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WINE ENTHUSIAST MAGAZINE / WEB 2012 / WASHINGTON WINE COUNTRY FOR THE INSIDER



Washington Wine Country for the Insider

Exploring four scenic havens for wine, food and outdoor activities in the unspoiled Pacific Northwest.

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The ongoing expansion of wineries, tasting rooms and related amenities throughout Washington State has dramatically upgraded the state's appeal for adventurous wine tourists. Washington's 700-plus wineries offer the diversity of California within a more constrained geographic region. From the hub of Seattle, none of the four touring regions profiled here is more than a four-hour drive. The two largest regions (in terms of wineries)—Woodinville and Walla Walla—neatly bookend the state. In both locations you will find scores of small, family-owned wineries, as well as a handful of larger facilities, along with excellent dining and lodging options.

The tiny American Viticultural Areas (AVAs) of Lake Chelan and Columbia Gorge have far fewer wineries, but outstanding recreational opportunities, as well as breathtaking scenery. In all four locations visitors will find tasting rooms staffed with owners, winemakers, or extremely knowledgeable staff. Tasting room fees are a fraction of what you would pay in Napa, and usually are applied to your first purchase. Tasting rooms in the region have a reputation for welcoming visitors, and most provide a casual, relaxing ambiance. The weather in eastern Washington is at its best in the spring, early summer and fall. July and August are hot, though Chelan and the Gorge have a large lake and river to cool things off. It turns out that the Washington Wine Commission's claim, "The Perfect Climate For Wine" is also the perfect climate for wine touring.

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Parts of the Columbia Gorge offer stunning views of Oregon's Mount Hood.

Vineyard & Winery, which produces wines using grapes sourced from a century-old vineyard. A short drive away are Phelps Creek Vineyards and Wy'East Vineyards, arguably the region's best Pinot producers. Find a map at columbiagorgewine.com.

Leaving downtown Hood River, cross over the bridge to Washington, and continue your tasting at Syncline Wine Cellars, where wines made from Rhône varieties are the passion, notably Syrah, Mourvèdre and some inspired blends. The view from the tasting room of nearby Memaloose winery must be seen to be believed; bring a picnic and enjoy the breathtaking panorama of vineyards, mountains, river and sky, while sipping the Estate Cabernet Franc.

Continue a few miles east to Maryhill Winery. The site of a popular summer concert series, the winery's tasting room adjoins a well-stocked gift shop and offers an expansive lineup of wines, including an excellent Zinfandel.

WHERE TO DINE: On the Oregon side, Simon's Cliff House at the Columbia Gorge Hotel is noteworthy for its

Columbia Gorge

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The Columbia Gorge AVA lies within the boundaries of the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area, along a 15-mile stretch of the Columbia River. It includes vineyards and wineries on both the Oregon and Washington sides. Fans of history and a slower pace will love the region: More than 30 wineries and vineyards, most quite small, recall charming, rustic wine touring as it was in the past. The Gorge is an unbeatable place to combine wine touring with windsurfing, kite boarding, snow skiing, white-water rafting, salmon fishing, mountain biking and more.

WHERE TO TASTE: A pleasant hour's drive east from Portland, Oregon, brings you to the town of Hood River, the regional hub for food, wine and recreation. Several tasting rooms are right downtown. Don't miss The Pines 1852

extensive regional wine list and terrace dining overlooking the hotel gardens. Celilo Restaurant and Bar in downtown Hood River sources everything—tea and coffee, produce, seafood, pork, lamb and beef—locally, sustainably and in an environmentally responsible fashion. On the Washington side, visit Henni's Kitchen and Bar in White Salmon for small-town, country-comfort food with flair.

WHERE TO STAY: Inns, B&Bs and boutique hotels abound, along with national motel chains. The area gets booked up during the summer months, so plan well ahead. If you want a cozy room in a small town, try The Lyle Hotel. The 16-room Inn of the White Salmon is a bit more utilitarian, but well located. Other good options include the historic Columbia Gorge Hotel and the Columbia Cliff Villas Hotel, both just west of downtown Hood River.

OTHER ACTIVITIES: Don't miss the Maryhill Museum of Art. Originally a private mansion, its permanent collection includes 80 sculptures and watercolors by Auguste Rodin. Nearby is an exact, full-size replica of Stonehenge.

FOR THE BUDGET MINDED: Stay in a circa-1923 cabin at historic Carson Mineral Hot Springs. It's a great place to unwind and "take the waters."

