

walla walla wine guide

Walla Walla wine guide: Nestled in the southeastern corner of Washington State, Walla Walla is a burgeoning wine region that has garnered acclaim for its exceptional vineyards, diverse varietals, and picturesque landscapes. This article serves as a comprehensive guide to Walla Walla's wine offerings, providing insights into its history, key wineries, tasting experiences, and tips for visitors.

History of Walla Walla Wine Region

Walla Walla's viticultural history dates back to the mid-1800s when the first settlers began to cultivate grapes for personal use. However, it wasn't until the 1970s that commercial winemaking took off, thanks to pioneers like Gary Figgins and the founding of Leonetti Cellar. Their success inspired a wave of new wineries, and by the 2000s, Walla Walla had firmly established itself as a premier wine destination.

Today, the Walla Walla Valley is recognized as an American Viticultural Area (AVA) and spans parts of both Washington and Oregon. The region benefits from a unique climate characterized by hot summers, cold winters, and well-drained soils—ideal conditions for grape growing.

Walla Walla Wine Varietals

Walla Walla is known for producing a wide array of varietals, but several stand out as the hallmarks of the region:

1. Cabernet Sauvignon

Cabernet Sauvignon thrives in the warm climate of Walla Walla, yielding bold, full-bodied wines with prominent tannins and dark fruit flavors. Many wineries in the area produce exceptional Cabernets that showcase the terroir's complexity.

2. Merlot

Merlot from Walla Walla tends to be rich and velvety, often with notes of plum, chocolate, and herbs. It has gained recognition for its smooth finish and balanced acidity.

3. Syrah

Walla Walla Syrah is known for its boldness and complexity, often exhibiting flavors of dark berries, pepper, and earthy undertones. It is considered one of the standout varietals of the region.

4. Grenache

This varietal is increasingly popular in Walla Walla, producing wines that are fruit-forward with a lovely balance of acidity. Grenache can be enjoyed on its own or blended with other varietals.

5. Sauvignon Blanc

While red wines dominate the region, Walla Walla also produces excellent white wines. Sauvignon Blanc offers crisp acidity and flavors of citrus and green apple, making it a refreshing choice.

Top Wineries to Visit

Walla Walla is home to over 120 wineries, each with its unique offerings and charm. Here are some must-visit wineries that showcase the best of the region:

1. **Leonetti Cellar** - One of the pioneers of the Walla Walla wine industry, Leonetti is known for its Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot. The winery offers limited tastings by appointment only, ensuring a personalized experience.
2. **Woodward Canyon** - This winery combines stunning architecture with exceptional wines. Woodward Canyon produces a range of varietals, including Cabernet Sauvignon and Chardonnay, and offers guided tastings in a serene setting.
3. **Charles Smith Wines** - Known for its bold and innovative winemaking style, Charles Smith Wines has gained a cult following. The tasting room features a unique design and offers a variety of wines, including the popular "Kung Fu Girl" Riesling.
4. **K Vintners** - Founded by winemaker Charles Smith, K Vintners focuses on single-vineyard wines that highlight the terroir. Their Syrah is particularly noteworthy, often receiving high praise from critics.
5. **Seven Hills Winery** - With a focus on sustainable practices, Seven Hills Winery produces a range of wines that reflect the essence of Walla Walla. Their Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot are especially popular among visitors.

Tasting Experiences

Walla Walla offers a variety of tasting experiences, from intimate sit-down sessions to larger group tastings. Here are some options to consider:

1. Private Tastings

Many wineries offer private tastings, allowing guests to enjoy a more personalized experience. These tastings often include food pairings and discussions with the winemaker or knowledgeable staff.

2. Wine Tours

Consider booking a wine tour to explore multiple wineries in one day. Local tour companies provide transportation and guided experiences, making it easy to sample a variety of wines without the worry of driving.

