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Downtown Walla Walla

3 Amazing Days in Walla Walla

BY ALLEN COX

Have you ever gone away for a long weekend only to ask yourself, when it's over, where the time went? Those fleeting days are actually a sign that you're enjoying your time away more than you might have anticipated. Three days of one amazing discovery after another pass until the weekend's a blur. Time seems to speed up. Boredom never enters the equation. Post-trip, you have to revisit your photos to remember everything you did. Some destinations naturally lend themselves to the "fleeting weekend" phenomenon, and Walla Walla, Washington, is one such place. You'll want more, to return again and again.

D Start your adventure as soon as you roll into town with Walla Walla's most unusual and surprising eatery, Andrae's Kitchen. You'll pull into the parking lot of a gas station and convenience store, and, yes, you're in the right place. Don't be put off by fact that your table is next to the candy, gum and jerky aisle. Instead of choosing lunch from a hot dog rotisserie or ordering convenience-store nachos, you'll gaze up at a menu offering everything from house-smoked brisket to fresh beignets. Sample as much as your appetite can handle and be sure to include the tacos—the corn is imported from Mexico and ground in the back room for the homemade tortillas. It didn't take long for owner and chef Andrae Bopp to become a local legend since his arrival in Walla Walla more than a decade ago. He started with a food truck; then, as lines snaked around the block, he decided on a brick-and-mortar location in a convenience store. And why not? People come to Andrae's Kitchen for the food, not the ambiance.

