

The Saber Travels: Château Élan

A taste of French wine country less than an hour from busy Atlanta, GA.

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Distance from Columbus: 153 miles. Best Route: I-185N and I-85N

Château Élan Winery – the name conjures up images of lush green vineyards loaded with a myriad of grapes in every color imaginable under the Provencal sunset. For the epicurean student in us all, Château Élan offers events ranging from wine tastings, cooking classes, an art gallery, and even an equestrian center.

Opened in 1984 by Don and Nancy Panoz, Château Élan offers a sophistication that matches that commonly associated with much larger cities. However, Château Élan is not just a winery; with a real estate agency nearby, the particularly affluent can live in this bit of paradise found in the middle of Georgia. It's not cheap, though – houses start around \$400,000. More a resort than a simple vineyard, Swedish massages can be had after a long day hitting holes-in-one at Château Élan's two 18-hole golf courses, or at the Legends private golf club. If the sport that made Tiger Woods isn't your style, the Stan Smith tennis center has three clay courts and four hard courts for your inner Agassi.

3,500 acres of forest and nature trails can be had for the hikers and cyclists who would rather move across natural turf than a rebound surface. Bicycles can be rented and picked up at the front desk of the Inn, but the service is only offered to registered, overnight guests. Private bicycles are allowed, but all riders are required to wear a helmet and sign in at the front desk. The rental cost is \$20 per bike.

Fitness facilities offer more than 20 yoga and aerobic class per week, as well as personal training sessions. Even if one chooses to forgo the spa services, participation is still allowed in Spa Fitness programs for \$25 per weekday and \$35 per weekend (including Friday).

The winery grows an assorted variety of grapes that range from Chambourcin to Merlot and Muscadine, among others. A full wine list can be found on the website (<http://www.chateauelan.com>). Wine-making classes are offered for those seeking to make their own wine for a more personal palate.

Certainly not the least expensive of destinations, Château Élan targets those with fine tastes and the wallets that accompany them. A good destination for the upcoming Valentine's Day, treat your significant other to a night of sophisticated dining and entertainment they won't soon forget.