



# Cathedral bar crawl!

*Ditch the holy water – Bacchus, the god of wine, would have a field day in Reus. That’s because the cellars are altars to the love of the grape*

**R**ows of soaring arches, lofty windows, glittering tile work – it might sound like the interior of a church or cathedral, but this isn’t any old place of worship. These are the hallmarks of an extraordinary set of wine cellars dotted throughout small towns near Reus in Catalonia.

In the early 1900s, officials encouraged local farmers to form co-operatives by building giant vaults so that wine-making, bottling and storage could all take place under one roof. Many were entrusted to Cèsar Martinell, a student of legendary master-builder Antoni Gaudí (seek out Barcelona’s La Sagrada Família if you don’t know who he is). The result was some of the most stunning buildings ever created in Spain. Someone joked these were not wine cellars but “wine cathedrals”. The name stuck.

They are all still working and, thankfully, several of them now welcome visitors. But beyond the architecture, touring these cathedrals is a great way to explore the

Reus countryside, while sampling distinctive wines and seeing how they’re made up close.

Start your trip with one of Martinell’s most spectacular creations, La Catedral del Vi ([catedraldelvi.com](http://catedraldelvi.com)), which dominates tiny Pinell de Brai near the Ebro river. The front is wrapped in a tiled frieze depicting every aspect of wine-making, including sozzled, droopy-moustached characters falling into the local brew. The cellar has been relaunched this year under the guidance of brothers Quim and Fran López, with a “tunnel of aromas”, where you identify wine-related objects, including different vintages of plonk, just by smell.

Fran is also a Michelin-starred chef, at Villa Retiro ([hotelvillaretiro.com](http://hotelvillaretiro.com)) in nearby Xerta. The Pinell cellar restaurant isn’t so worthy, but it serves tasty modern Catalan cuisine and there’s a god-send of a bar.

Gandesa’s gorgeous Celler Cooperatiu ([coopgandesa.com](http://coopgandesa.com)) looks less like a church than a white-walled fairytale castle. And don’t miss the Cooperativa Falset Marçà



(*top, [la-cooperativa.cat](http://la-cooperativa.cat)*) outside the village of Falset. As part of the Montsant wine region, its Etim label wines are excellent value at only a few euros.

Roads curve and snake up to Cornudella de Montsant (*above, [cornudella.net](http://cornudella.net)*), at the foot of the massive mountain ridge of Serra de Montsant. Recent wines are exceptional, and tours of the vaults can extend to the hillside vineyards. Finally, it’s time to stop off in L’Espuga de Francolí, where the refined Francolí label wines from the Celler (+34 977 870 105) include a very smooth, light cava that’s really worthy of praise, maybe even devotion.

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