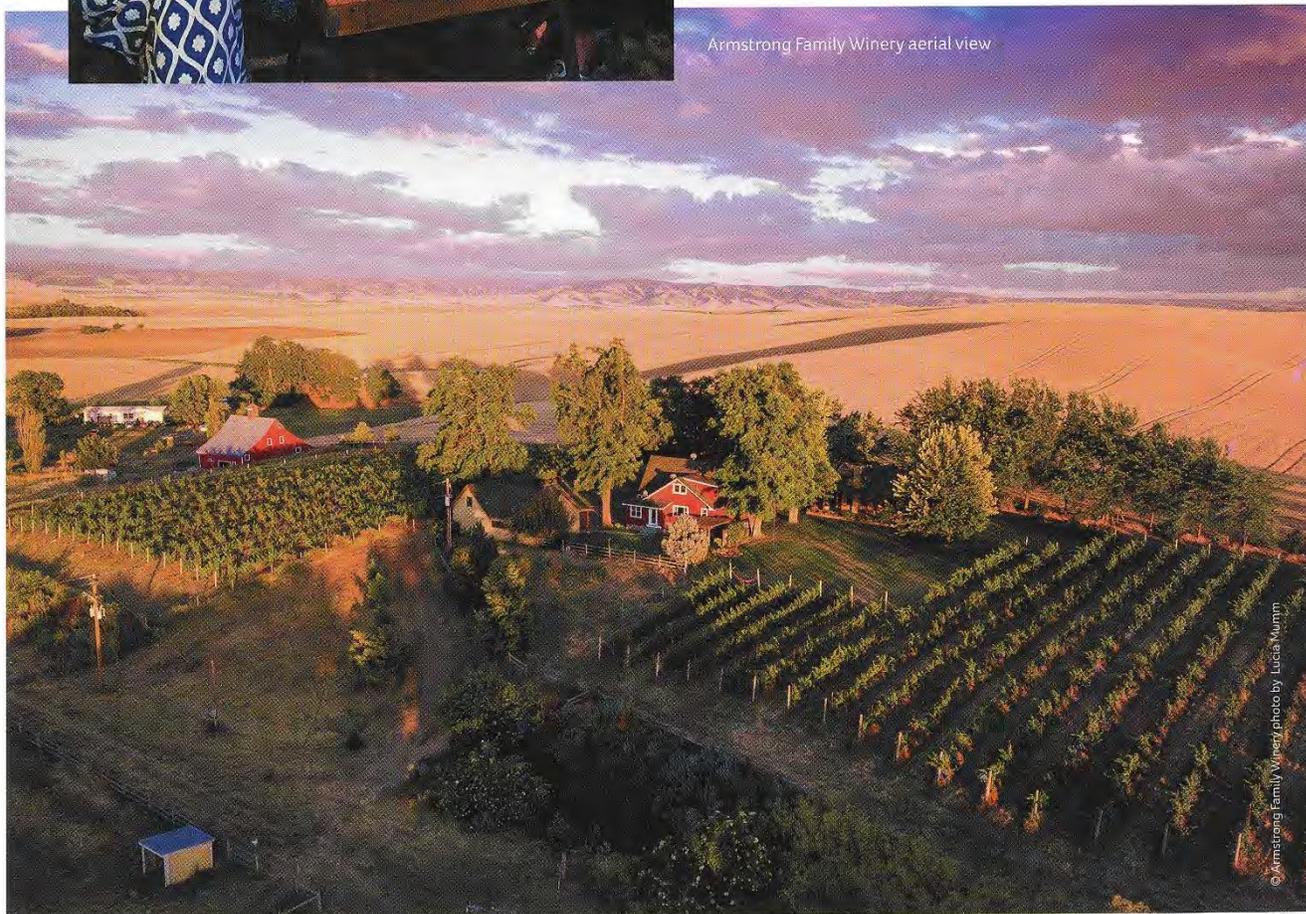


Next, drive downtown to Armstrong Family Winery's tasting room for your introduction to this renowned wine region. The Armstrong's vineyards and production facility are located on their 22-acre farm just out of town. Their inviting downtown tasting room sits in a heritage building that showcases the city's architectural roots and exhibits photos of the farm and vineyards. Their 2016 Four Birds is a merlot-based blend that won double gold at the Seattle Wine Awards.

Walla Walla has become a major wine grape-growing region with more than 80 wineries. Besides downtown tasting rooms, wineries and vineyards surround the city in all directions. But there's much more to a Walla Walla getaway than wine tasting, as you'll discover over the next few days.

Drive to Walla Walla's Eastside, where you'll check in for the next two nights at The Inn at

Armstrong Family Winery aerial view



© Armstrong Family Winery photo by Lucia Mumin

Abeja, one of the finest country inns in the Northwest, located among the vineyards at the winery, Abeja. You'll choose from rooms in the original farmhouse to cottages and suites in the farm's repurposed out buildings. Stroll the grounds, watch the resident wild turkeys, taste Abeja's wines and enjoy a gourmet breakfast every morning.

After settling in and relaxing, head back downtown for dinner. Walla Walla is a food-lover's city, and the dining choices are many. Tonight, select Hattaway's on Alder, a relatively new restaurant that prides itself on using local ingredients for their interpretations of the American Southeastern cuisine. Start with freshly made potato chips with Walla Walla sweet onion dip or their take on a Southern classic—pimiento cheese made with Beecher's Flagship cheese—both perfect accompaniments to pre-dinner craft cocktails. The creative menu is designed to satisfy every diner's cravings, from carnivore to vegan.

DRIVE

After breakfast, begin today's adventures with a nature hike. Follow Highway 12 out of town to Dayton and turn right on Route 64, which will slowly ascend into the Blue Mountains in the Umatilla National Forest. This scenic drive passes through various ecological zones, from agricultural lands to an alpine ridge with views of a canyon and layered mountains rising in the east. When you reach



Hattaway's on Alder photo by Jaina Dotolo



Doubleback Winery



The Inn at Abeja vinyard view

© The Inn at Abeja

the forest, park at a safe spot and enjoy the route on foot. This little-traveled route is known as the Kendall Skyline Road and, with virtually no traffic, is perfect for an easy hike. Walk as far as you wish and turn around and retrace your steps back to your vehicle. After a spot sporting spectacular views on both sides of the ridge, the road will descend and wind up back in Walla Walla.

By the time you return to Walla Walla, you'll have worked up an appetite. Grab a table at Walla Walla Bread Company, one of the best bakeries in the state, for a wood-fire pizza or a sandwich on their famous bread.

By now you've earned an afternoon of winery-hopping. With so many to choose from, decisions can be daunting. Concentrate on one area of town—the South End—to hit some top-shelf wineries.

Begin at Va Piano Winery to sample owner and winemaker Justin Wylie's quest to craft the perfect cabernet sauvignon. Of course, Wylie works with other varietals as well, like syrah, cab franc and chardonnay. The tasting room and grounds present an oasis that invites visitors to linger over Va Piano's fine lineup.

Next, drive less than 10 minutes to Vital Wines. As a nonprofit, this winery is all about giving back to the industry and to the people who work so hard to turn its

gears. Proceeds help fund a local clinic that provides free health care to vineyard workers. Step up to the counter and taste winemaker Ashley Trout's big reds that Walla Walla is known for.

Finish your South End tasting tour at Doubleback Winery's modern, airy tasting room, only a short drive from Vital Wines. Doubleback is the post-retirement passion of former NFL quarterback and Walla Walla native Drew Bledsoe. Tastings are by appointment (please call ahead) and showcase the fine craftsmanship of winemaker Josh McDaniels in working with cabernet sauvignon and cab blends.

On your way back to town, stop at Revelry Vintners to sample their lineup that includes Columbia Valley whites and fine reds. In his Aerial Series, founder and winemaker Jared Burns is dedicated to crafting single-clone, single vineyard, single-varietal reds to showcase the purity of a single terroir.

Downtown, the recently opened Walla Walla Steak Company (owned by the company that introduced the Northwest to El Gaucho steakhouses) is a must for dinner. Besides steak and other selections done to perfection, the restaurant's wine list was just named one of the country's top 100 wine restaurants by *Wine Enthusiast*. After all, you are in wine country.