

Filippo Magnani
25th Anniversary Interview Questions

**Italian Wine Travel Pioneer and Writer Filippo Magnani
Celebrates 25th Anniversary of Fufluns Wine Travel Concierge in Italy**

Celebrating a quarter-century of excellence, Fufluns Wine Travel Concierge, led by Filippo Magnani, commemorates its 25th anniversary, marking a significant milestone in delivering unparalleled wine travel experiences throughout Italy.

You are celebrating 25 years of your company, Fufluns Wine Travel Concierge, which specializes in personalized wine tours and experiences throughout Italy. Can you share a bit about when and how you started Fufluns?

Upon graduating with a degree in Hotel and Tourism Management from the University of Economics in Florence, followed by an MBA in Hospitality Management from Brighton University, UK., I worked as an F&B Manager in several luxury hotel chains, aspiring to become a hotel general manager. In 1996, a visit to Napa Valley sparked the idea of creating a wine travel agency in Tuscany, my homeland. I traveled extensively through premier wine regions worldwide, and in 1999, at the age of 26, I founded Fufluns, a travel concierge company specializing in customized wine tours in Italy for wine professionals and enthusiasts. Soon, I immersed myself into the world of wine, earning a degree from Le Conseil Interprofessionnel du Vin de Bordeaux, France in 2001, followed by WSET Diploma in 2006.

How has the landscape of wine tourism in Italy evolved over the last 25 years?

In the 1990s, wine tourism was not yet recognized as a distinct market segment in Italy. International visitors came for the art and history, for beautiful cities, the sea, and mountains, and for business trips, and while they may have been attracted to Italian cuisine, olive oil, and wine, very few wineries were open for tastings at that time.

Little by little, the Italian wine sector recognized the potential for wine tourism. Organizations like Movimento Turismo del Vino and Le Donne del Vino (women of wine) started promoting winery visits, sommelier associations opened courses to wine lovers, Italian wine consortia began to market their regions as wine travel destinations, and media attention grew around gastro-tourism. National tourism campaigns highlighted Italian wine, food, and lifestyle, while wineries realized the benefits of promoting, building their brands, and selling directly to estate visitors. Today, wine estates both large and small - from famous names to hidden gems - have opened their doors, and many have invested in visitors by building deluxe wine resorts. From Trentino Alto Adige in the Alps all the way to the boot of Italy in Sicily, wine travelers now receive a fantastic welcome with different experiences at each winery.

What strategies have you employed to develop and sustain a successful path for Fufluns over the past 25 years?

From the beginning, I have consistently invested time and effort into expanding my know-how and expertise in wine, wine territories, hospitality, and tourism. My strategy has involved extensive travel throughout Italy, particularly in wine regions, to deepen my understanding of these territories, meet wine producers, and connect with local people and communities. Simultaneously, I have wholeheartedly immersed myself in the wine world and continuously strive to learn as much as possible to keep up with its vast information and ever-evolving nature. My guests, team, and industry peers expect well-informed responses and advice, so staying knowledgeable in both wine and hospitality is crucial. Another important aspect that has been a “must” for me has been to build personal relationships based on trust, honesty, and professionalism, often leading to lasting friendships.

How have your clients evolved from the inception of Fufluns to the present day?

When I began my journey at the age of 26, the concept of organizing trips centered around wine was virtually unheard of. The first 2-3 years were very challenging, with me conducting daily tours in my Alfa Romeo around Tuscany, accompanied by families from Germany and Holland following me in their cars. At that time, clients paid 35,000 lira per person for a 3-hour guided tour, which did not yield much profit and attracted clients with limited interest in wine. However, as my knowledge of wine grew and I established relationships with both premium producers and smaller wineries, as well as made connections with wine writers and schools, my clientele began to change. I started to attract more experienced travelers, who were passionate about wine.

Today, I oversee and coordinate a team of 10 talented individuals who cater to private wine collectors, oenophiles, wine auction donors, groups of wine professionals, and wine clubs throughout the year. This evolution has allowed Fufluns to distinguish itself by offering our guests unparalleled access to Italy's wine regions, with an overarching commitment to excellence and customer satisfaction.

What regions or wine districts do you cover in your tours, and how do you choose them?

When I first started out, I organized daily tours along the Tuscan coast, focused on the areas between Suvereto, my hometown, and nearby Bolgheri. Gradually, I expanded to offer multi-day itineraries that included renowned Tuscan wine areas such as Chianti Classico, Brunello di Montalcino, and Nobile di Montepulciano. For the past 15 years, the Fufluns team and I have been organizing bespoke wine travel experiences all across Italy.

Initially, international wine travelers mainly requested visits to the well-known A-B-C wine territories: "A" for Amarone della Valpolicella in Veneto, "B" for Barolo, Barbaresco in Piedmont, and Bolgheri, Brunello in Tuscany, and "C" for Chianti Classico in Tuscany. These areas are celebrated for producing premium wines and have become iconic destinations. Today, however, there is a strong desire to discover all of Italy's diverse wine landscapes. Wine enthusiasts are now eager to explore the more off-the-beaten-path areas, smaller, family-owned wineries, and even the diverse array of native Italian varieties. Under my supervision, the Fufluns team is dedicated to crafting personalized wine journeys in regions such as Sicily, Campania, Puglia, Umbria, Emilia-Romagna, Friuli-Venezia-Giulia, Trentino-Alto Adige, and beyond, ensuring a rich and varied exploration of Italy's wine country.

