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Democracy Dies in Darkness

Add these 3 scenic cities to your Pacific Northwest itinerary

Along the Washington-Oregon border, Walla Walla, Hood River and Astoria each have a unique personality

Advice by Alex Pulaski
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Covered bridge at the Abeja Winery & Inn near Walla Walla. (Alex Pulaski for The Washington Post)

Walla Walla

In fall, the rolling hills surrounding Walla Walla, about four hours east of Portland, shimmer with ankle-high harvested wheat. The yellow-gold is interspersed by green vineyards heavy with grapes awaiting harvest and their future home inside a wine bottle.

When Joan Monteillet was growing up here in the 1960s, she said, “it was just a Podunk town surrounded by wheat farms.”

That assessment arrived while we sampled a selection of creamy, subtle sheep and goat’s milk cheeses that she and her husband, Pierre-Louis Monteillet, have perfected over the past 25 years at [Monteillet Fromagerie](#).

The area’s food scene has evolved during that span to keep pace with Walla Walla’s burgeoning reputation as a wine-lover’s destination. More than 120 wineries call the Walla Walla Valley home today, more than double the total in the early 2000s.

The downtown core is thriving, with restaurants, shops and more than 30 wine-tasting rooms. One of the very few that also houses a production winery is the gorgeous [Seven Hills Winery](#), set in a century-old wood mill. As we sampled a series of robust reds — merlot, cabernet sauvignon, a Bordeaux blend and petit verdot — winemaker Bobby Richards passed through, his mind on imminent harvest scheduling.

“We’re on the high dive, about to take the plunge,” he said.

Also in town, and mixing art with wine, is [Foundry Vineyards](#), with a big patio and gallery space. The Walla Walla Valley is divided into six winemaking districts that even reach slightly into Oregon; options are many, and we enjoyed [Reininger](#), [L’Ecole No 41](#) and [Pepper Bridge Winery](#).

Dining options are varied, from the hearty, homestyle breakfasts at the [Maple Counter Café](#) to handmade pasta at [Passatempo Taverna](#) to the Southern flair (think summer corn and grilled pork collar) of [Hattaway’s on Alder](#).

To be simply transported by a meal, stop for the heavenly tacos (short rib, brisket, marinated pork and more) at [AK's Mercado](#). Chef/owner Andrae Bopp's attention to detail includes importing corn from southern Mexico and grinding it on-site for tortillas.

A short drive from town, the [Inn at Abeja](#) offers a peaceful respite on a 38-acre farmstead, with luxurious surroundings (imagine Norman Rockwell's vision of a turn-of-the-century farm), superb dining and the opportunity to sip a 2014 cabernet sauvignon on your veranda.

Vestiges of Lewis and Clark's journey remain nearby. At the [Fort Walla Walla Museum](#), a diorama demonstrates the Corps' exchanging of gifts with a local Native American chief. About 45 minutes northeast of the city, the [Patit Creek Campsite's](#) metal silhouette sculptures represent party members, a lingering reminder of their passing.

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