3. Festivals and Events

Walla Walla hosts several wine festivals and events throughout the year, such as the Walla Walla Wine Alliance's "Spring Release Weekend" and "Fall Release Weekend." These events feature tastings, food pairings, and live music, making them a great way to immerse yourself in the local wine culture.

4. Outdoor Tastings

Take advantage of Walla Walla's beautiful landscapes by enjoying outdoor tastings. Many wineries have patios or gardens where visitors can sip wine while taking in stunning views of the vineyards and rolling hills.

Dining and Accommodation

After a day of wine tasting, visitors can explore Walla Walla's culinary scene and find comfortable accommodations.

Dining Options

Walla Walla offers a diverse range of dining options, from casual eateries to fine dining establishments. Some popular choices include:

- **Whitehouse-Crawford** - Located in a historic building, this restaurant emphasizes seasonal ingredients and offers a curated wine list featuring local wines.
- **Brasserie Four** - A French-inspired bistro, Brasserie Four features a menu filled with classic dishes and an extensive wine selection.
- **Pasta Gianni** - This Italian restaurant is known for its homemade pasta and warm ambiance, making it a favorite among locals and visitors alike.

Accommodation Options

Walla Walla provides various lodging options to suit different preferences and budgets:

- **Luxury Hotels** - The Marcus Whitman Hotel and Conference Center offers elegant accommodations and is conveniently located in downtown Walla Walla.
- **Bed and Breakfasts** - For a more intimate experience, consider staying at one of the charming bed and breakfasts in the area, such as the Baker Boyer House.
- **Vacation Rentals** - Many visitors opt for vacation rentals to enjoy a home-like atmosphere, with options ranging from cozy cottages to spacious homes.

Tips for Visiting Walla Walla

To make the most of your visit to Walla Walla, consider the following tips:

1. **Plan Ahead** - Many wineries require reservations for tastings, especially during peak seasons. Be sure to check ahead and book your appointments.
2. **Stay Hydrated** - Wine tasting can be dehydrating, so remember to drink plenty of water throughout the day.
3. **Take Notes** - With so many wines to sample, it can be helpful to take notes on your favorites to remember them for future purchases.
4. **Explore Beyond Wine** - Walla Walla is rich in history and culture, so take time to explore local art galleries, shops, and historical sites.

Conclusion

The Walla Walla wine guide illustrates the charm and richness of this exceptional wine region. With its varied terroir, talented winemakers, and vibrant food scene, Walla Walla is a must-visit destination for wine enthusiasts and casual drinkers alike. Whether you're indulging in a private tasting at a renowned winery or enjoying a meal paired with local wines, Walla Walla offers a memorable experience for all who venture to this beautiful corner of Washington.

Frequently Asked Questions

What are the best wineries to visit in Walla Walla?

Some of the best wineries in Walla Walla include Leonetti Cellar, Woodward Canyon, and Dunham Cellars, each offering unique tasting experiences and exceptional wines.

What types of wine are most commonly produced in Walla Walla?

Walla Walla is renowned for its Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, and Syrah, but also produces great blends and varietals like Grenache and Chardonnay.

When is the best time to visit Walla Walla for wine tasting?

The best time to visit Walla Walla for wine tasting is during the spring (April to June) and fall (September to October) when the weather is pleasant and many wineries host events.

Are there any wine tours available in Walla Walla?

Yes, there are several wine tour companies in Walla Walla that offer guided tastings and transportation between wineries, making it easy to explore the region.

What food pairings are recommended with Walla Walla wines?

Walla Walla wines pair well with a variety of foods; for example, Cabernet Sauvignon complements grilled meats, while Syrah goes nicely with barbecue and spicy dishes.

Can I find local accommodations near Walla Walla wineries?

Yes, there are numerous accommodations ranging from luxury hotels to cozy bed and breakfasts, as well as vacation rentals close to the wineries.

What events are held in Walla Walla that focus on wine?

Walla Walla hosts several wine-related events throughout the year, such as the Walla Walla Wine Auction, Fall Release Weekend, and the annual Walla Walla Valley Wine and Food Festival.

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