INSIDER TIPS: The Columbia Gorge Discovery Center sits on 54 acres just outside of The Dalles, one of the oldest continuously occupied areas in North America (for nearly 11,000 years). It also provides access to the Lewis and Clark and Oregon Trails. The Columbia Gorge Wine & Pear Fest and the Fruit Loop Celebrations showcase the region's orchards in full bloom.

Join the [Syncline Wine Club](#) (membership is free) and you'll get invited to one of the region's best summer parties. The Syncline Wine Club Party, scheduled for July 20–21, is hosted every summer at the family-owned property and includes tastings of library and limited-release wines, a catered dinner, live music and dancing. Club members get 20% discounts on all their purchases as well as free tastings at the winery.



Guests overlook Lake Chelan from the concert grounds at Tsillan Cellars.

Lake Chelan

One of the newest (and smallest) AVAs in Washington, Lake Chelan is home to roughly 20 wineries. The scenery here is spectacular, centered by the largest natural lake in Washington State. A well-established tourist industry attracts crowds in the summers, but ensures that there are plenty of family-friendly outdoor activities. Many wineries sell their wines almost exclusively out of their tasting rooms, which feature splendid views, picnic areas, well-stocked gift shops, full-service restaurants and outdoor summer concerts.

WHERE TO TASTE: A dedicated wine tourist can literally visit all the Lake Chelan tasting rooms in a long weekend. Along the lake's south shore, close to the town of Chelan, a half dozen are clustered within a few minutes drive. Don't miss Tsillan (it's pronounced Chelan) Cellars, with its Tuscan-style tasting room and lovely outdoor concert grounds. Nearby

Nefarious Cellars is a husband-and-wife project with some thrilling, estategrown Syrahs in the lineup.

Along the lake's north shore, the wineries are a bit more scattered. From downtown Chelan, Vin du Lac is the closest

winery stop; the Riesling are especially good. Benson Vineyards Estate Winery has a fine patio with a sweeping lake view; nearby is Lake Chelan Winery, which hosts daily barbecues and has the largest gift shop and tasting room in the valley. Hard Row to Hoe Vineyards offers free vineyard tours and one of the warmest welcomes, with sassy wines and saucy stories. Even the wallpaper has tales to tell...go there and see it for yourself.

WHERE TO DINE: Café Manson, though open just three nights per week (Saturday, Sunday and Monday), offers farm-grown foods made from scratch—risotto is a specialty. The Riverwalk Inn is a good option for breakfast and lunch, and features local wine and beer. For pizza or burgers, try Orchard Wood Ovens, My Buddy's Place and Local Myth Pizza. Maki Sushi is great for a change of pace, with specialty rolls, such as the Samurai, with extra-spicy tuna, jalapeño pepper, shredded crab, hot chili sauce and scallions rolled in sesame seeds; or the Stehekin, with unagi, shiitake mushrooms, red ginger and carrots, topped with tobiko, avocado and scallions.

WHERE TO STAY: The Lake House at Chelan combines the comforts of a private home with the services and amenities of a top resort—there's also a pool, bonfire and s'mores nights. Wapato Point on Lake Chelan is a perfect launching pad for various boating and recreational activities. Campbell's Resort is right on the beach, and is family-oriented. The Mountain View Lodge in Manson on the lake's north shore is a popular retreat for weddings and reunions.

OTHER ACTIVITIES: Chelan Cycle de Vine (June 23) draws several hundred riders into town for an approximately 35-mile tour. ChelanMan, a triathlon/ half-marathon in July, has an event for every level of athletic ability. Taste the local bounty at the various farmers' markets in Chelan on Thursday evenings and Saturday mornings.

FOR THE BUDGET MINDED: Just a short distance from Chelan in nearby Orondo, you'll find camping at Beebe Bridge Park and Daroga State Park.

INSIDER TIPS: Well worth an all-day trip is the isolated town of Stehekin, located just south of the North Cascades National Park. While there, visit the Stehekin Pastry Co. for its celebrated baked-from-scratch muffins and cinnamon rolls or take the shuttle to Rainbow Falls State Park. Time to relax? Swim with the locals at Manson Bay Park, or rent a boat from the Manson Bay Marina and cruise the lake at your own pace. In the evening, hang with the locals and enjoy live music and area wines at The Vogue, or enjoy a glass of wine and an array of artisanal cheeses at Lake Chelan Cheese.

Chelan's historic **Ruby Theatre** opened in the summer of 1914 and is believed to be the oldest continuously running movie theater in Washington State. Visitors today are promised "Comfort and Courtesy, Clean, Wholesome Dramas and Good Projection"—the theatre's original motto. Watch a movie in the preserved interior space, which features a horseshoe-shaped balcony, pressed tin ceiling and vine-decorated proscenium.