Can you tell us about your team and their roles in delivering the Fufluns experience?

Building meaningful human relationships is at the core of what I do, both personally and professionally. For Fufluns, I've assembled a talented team of professionals whom I trust to deliver first-class services. In our back office, we have two dedicated individuals who meticulously plan and organize every detail of our programs. In the field, I work with a team of ten wine expert guides, all of whom are either WSET-certified or Master Sommeliers. These individuals are not only professionals but also friends and long-time collaborators, so I have complete confidence in their abilities. Our local wine experts provide insights and experiences that are difficult to match. Together, our team's goal is to create intimate, genuine connections between our guests and the local culture, people, and wineries. These authentic experiences allow visitors to immerse themselves in the Italian way of life, going beyond just wine tasting to truly connect with Italy's rich wine heritage and culture. The combination of our team's expert knowledge and personal attention is why our clients return time and time again to explore Italy with us.

How would you describe your vision and approach to creating immersive travel experiences?

Our vision at Fufluns is to provide an authentic and immersive travel experience that allows guests to deeply connect with the essence of Italy's wine regions. We aim to be the ultimate ambassadors of Italian wine culture, offering personalized, luxury wine tours that highlight not only the renowned wine areas but also the hidden gems of Italy. Our approach is centered around meticulous curation and personalization, ensuring that each tour is tailored to the individual interests and preferences of our guests. We believe in leveraging our intimate local knowledge and relationships to offer unique experiences that go beyond the typical tourist paths, allowing our guests to become true locals, experts, and lovers of Italy.

By maintaining a focused dedication to Italy's diverse wine culture, and an unwavering commitment to crafting exclusive, authentic experiences, we strive to set the gold standard in wine tourism. Our vision for the future includes expanding our offerings while continuing to uphold the personal touch and high-quality experiences that have become synonymous with Fufluns. Our goal is to create unforgettable journeys that celebrate the beauty, tradition, and spirit of Italian wine.

For your roles as a wine writer and advisor, how do you approach writing about Italy and its wines to capture their essence for your audience?

As an independent wine writer who first started writing about Italian wine in 2007, I have always aimed to bring the rich tapestry of Italian wine to life for my audience. My contributions to esteemed publications, including Liz Palmer's site and The Beauty of the Wine in Canada, Wine Channel in China, Vinum in Croatia, and Decanter, along with my personal blog, Tales Behind the Wine, are each centered around providing in-depth insights into Italy's wine heritage. My approach is to share expert knowledge, exclusive insights, and unique wine experiences in order to elevate the global wine community's understanding and appreciation of Italian wine and travel.

In my writing, I focus on the territories of wine production and the people who work within these areas, particularly the producers who are the heart and soul of Italian wine. I strive to capture the essence of Italy's varied wine destinations and the passion of its wine producers, showcasing the depth and diversity of the country's viticultural wealth.

As a proud Italian, I do my best to embody the spirit, the pride, and the style of Italy in my work, celebrating its viticultural legacy and the warmth of its people. My goal is to invite the world to discover and appreciate the allure of Italian wine culture, fostering a deeper exploration of Italy's wine regions and the stories behind its wines.

How do you intend to celebrate the significant milestone of 25 years in the wine sector, both personally and with your company?

I feel honored to celebrate this achievement in several different ways this year. First, I am thrilled to debut an enhanced Fufluns website, featuring a range of new personalized, comprehensive, and deluxe wine itineraries throughout Italy. Visit www.fufluns.com to learn more. I am also pleased to showcase a refreshed version of my personal website, www.filippomagani.it, focused on my writings and collaborations, consulting experiences, and career achievements.

In addition, I am excited to announce the launch of a quarterly newsletter with a new logo *“A Journey Through Italian Wines”*. Featuring captivating insights into Italy's wine destinations, exclusive interviews with key personalities in the wine and hospitality industry, detailed wine tasting notes, and selected excerpts from my personal blog, this newsletter aims to further enrich the understanding and appreciation of Italian wine culture among enthusiasts and professionals worldwide.

Furthermore, throughout 2024, I will personally lead tours for various wine club groups and private wine collectors across Italy. These tours, featuring long-standing partners and loyal clients, are a special celebration of Fufluns' 25th anniversary, allowing me to share the beauty and richness of Italy's wine regions and producers with those who have supported this journey. As Fufluns continues to innovate in the wine travel space, my goal is to continue strengthening my expert team, further enhancing Fufluns' ability to offer unique and memorable wine experiences while maintaining the personal touch that has distinguished us in the industry.

Lastly, I'm pleased to participate in a charity auction as part of The Golden Vines Awards next October in Madrid. For the occasion, I have created a special auction item: “VIP Experience - Discovering the Iconic Bolgheri”, in which I will personally accompany six passionate donors on a visit to the historic estates of this famed Tuscan region. All proceeds will be donated to the Gérard Basset Foundation, an organization of which I am grateful to have the opportunity to make a small contribution.

