

Airlines upgrading wine cellars to woo passengers

By Elin McCoy, Bloomberg Markets

This past spring, Joost Heymeijer arrived in Bordeaux with the Emirates airline wine team for a four-day marathon of tasting barrel samples. They ended up purchasing almost 1 million bottles as futures, zeroing in on 60 famed crus classés, such as Château Cheval Blanc. When the wines are ready to drink, they'll be poured gratis in Emirates' first and business classes.

"A long journey looks a lot better with a glass of fine Bordeaux or champagne," says Heymeijer, who's in charge of the airline's in-flight catering. "That's why we've spent half a billion dollars on the wine program over the past decade."

Emirates is one of many airlines adding elite wines to the list of luxury perks like massage beds and Michelin-starred cuisine as a long-term strategy to win wealthy travelers' loyalty.

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