Walla Walla

Home to Cayuse Vineyards, Dunham Cellars, K Vintners, Leonetti Cellar, Woodward Canyon and dozens of other boutique wineries, the Walla Walla Valley is the eastern epicenter for Washington wine touring. One of the oldest cities in the Northwest, it is ringed by the Blue Mountains, verdant vineyards and thousands of unbroken acres of rolling, wheat-covered hills. Superb dining and nonstop recreational and cultural activities make this a place worth visiting for a full week if you can.

WHERE TO TASTE: Grab a free touring map at any tasting room. More than two dozen are within walking distance of downtown, and many, such as Charles Smith Wines, Sapolil, Sinclair Estate Vineyards and Walla Faces, often feature live music. In the historic Marcus Whitman Hotel, Tero Estates and Flying Trout pour outstanding reds.

Got a car? A full day can be spent touring the airport wineries. What were once abandoned military buildings are now home to Buty, Dunham Cellars, Syzygy, Tamarack Cellars and many more. Continue just a few miles further east and visit Walla Walla Vintners and àMaurice Cellars, set on a hilltop with stunning views of the Blue Mountains.



Visitors to Walla Walla Vintners might encounter owners/winemakers Gordon Venneri (left) and Myles Anderson behind the tasting bar.

About 15 miles west of downtown are three of the region's founding wineries: L'Ecole No. 41, Waterbrook and Woodward Canyon. You can easily taste a couple dozen wines among them. Three Rivers Winery and Reiningier are other close-by must-sees. If you want to sip wine in the vineyards, head south. Northstar and Pepper Bridge, tiny Beresan and Balboa, Va Piano Vineyards and Waters, Saviah Cellars and Sleight of Hand Cellars are side-by-side, interesting stops—truly an embarrassment of riches.

WHERE TO DINE: Saffron Mediterranean Kitchen, with James Beard-nominated chef Chris Ainsworth, is the hot ticket and reservations are practically required. Whitehouse-Crawford Restaurant offers an extensive menu of locally sourced foods in a renovated 1904 planing mill. Local favorites include the gently healthy Green Spoon, the bistro-inspired Brasserie Four with frites to die for; and rising star Bacon & Eggs for breakfast served Thursday thru Tuesday from 8 am to 2 pm.

WHERE TO STAY: The landmark Marcus Whitman Hotel is central, classy and convenient. Walla Faces offers rooms in a vineyard just east of town, as well as suites located in the historic downtown. Among dozens of B&Bs, the deluxe farm-country ambiance of the Inn at Abeja, the spacious, Victorian elegance of Vine & Roses Bed & Breakfast and the down-home comforts of the Fat Duck Inn are standouts.

OTHER ACTIVITIES: Farmers' markets, antique auto shows, rodeos, sheep-shearing competitions, demolition derbies, world-class golf, the Shakespeare Walla Walla Summer Festival, The Walla Walla Chamber Music Festival, Walla Walla Sweets baseball games and a visit to the Montillet Fromagerie (the first farmstead artisanal cheese facility located in the Walla Walla Valley)—the options are nearly endless.

FOR THE BUDGET MINDED: The Ice-Burg Drive-In, owned by Tamarack's Ron Coleman, serves up burgers and fries in the old-school tradition.

INSIDER TIPS: A bucolic 20-minute drive through wheat country brings you to Waitsburg, home of can't-miss spots like The Anchor Bar, jimgermanbar (a cocktail hot spot) and Whoopemup Hollow Café, serving up Southern comfort foods. It's Main Street America, perfectly preserved. On weekends, the Walla Walla Farmers' Market is packed with locals seeking fresh produce, baked goods and live music. Cugini Import Italian Foods, just west of downtown, is the place for take-out cheeses and cold cuts, or complete heat-and-eat dinners.

Sign up for the Downtown [Walla Walla Foundation](#) free e-newsletter to receive information on all of the latest local wine and food festivals, music concerts, performing arts shows, gallery walks and restaurant openings. The best time to visit Walla Walla is in June when the weather is great and the amateur baseball team—the Sweets—are playing ball.

Woodinville

Woodinville is a bedroom community about a 45-minute drive northeast from downtown Seattle. Chateau Ste. Michelle and Columbia Winery are the anchors for a burgeoning community of garage winemakers and dozens of



The courtyard at Chateau Ste. Michelle is a quiet spot to relax with one of the winery's many offerings.

tasting rooms. Vineyards are scarce, but along with easy access from the city, the main attraction here is the opportunity to meet so many eager young vintners in a rustic, laid-back setting. All but a handful of veterans have been in business for a decade or less.

