



**D**o you have a bucket list? If you're reading my blog and are the least bit interested in travel, you must have one, even if only a few destinations are present. For me, the more I travel the more places I add to my ever-growing list.

Recently, I was able to tick off a destination I've had on my [electronic bucket list](#) for a while now: visit the vineyards of Washington state. I've explored the wineries of Napa and have been tipsy in Sonoma. I drank my way through my favorite vineyards in Mendoza. I visited the Tuscan hills of Italy and discovered delectable wines of New Zealand and Adelaide, Australia. Ah oh. I was becoming a wine snob, but here's the thing...



*"Life is too short to drink bad wine."*

I love all things international, but I also love to drink domestic. Every American knows the world famous wine region in northern California. But what about in southeastern Washington at the foothills of the Blue Mountains? With a population of 30,000 people, Walla Walla is small in size but big in personality. I've frolicked on the beaches of Belize and mingled with the Israeli locals, but I have never experienced a warmer welcome than in rural Washington state.

### **The Experience**



The Homeland Tribes called this area Walla Walla, meaning a place of many waters due to the many streams here. To me, it's a place so nice, they named it twice. I have never met a group of strangers who were so willing and ready to make sure someone whom they've never met (me) was about to have the time of her life in wine country. I had more genuine, friendly conversations in a 10 mile radius than ever before. I was welcomed back into more people's homes than ever before. I had more bottles of wine gifted to me than ever before, and I was truly humbled by this overwhelming sense of hospitality. If more people could be like Walla Wallans, the world would be a better place.

### **The Itinerary**

Many of my readers have requested my exact itineraries. Lucky for you, I provided Walla Walla's itinerary below! I'd highly suggest copying all of it, drinking your way through the valley one red or white at a time.

With a unique blend of climate, character, charm and culture, the Walla Walla Valley has become home to one of the finest wine regions in the nation, with more than 100 wineries and 2,800 acres of grapes. Grab a glass and let's get to drinking...

### **FRIDAY**

*Arrival:* Arrive in Walla Walla @ 5:30 p.m. just in time for a party in my honor.

*Reception:* 6:30 p.m. – Waldheim Mansion

As a means of conveying Walla Walla's reputation for hospitality, a welcome reception was held at the Waldheim Mansion by "Mama" Julia Russell and her husband Roger, owners of [Mansion Creek Cellars](#). To Mama Julia and Roger, thank you from the bottom of my heart for opening your doors to a complete stranger and opening your wine for hardly a connoisseur. I do know great wine when I taste it, and yours is "the best!" as you say it is!

*Event:* 6-10 p.m. – [Dunham Days](#)

Oh, what a night! Now in its 7th year, the much anticipated Dunham Days celebration at Dunham Cellars annually attracts hundreds of locals to celebrate the beginning of harvest season in Walla Walla. Think live music, copious amounts of wine and the liveliest crowd you'll ever meet. If you caught me swinging dancing on Snapchat a few weeks ago, it took place at this fine party.

## SATURDAY

*Pick-up:* 9:30 a.m. – Wine tasting/touring transportation

I was picked up bright and early by wine expert Daylan Gibbard in his vintage 1962 Pontiac Tempest convertible for a day of wine tasting and touring. Surprise! By lunch, we switched out cars like ballers and spent the remainder of the day in a 1948 Pontiac Silver Streak. What did I do to deserve this treatment?!

*Breakfast:* 9:30 a.m. – [Bacon and Eggs Restaurant](#)

This breakfast staple has everything I desire in the morning hours: bacon, eggs, biscuits and gravy, pancakes, granola, amongst other caloric intakes. What more could you ask for after a night of wine indulgence? Short answer: nothing (except more wine).

*Experience:* 11 a.m. – [Pepper Bridge Winery](#) Food & Wine Pairing in the Cellar

An exclusive wine & food pairing? Twist my arm. Sure, it's easy to pair a bold red with an even bolder meat, but it doesn't have to be the usual suspects. Here, Manager Jenn Clapp challenges guests with different pairings. A Cab Sav was matched with beets, a highly unusual couple that definitely won over the tastebuds. Jenn explained how, for example, you can pair fish with red wine, but just think about how you prepare it. Don't do a citrus glaze with big red wine, and definitely don't write things off because you have preconceived notions about something (read: Merlot and Chardonnay).

*Experience:* 1:00 p.m. @ [Sleight of Hand Cellars](#)

This eclectic tasting room is full of vivid colors, tastes and sounds – quite the threesome if you ask me. The winemaker, Trey Busch, loves some good tunes just as much as he loves a good Cab. Being the Pearl Jam fanatic that he is, he went ahead and named the winery after one of the band’s songs. The names of his wines then followed suit. My favorite is known as The Illusionist, a 2012 Cabernet Sauvignon which incorporates 5% Cabernet Franc and 3% Petit Verdot. Mmmmmm.

*Experience:* 2:00 p.m. @ [Abeja Winery](#).

Spanish for the word ‘bee,’ Abeja is straight out of a winery storybook, if there is such a thing. Their focus is Cabernet Sauvignon which was delightful, but my focus was on the stunning grounds and interiors. With a beautiful inn and narnia-like feel, it’s no wonder they are booked out years in advance!



*Tasting/tour:* 3:45 p.m. – [Va Piano Vineyards](#)

Va Piano was last on our itinerary for the day, so you know what that meant: yes, I was a wee bit overserved, but not overserved enough to forget about the story that goes along with this Tuscan-style winery. Owner/winemaker Justin Wylie was seduced by the culture of Florence, Italy, while studying abroad. While overseas, Justin befriended a man named Father Bruno Segatta, dean of the school and an artist himself. Justin and Father Bruno’s longtime relationship can be seen in the winery’s production of Bruno’s Blend, a red blend bearing the Father’s paintings. His paintings even adorn the winery walls. During our tour, I was lucky to meet the man himself as he just so happened to be in town from Italy! I love a winery with a good story and even better people.