

NORTHWEST TRAVEL AND OUTDOORS

Washington's Premier Wine Destination is Getting Even Better

Start planning your Walla Walla escape.

BY: KRISTEN RUSSELL | FROM THE PRINT EDITION | AUGUST 2017



Image Credit: Long Shadows

At Long Shadows Vintners, guests can enjoy tasting wine in the Chihuly Room featuring work by famed glass artist Dale Chihuly

With short odds on sunshine and an adorable historic downtown—and tasting rooms pouring some of the best wines in the region—Walla Walla should top any wine lover's bucket list. But this fall, there are new reasons to visit (or revisit): the opening of a major new resort and two celebrated new dining options. Add to that the recent arrival of Uber, and you've got near-perfect conditions for a stellar wine-tasting getaway.

Slated to open sometime this fall is [E'ritage, a multimillion-dollar collaboration](#) between Va Piano Vineyards owner Justin Wylie, Seattle chef Jason Wilson and a number of investors. The first phase of the resort, which is located north of town, will include a 10-room bed-and-breakfast and an onsite restaurant tucked along the shores of an artificial lake.

There are increasingly more options to the dreary chain hotels that ring the town or the default accommodation, The Marcus Whitman hotel. (Plans were recently announced for the multi-story Penrose in downtown Walla Walla, with a projected 2018 opening.) Plan well in advance to score one of the cottages at The Inn at Abeja, a lovingly restored farmstead on lush, sprawling grounds, or settle into a quiet, comfy fireplace suite at Walla Faces Inn at the Vineyard. Then, map out your strategy for sampling some of the best wines in the state.

With more than 120 wineries to choose from—including the acclaimed Leonetti Cellar, L’Ecole No. 41 and Woodward Canyon—a visit to Walla Walla can seem overwhelming. As you pore over your options, consider tossing in a few that offer sips with a twist: tasting adventures infused with music, art and even golf.

Enjoy local live music and a lush, away-from-it-all ambiance just east of downtown, at tucked-away Tranche Cellars. Owned by the Corliss family, Tranche’s new tasting room is at once spacious and intimate, with floor-to-ceiling windows that open onto rolling hills, and a banded wooden ceiling reminiscent of a wine barrel. Be sure to visit on a late Friday afternoon, when you can take in everything from coffeehouse guitar to alt-rock while sipping by the fire pit on the tranquil estate.

On the south side of town you’ll find cult darling Sleight of Hand Cellars, where Pearl Jam–obsessed winemaker Trey Busch has created a tasting room like no other. His vast vinyl collection spins amid a veritable Pearl Jam museum, and the wine club includes digital downloads from Sub Pop Records with every shipment. (Get a local preview at Sleight of Hand’s new tasting room in Seattle’s SoDo district.)

Art lovers shouldn’t miss the sculpture garden at Foundry Vineyards, the labor-of-love gallery and winery created by the family behind the internationally acclaimed Walla Walla Foundry. On display now in the garden: “Azlon,” a hypnotic kinetic sculpture by Orcas Island’s Anthony Howe; this month, the indoor gallery is featuring works by local artist Keiko Hara.

Head a few miles west of town to soak up the sweeping views and spectacular glass art at Long Shadows Vintners, a collaboration between former Chateau Ste. Michelle CEO Allen Shoup and celebrated international winemakers.



Photograph by Emily Riley: Bocconcini Dolce from Passatempo Taverna

For dinner, book weeks (or better yet, months) in advance for a table at the splendid new Passatempo Taverna, whose bar is led by Northwest cocktail legend Jim German (of the beloved but now-closed Jimgermanbar in nearby Waitsburg), featuring rustic Italian cuisine by executive chef Aaron Mooney, and owned by Mike Martin, founder of the excellent The Walls Vineyards. Also sample hyperlocal food, artfully prepared, at The Ox & Cart, a chic farm-to-table bistro that serves some of the best meals around. Next morning, fortify yourself for a long day of drinking with a bright brunch at The Maple Counter Cafe, where the lines can be long but the blintzes are heavenly. Spare some time to stroll amid the restored Victorian and Beaux Arts buildings of Walla Walla’s historic Main Street, replete with tidy shops, can’t-miss wineries and tasting rooms (Mark Ryan, Cayuse Vineyards), and a Saturday farmers’ market (May–October).

Insider tip

If you’re lucky enough to have several days to spend here, organize your tasting adventure by area—westside, downtown, airport, eastside and southside—taking a day to explore the wineries in each.

Getting there: *Walla Walla is about a four-and-a-half-hour drive southeast of Seattle, via I-90 east and I-182 east.*

Coordinates

STAY:

E'ritage, Walla Walla, 1281 Bergevin Springs Road; 509.529.0900

Inn at Abeja, Walla Walla, 2014 Mill Creek Road; 509.522.1234; \$325–\$625

The Marcus Whitman, Walla Walla, 6 W Rose St.; 509.525.2200; from \$149

Walla Faces Inn at the Vineyard, Walla Walla, 254 Wheat Ridge Lane; 877.301.1181; \$100–\$295

SIP:

Foundry Vineyards, Walla Walla, 1111 Abadie St.; 509.529.0736

Long Shadows Vintners Winery and Tasting Room, Walla Walla, 1604 Frenchtown Road; 509.526.0905;
info@longshadows.com

Sleight of Hand Cellars, Walla Walla, 1959 J B George Road; 509.525.3661

Three Rivers Winery, Walla Walla, 5641 U.S. Highway 12; 509.526.9463

Tranche Cellars, Walla Walla, 705 Berney Drive; 509.526.3500

EAT:

Maple Counter Cafe, Walla Walla, 209 E Alder St.; 509.876.2527

Passatempo Taverna, Walla Walla, 215 W Main St.; 509.876.8822

The Ox & Cart, Walla Walla, 7 1/2 First Ave.; 509.525.9952