WHERE TO TASTE: Begin tasting at Chateau Ste. Michelle and Columbia Winery—which produce a variety of wines—just across the street from each other. Both feature expansive tasting rooms and tourist-friendly gift shops. Up the road is the ultramodern Novelty Hill and Januik tasting room. Veteran winemaker Mike Januik oversees the winemaking for both: Try the budget-priced Januik Red or one of the single-vineyard Cabernets.

At Hollywood Hill Vineyards you'll find Pinot Noir and Chardonnay vines just outside the barrel room—a rarity in western Washington. Nearby is the Mark

Ryan Winery tasting room, with its explosive reds. Across the street is Brian Carter Cellars, another veteran producer whose tasting room staff is eager to talk through the wines and shed light on the regional wine culture. The winery specializes in unusual blends, such as the Oriana White (Viognier, Roussanne and Riesling).

If your travels won't take you to eastern Washington, Woodinville brings the wineries and wines closer to you. Standouts include DeLille, known for its Chaleur Estate Bordeaux-style blend, and Efeste, whose Big Papa Old Block Cabernet captures the best of Washington in a single bottle. Many wineries offer special tastings and events; for more information, check out [Woodinville Wine Country's Web site](#) and the [Woodinville Warehouse Wineries site](#).

WHERE TO DINE: The Herbfarm (a Wine Enthusiast Best 100 Wine Restaurants pick) is the ultimate foodie heaven, with a massive Northwest-based wine list and seasonally themed dinner extravaganzas. For casual dining, try the Big Fish Grill for seafood, Italianissimo Ristorante for housemade pasta or Racha for specialty Thai noodles.

WHERE TO STAY: The Willows Lodge is where all visiting wine-and-food celebs stay. It's classy, yet comfortably rustic, with a spa and gardens. Its Barking Frog Restaurant boasts an outstanding Washington wine list, and serves hearty breakfasts and regionally inspired lunch and dinner items, like a grilled Snake River Farms pork chop with pickled apple glaze. The lodge also hosts wine tastings in its Fireside Cellars, with happy hour tapas and live music. It's easy walking distance to many tasting rooms and a brewpub.

OTHER ACTIVITIES: At the height of Washington's best weather, check out the Bastille Day celebration at DeLille Cellars. The setting of this lovely country estate can't be beat. Consider visiting in August for the annual Auction of Washington Wines, which includes barrel tastings, winemaker dinners and a gala auction of some of the best wines Washington has to offer.

FOR THE BUDGET MINDED: Happy hour specials at Pho Vina cure hunger pangs—and you'll likely run into local winemakers.

INSIDER TIPS: Need a break from the region's rich red wine? Hoof it on over to the Redhook brewery and take their \$1 brewery tour, which includes tastes of up to five beers. Live music and a popular Moonlight Cinema Series are also on tap. Marry music and wine with the summer concerts on the lawn at Chateau Ste. Michelle; the winery attracts top

jazz, rock, blues and contemporary artists to the intimate outdoor amphitheatre. Join the free mailing list for early announcements about each summer's lineup.

This August, on the groomed grounds of Woodinville's Chateau Ste. Michelle, the [Auction of Washington Wines](#) will celebrate its 25th anniversary with four days of tasting events featuring nearly 3,500 participants. For a casual and affordable outing, attend the Picnic & Barrel Auction on August 16, where you can meet winemakers, taste their new releases (and library gems), and eat gourmet picnic fare. Tickets are \$125 until June 1 (\$150 after).

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An excellent overview of Washington Wine Country Paul with enough insider info to make a trip to any region something special. I like it! – Chuck Reininger, Reininger Winery.

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Very Nice Article about Lake Chelan AVA... Great place to be from and a great place to share with others. <http://www.ChelanProperties.com>

[Reply](#) · [5](#) · [Like](#) · [Follow Post](#) · April 26 at 4:25pm**Greg Lill** · President, CEO, co-owner at DeLille Cellars

Great article and I like all the insider tips! Thank you Paul!

[Reply](#) · [4](#) · [Like](#) · [Follow Post](#) · April 26 at 10:42am**Scott Milburn** · University of Virginia

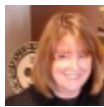
Great article! Too bad Yakima Valley is not covered, as I'm heading there in a few hours for barrel tasting weekend.

[Reply](#) · [Like](#) · April 27 at 6:40am**Fat Duck Inn**

Thanks for the shout out for the [Fat Duck Inn](#) Paul!

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Nice article on Washington Wine Country! We are honored to have been mentioned!

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Jan Roskelley – did you see this? NICE!

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