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23/02/06



The floating vineyards of Thailand

Delphine Moussay-Derouet and Christophe Derouet continue their report on their tour of the wine world with this account of the 'floating vineyards' of Thailand. See their earlier [account](#) of one of the world's highest vineyards in Bolivia.

Since our arrival in Asia, we have tasted delicious fruit wines, all quite different to what we were expecting. After the pineapple wines in Cambodia, papaya in Lao, and strawberry wines in Vietnam, we were very impatient to visit the vineyards of the kingdom of Thailand. Our curiosity was aroused during the planning part of the trip when we discovered that Thailand has some unusual vineyards called the "floating vineyards". The dream-like sounding words tempted us to explore further! We joined Siam Winery for this journey of discovery.



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We left the capital and headed 60 km south, on the Chao Phraya Delta. We arrived in Samut Sakorn on the Gulf of Siam, between the Taicheen and Mekong Rivers.

For many generations, the farmers here have been drying the ponds and paddy fields, fighting the land so that they can develop a prosperous agricultural output, with successful crops (coconut, rice, banana, orange, dragon fruits and grapes etc).

In South America, Chile, and Argentina, the canals are built to irrigate or get the water in, but here in Thailand, they are built to get the water out. What else would you expect in such a sub tropical climate?

Now, if you look closely enough you'll notice that the floating vineyards are not actually on water, but simply that the vines are planted on little rectangular isles which are separated by canals. It looks very much like a mini-Venice! To go from one row of vine to the next, you need to cross the water on a light barge or on a bamboo stick which is, believe us, quite an acrobatic feat!

The soil is rich and very fertile and takes a lot of looking after. Every year during the rainy season, the people need to reinforce the isles to make sure they do not collapse, thereby destroying the vines. These unique conditions make the farmers work hard on the 56 000 rais of vineyards (9,000 ha) in order to produce grapes for the local market. Siam Winery is the largest single grape buyer in the area.

The harvest picking is done by hand and takes place early in the morning. The grapes are carried away to the winery by boats that look similar to the gondoliers of Venice. Can you imagine a more romantic way to pick grapes?

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This type of vineyard has given Siam Winery wine a unique character which is at the root of its worldwide success. But that is not all. To stand out in this ultra-competitive market, the winery has had to differentiate itself by creating a new style of wine, which has its own unique Thai character.

In contrast to other Thai wineries, Siam winery does not work exclusively with Shiraz or Chenin Blanc grapes, but primarily uses local (traditional) grapes such as White Malaga and Red Pok Dum. On the label, the two yearly harvests, winter (dec-mar) and summer (jun-sep) are stipulated under a Thai vintage Buddhist era calendar. Lord Buddha was born 543 years before Christ and the 2548 vintage corresponds to the 2005 vintage in Europe. All of these details are printed on the label and seem to be partly responsible for the success of Monsoon Valley, Siam Winery's principal wine label, in both the export and local markets.