. Greco has more acidity and is leaner in body, producing wines with green apple, stone fruit and passion fruit flavours. Most producers ferment their wines in stainless steel, but some use old oak and techniques such as lees stirring to enhance the texture of their wines. The best can age in bottle to develop aromas of honey and mushrooms.

**Aglianico** is the most prestigious black grape of the south; it has deep colour with high acidity and tannin, with flavours of black fruit. It is matured in oak and can age in bottle, where it develops earthy, forest floor notes. It is found in a number of wines in Campania and other regions but is at its best in **Taurasi DOCG**.

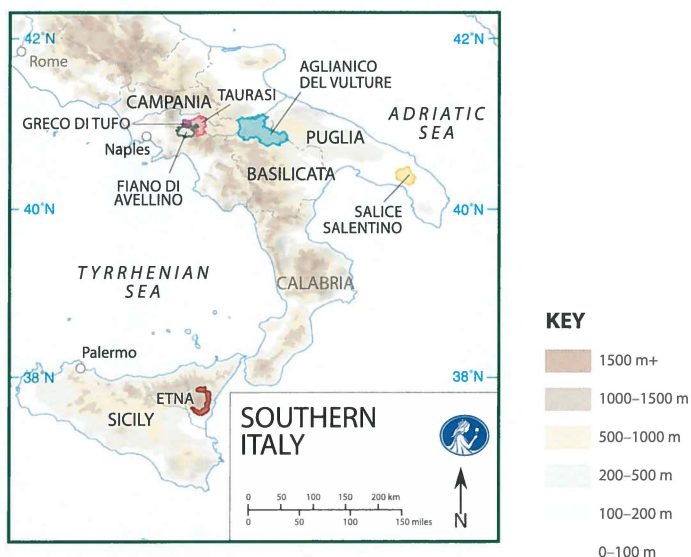
## BASILICATA

Just below Campania, Basilicata is an extremely mountainous region where vineyards can reach 900 metres, especially on the vast, high plain that surrounds the extinct volcano of Monte Vulture. Aglianico is the principal grape and makes **Aglianico del Vulture DOC**, which is considered to be the best wine of the region.

## PUGLIA

This is a vast agricultural area, where large volumes of grapes are grown. The hot climate means the region is dominated by black grapes, most notably **Negroamaro** and **Primitivo (Zinfandel)**. When they are grown at high yields these grape varieties produce simple, fruity wines for early drinking which are sold as **Puglia IGT**.

When yields are controlled, Negroamaro produces high-quality full-bodied wines, with medium tannins and acidity, high alcohol and baked red and black fruit. Many of the best come from **Salice Salentino DOC**. Primitivo can also produce high-quality wines in a similar style. The best are full-bodied, with medium tannins and acidity, high alcohol and pronounced flavours of very ripe berry fruit.



Hand harvesting in Sicily. Picking grapes in the cool of the night slows down oxidation, which could lead to off-flavours.



## SICILY

Like Puglia, Sicily also grows vast quantities of grapes, most of which find their way into either **IGT Terre di Sicilia/Terre Siciliane**, or if yields are slightly lowered, **Sicilia DOC**. **Nero d'Avola** is the dominant black grape in these wines and is grown widely throughout the island. It produces medium- to full-bodied wines, with

medium levels of acidity and tannins, with aromas of plums and black cherries. It is often made in a fruity, early-drinking style but those from the best producers are more concentrated and complex. Local white grape varieties are either sold as varietal or blended wines, and are usually made in an unoaked style, displaying citrus and stone fruit flavours. International varieties, such as **Chardonnay** and **Syrah** are also planted; Syrah has been particularly successful.

There are a number of small appellations. Some of the best wines on the island come from **Etna DOC**, produced from old, low-yielding vines at high altitudes. The reds are particularly noteworthy; these are made from Nerello Mascalese and Nerello Cappuccio, which are blended together to create fragrant wines with both high acid and tannins, and aromas of sour red cherries, cranberries and raspberries, sometimes with dried herbs. With bottle age the high tannins soften and mushroom-like aromas can develop. High-quality white wines are also made. They tend to be medium-bodied with high acidity, and display citrus fruit often with a stony/steely character developing aromas of honey and wax with bottle age.