

VOGUE

Why Walla Walla, Washington Should be Your Next Wine Region Vacation



APRIL 6, 2018 3:32 PM
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The Blue Mountains in Walla Walla wine country
Photo: Alamy



Walla Walla. It's a fun name to say—and almost everyone who visits has a different way of saying it. The tiny town in southeastern Washington has been making a big name for itself as of late, growing from a small wheat farming community at the foot of the Blue Mountains to a world class wine destination with over 100 wineries in just a few short decades. But unlike many of the world's most famous grape-growing regions, Walla Walla doesn't specialize in one definitive varietal or style; thanks to a range of soils, elevation, and micro-climates, the area excels at everything from Cabernet Sauvignon to Tempranillo to Malbec to Merlot. Truly, a wine to suit every taste—and pronunciation. Still, if pressed, locals and critics alike will usually say that Walla Walla Syrah is the thing to get.

Don't go expecting the pine trees and misty skies of nearby Seattle or Portland; here, it's all about rolling hills covered with sage brush or rows and rows of grapevines. In the growing season, the verdancy of those vines creates an otherworldly effect against the otherwise arid land—especially as the sun begins to descend, coloring the sky with vibrant streaks of orange red. Walla Walla's sunsets are legendary and, truly, some of the most enchanting around.

The best time to visit? Really anytime. But if hard-pressed, aim for the first weekend in May—well after bud break and also when visitors can sample the Spring Release—or, better yet, mid-June, when internationally known growers and expert speakers descend on the town to celebrate the region's vast canon of wines.

Below, a few favorite spots not to be missed, should you decide to make the trek.

Where to Stay in Walla Walla

The Inn at Abeja

If one could magically conjure a real-life version of a storybook wine country hideaway, it would probably look a lot like Abeja. Of course, the setting doesn't hurt: 35 acres of golden wheat fields, meandering vineyards, flowering gardens, and wooded creeks all nestled against a ridiculously picturesque backdrop of undulating foothills and distant Blue Mountain peaks. But beyond the mesmerizing natural beauty, it's the innkeepers' thoughtful attention to detail that really sets this place apart. It's apparent at every turn—from the moment you make your way down the treelined driveway through the wooden entrance gate, and long after you've been handed your first glass of Chardonnay at check-in. Each of the eight guest suites occupies its own secluded spot of the property—either nestled in the corner of a gabled carriage house, the tower of a refurbished barn, or its own small cottage—and has been lovingly decorated with a mix of elegant antique finds and rustic country furnishings. (Don't miss the handmade lavender-flecked bath salts that sit alongside the dreamy clawfoot bathtubs in some of the rooms.) Breakfast at the Inn is an event unto itself, with a menu of dishes like local Walla Walla onion quiche or Northwest smoked salmon hash served in the tasting room alongside a grand fireplace.

Eritage

Local Va Piano winemaker Justin Wylie had a vision for the 300 acres of vineyards that stretch across the rolling hills just outside of downtown Walla Walla: a sleek but intimate design hotel the likes of which the area had never seen. To achieve his dream, he enlisted the help of two longtime friends who just happen to be well-versed in the world of hospitality: James Beard award-winning chef Jason Wilson and Chad Mackay of Seattle-based hospitality group Fire & Vine. Together, the three have crafted a modern mini resort complete with a ten airy suites, a pool, events space, and restaurant all centered around a crystalline lake and set to open later this spring.

Where to Wine in Walla Walla

L'ecole and Woodward Canyon

For a crash course in Walla Walla wine history, head to the western edge of town to two of the area's OG wineries. L'ecole, which is housed in a beautiful 1915 French schoolhouse, looks like something straight out of a Wes Anderson film and is an enchanting place to start. The roster here includes award-winning Chenin Blancs and Cabernet Sauvignon, all of which are available to sample in the schoolhouse's stained-glass accented tasting room. Afterwards, head next door to the farmhouse tasting room of Woodward Canyon. Though this winery was integral in establishing the Valley's appellation, it also makes a variety of wines produced from other Washington grapes, so it's a great place to learn about—and taste—vintages from the state's other appellations as well.

Bella Fortuna Tours

With over 100 wineries in the area, figuring out where to taste can be daunting, to say the least. For groups of two or more, consider hiring a guide—not only will it take the guesswork out of winery-hopping, but it also means you won't have to worry about driving after several glasses of Syrah, Malbec, and Chardonnay. Sharon Martin of Bella Fortuna is the real deal; not only does she have a background in enology and viticulture, but she's also a Walla Walla native with close ties to all of the town's important players.

Where to Dine in Walla Walla

Brasserie Four

Ask any local for a restaurant recommendation and they'll be quick to point you towards Brasserie Four. Located on Main Street right downtown, this sweet little spot offers French-inspired classics (moules frites, entrecôte steak, foie gras burgers) made with super fresh ingredients from nearby farms and purveyors. Best of all, the wine list leans heavily on local wines, making it easy to sample some of the region's harder to find Cabernets and Syrahs. Just be warned: It can be hard to get a table so call ahead to make a reservation.

Walla Walla Bread Company

Before Walla Walla was a wine town it was a wheat town, and the remnants of that history can still be seen in the old grain silos and elevators that dot each distant field. Walla Walla Bread Company, housed in an airy building on the corner of Main Street, makes good on that history by using only locally-raised wheat. Though baked goods, wood-fired pizzas, and sandwiches are obviously the stars of the show, there's plenty here for the gluten-adverse as well: hearty dishes like chicken and rice, corned beef hash, steak and eggs, and super lush salads flecked with seafood.