

TRAVEL
TICKER

1800

The Library of Congress in Washington, DC, is known as one the biggest library in the United States. It stocks over 30,000,000 books and was built in 1800. And if you get the feeling you have seen it before, you have paid good attention to *National Treasure 2*.

WHO IS GAME TO STAY
IN A TURKISH CAVE?

In the Cappadocia region of Turkey, there lies a landscape that catches the fancy of visitors owing to its whimsical, fairytale-like landscape. For those looking for an unusual holiday, try the cave hotels of Turkey — who knows, may be you'll bump in to a green goblin!



Cochrane Place promises to enchant you with its quaint, old-world charm.

Take a joyride
to the hills
and beyond

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THERE is life beyond Darjeeling in North Bengal. Explore the lush tea gardens and monasteries in this Himalayan region and come back enchanted.

DAY 1: Start from Siliguri and drive through tea gardens and sal forests until you reach Kurseong, Darjeeling's lesser known cousin. Take the Pankhabari Road to Makaibari Tea Estate. Makaibari produces one of the finest brews in the world. Kurseong receives the highest amount of rainfall after Cherrapunji and the heavy rains are right for growing white orchids. Spend the night at nearby Cochrane Place (tel: 03554-233 0703), a boutique hotel steeped in old-world charm.

DAY 2: After breakfast head to Darjeeling, one-hour away. Check into Dekeling Resort & Hotel. If wildlife's your thing, visit Padmaja Naidu Himalayan Zoological Park, where you can spot Siberian tigers, snow leopards and red pandas. Return to town via the Bhutia Busty Gumpa, one of the most ambient monasteries in town. Then head to Keventers and wash down a hot dog with a cup of hot chocolate. Waste away the after hours at nearby Joey's Pub.

DAY 3: Start the day with breakfast at the legendary Glenary's. Then walk to Darjeeling's mall area. Also called Chowrasta, this is a good place to hustle a pony ride around town, apart from exploring souvenir shops peddling everything from Tibetan jewellery, local artefacts to hand-painted thangka scrolls. After lunch, visit the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute.

DAY 4: Set out early morning for Tiger Hill, a premier viewpoint to see the sunrise. Return to town for breakfast and then set out for Kalimpong, three hours away. The climate here attracted the British who turned this small Lepcha village into an ideal holiday spot. In Kalimpong check into Hotel Silver Oaks (tel: 03552-255 296).

DAY 5: Have breakfast at Gompu's Bar & Restaurant, and then make the journey to Jaldapara Wildlife Sanctuary. Embark on a jungle safari on elephant-back. Spend the night at the Hollong Tourist Lodge, a charming guest house nestled inside the park.

MY MUST DO
TOY TRAIN RIDE

This steam-driven mountain railway traces a complex, scenic route of more than 80 km. It loops its way around the hills, including the Batasia Loop.

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By Kalpana Sunder

Throughout the ages wine has been a metaphor for life itself...As Robert Louis Stevenson said, "Wine is bottled poetry".

ROLLING hills cloaked with dark green forests, emerald green fields with obese Jersey cows, old mansions and stone farmhouses — this is an idyllic region. I am in the Yarra Valley, an hour's drive from Melbourne, Australia. In this valley surrounded by the Dandenongs and the Great Dividing Range, the chocolate coloured soil provides the ideal terroir for the Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and pinot noir wines.

Yarra Valley had its beginnings in 1837, when the three Scottish born Ryrie brothers planted the first vineyard, at the Yering Station. Viticulture spread rapidly in the 1800s, and many of the first wine makers were from Switzerland. By 1927, because of the economic depression and adverse natural conditions, vineyards were converted to pastureland. It was again in the 1960s that there was a renaissance of wine growing, by some medical doctors, and the third wave in the 1980s saw big names like Domaine Chandon and De Bortoli entering the Valley.

We are on a wine tasting tour with the Australian Wine tour company — a motley lot of giggling college kids from Brisbane, a businessman from British Guyana and an American couple celebrating their 50th wedding anniversary. There are more the 70 cellar doors or tasting rooms that one can visit. There are more than 50 wineries ranging from corporate giants to family owned small boutique wineries. Our first stop is the Yering Station, the oldest vineyard from 1838, where we learn about the process of how wine is made — crushed, fermented and then bottled, sometimes matured in special oak casks to give it that woody flavour. Trap the naturally occurring carbon dioxide and you get sparkling wine. We go through the actual wine tasting process — sniff, swirl and sip. We learn to understand the

Vintage
Yarra

We don't know what's eating
Gilbert Grape. What we do
know is that we have a big
crush on Yarra Valley

woody, grassy tastes from the fruity, spicy taste. We spit expensive wine into a spittoon only to start tasting the next wine! Back in the bus the decibel levels rise after the first tasting; stories are exchanged and friendships struck. If a glass of bubbles is your style then head to Domaine Chandon, the Australian winery of the French giant Moët & Chandon.

THE Green Point Bar's floor to ceiling glass gives us wondrous view of the vineyards with roses planted at the end of each row. Why roses, I wonder. They used to be used as early warning systems of disease but today are used as markers — red for pinot noir, white for chardonnay. In 17th century France, certain wines began re-fermenting in the warm weather and the dormant yeast began to push the carbon dioxide up and the bottles became little time-bombs causing explosions. The people in France called this wine 'devil wine' and Dom Perignon, a Benedictine monk, is said to have said to his fellow-monks, "Come quickly, I am drinking the stars," when he tasted the first sparkling champagne! There is also Madame Clicquot,

who with the assistance of her cellar master invented the first riddling rack. We see a gargantuan room filled with riddling racks. It's a wooden rack with circular holes, where the bottles are stuck upside down.

The Yarra Valley is not just about good wine. This is also a foodie paradise with shelves packed with charcuterie and farm cheeses, mustard, preserves and jams. There are homemade desserts, apple confit and breads that are great for food pairing. We visit the Rochford Winery, a favourite venue for summer concerts. Leanne guides us through the wine tasting with some sweet wine that tastes like 'Christmas cake in a glass' full of fruity, spicy flavours.

Our last winery, Yering Farm, is a contrast to all that we have seen today. It's a rustic shed with small wooden benches under tall trees where you can sip your wine and get high on nature. The wines of their small boutique winery have quaint names like 'Run, rabbit run'. The vast stretches of vineyards, the winding roads and glorious countryside like an Impressionist painting stretch out in front of us as we sprawl on the lawns sipping some of the golden liquid. I took one sip, closed my eyes and every beautiful thing that I had ever known crowded into my memory.