

// WEEKENDER

WALLA WALLA

This small Washington city punches above its weight in terms of wine and food, making it an ideal weekend destination, finds Fiona Tapp



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DAY ONE

Walla Walla is one of the most fertile agricultural areas in the United States, producing crops such as wheat, asparagus, strawberries and sweet onions. But it's probably best known as wine country. French fur trappers arrived here in the 1840s, planting the first grapes. Italian immigrants joined them, bringing winemaking traditions from the motherland — and a new wine industry was born.

Whether arriving on a flight or driving from Portland, Oregon or Seattle (which are all about 4.5 hours away), there are plenty of

ways to stretch your legs and get your bearings. Head downtown to stroll around or rent a bike. Aleggro Cyclery holds weekly group rides on a variety of different trails for all ability levels and can answer questions about local attractions. For those who prefer to head out on their own, cycle out to explore Bennington Lake Recreation Area. Before the journey, stock up on local cheese at Monteillet Fromagerie for a simple on-the-go lunch, or head back into town to the Hidden Valley Bakery for gluten free artisan sandwiches.

Visit the 19th century military fort at Fort Walla Walla Museum in the afternoon, where visitors can learn all about life in pioneer times.

After working up an appetite, it's time for dinner. Food trucks are a big deal across Washington state and the trend permeates from Seattle all the way to this little city of just 33,000 residents. Try the Walla Walla Wienery for gourmet hot dogs from its turquoise-hued truck on East Issacs Avenue.

After eating, take in some music or a comedy show at the Gesa Power House Theatre, a former gas plant.



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Clockwise from left: Vineyard, Columbia River Gorge; Cayuse Vineyards; pancakes, Maple Counter Cafe

DAY TWO

Start the day with blueberry cobbler French toast at the Maple Counter Cafe before heading for a most unusual attraction. The Museum of Un-Natural History is only open from 10am to 2pm on Saturdays, and features a motley collection of oddities and artifacts. Owner and curator Gerald Matthews is available to answer visitors' questions and to revel in the responses to his collection of surreal and satirical art and sculpture.

For lunch, check out the Walla Walla Bread Company, where artisan loaves and pastries are baked on site. Try the house-made brisket on corn beef hash, or for those with a sweeter tooth, the sublime waffles served with candied nuts.

Wine events pepper the calendar all year round, but it's worth heading to the valley in May to attend the Spring Release, when local winemakers unveil their new vintages. There are also summer festivals, a Fall release and Christmas barrel tastings held at many of the 130 wineries that operate over 2,800 acres of prime agricultural land.

Interestingly, Walla Walla actually straddles the same latitude as Burgundy and Bordeaux. Here cabernet sauvignon, syrah and merlot varieties reign supreme. Start at Tero Estates, a small lot producer where every bunch of grapes is hand-harvested. Make an appointment for tastings at the estate or pop into the downtown tasting room during regular opening hours.

This leaves just enough time to freshen up before attending a winemaker dinner, which are available at many vineyards, including Vintners, and feature multiple courses with expert wine pairings and sell out quickly. Be sure to reserve a spot before arriving.

DAY THREE

With its world-class reputation for producing fine wine, it's no surprise Walla Walla is also appreciated by gastronomes. Visit the twice-weekly farmers' market at Heritage Square Park on Thursday evenings or on Saturdays at the downtown farmers' market pavilion and pick up some fresh local produce.

The February is for Foodies month-long celebrations are worth checking out, or if you're there in April, welcome the spring by taking part in the Feast Walla Walla festival. Those in town in July can enjoy the Walla Walla Sweet Onion Festival, which celebrates Washington's state vegetable.

Learn more about the people who named Walla Walla at the Tamástslikt Cultural Institute, about an hour out of town. Exhibits and artwork on display celebrate the rich culture of the indigenous nations of the Northwest Plateau. Visit the on-site cafe for hot drinks and huckleberry pastries.

Head back downtown and meander round the charming antique and vintage stores to find that perfect souvenir. Try Trove on East Main Street for lovingly restored homewares or Yeehaw Aloha, on East Issacs, for unusual thrift discoveries.

Visitors may come for the wine, but Walla Walla also has a growing brewery and distillery scene. Crossbuck Brewing gives a front row seat to the brewing process, while also serving brisket burgers and flatbreads. Their bourbon stout brownie provides a perfect boozy finale.

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To book your Walla Walla trip, contact our travel agency – the number's on the back.

// ESSENTIALS



When to go: Spring, summer and fall are good times to visit, with 260 days of average annual sunshine providing the perfect climate for producing wine. Winters can be cold, with snowfall.

Currency: US dollar

Language: English

Getting around: Public transit and Uber are available, but to get out of town and to vineyards spread across the county, it makes sense to hire a car.



BOOK IT NOW

Explore this unique city for your next long weekend getaway. We'd be happy to help you plan all elements of the perfect gastronomic itinerary.