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Understanding The Best Ways To Ship Wine Home From Overseas

You’ve sipped and savored the finest wines on your vacation and want to bring some home; it’s easier said than done. Here’s what you need to know to enjoy that bottle once you are home.

First, you must understand the laws about shipping wine to the state you live. As of 2023, only Delaware, Mississippi and Utah ban individual wine deliveries, while Rhode Island, Alabama and Arkansas are heavily restricted. Several states restrict where the wine must come from or how much can be shipped annually to you. Please check with your state’s Liquor Authority or Alcoholic Beverage Control office for local regulations.

Europe is the most popular destination for international wine travel, particularly France, Italy and Spain. Most wineries you visit in those countries will not ship to the United States due to importing legalities. If you plan on bringing those old-world classics home, you can ship them or pack them in your luggage.

Some carriers do not ship wine internationally and others have restrictions. Popular options like UPS and FedEx require a license to ship wine. If you find a shipping company overseas, expect to pay about $130, or more, for each case of wine.

Before packing those elegant wines into the box, use polystyrene inner packaging and molded fiber trays. They’ll keep the bottles protected. Do not use bubble wrap or paper stuffing; they won’t keep your wine safe.

Since shipping wine can be complicated or not an option, depending on where you live, you can bring your new favorite varietal on the plane if you are checking luggage. Remember, you can only pack fluid up to 3.4 oz in your carry-on.

Generally, it’s safe to pack up to three bottles in your checked bag if you follow a few essential guidelines. Wrap the bottles individually inside your plushy clothing; it will help protect them. Keep them somewhat separated in your luggage, do not have them at the very bottom or top of your suitcase. Lastly, ensure your luggage is close to full otherwise, the bottles could shake loose and break.

Oenophiles often bring a wine suitcase with them. It’s a suitcase specifically lined and designed to carry up to 12 bottles of wine safely. They start at about $200 but will cost less than repeatedly shipping wine from Europe and you won’t need to wait for the delivery. If you have less than 12 bottles, you can use the extra space for clothing.

If you’re visiting other popular international destinations for wine in South America, the Mideast or Oceania, wineries in those countries will ship to the US. They’ll likely pass on the shipping cost to you but it’s less money and more convenient than shipping it yourself.

Any state laws and restrictions, including being 21 years old, are still in effect.

There is no federal limit on how much wine you can bring back from an international trip. US Customs advises that up to one liter is duty-free but state laws still take precedence. Customs also warns that although there is no limit on how much wine you can bring back, more than 12 bottles will likely set off red flags.

Lastly, if your wine journey takes you to Napa Valley, Sonoma or the Great Lakes, most wineries in the US will ship directly to you if state law allows it. Investing in a wine suitcase is the quickest, safest, and most cost-effective option, whether international or domestic travel.