

Culture &gt; Travel

# The Best Walla Walla Wineries (and More) to Visit Right Now

BY REBECCA TOY



Image Courtesy of Abeja Winery and Inn

Walla Walla's status as a **barely-kept secret in wine is over**. More than 120 wineries call this southeastern city in Washington State home, and dozens of tasting rooms fill the compact downtown. Locals swear that the area's three colleges—which include Walla Walla Community College, notable for its enology program—infuse it with energy and creativity that's apparent from the vineyard to science lab to tasting room. Throw into the mix unassuming hospitality, an enthusiastic community of collaborative winemakers and world-class bottlings, and you've got a wine destination that lives up to its hype.

Walla Walla is nestled inside the Walla Walla Valley, which is located just west of the Blue Mountains and east of the convergence of the Columbia and Snake Rivers. The valley, which extends partly into the northeastern corner of neighboring Oregon, has enviable growing conditions for **Rhône** and **Bordeaux varietals**. Within the Walla Walla Valley AVA, the Rocks District creates a distinct style thanks to cobblestone-rich gravels made of **volcanic rock**, while porous loess-covered foothills characterize the Blue Mountains.

Walla Walla's downtown features more than 30 tasting rooms that highlight unique wine styles, passion projects and personalities. In the surrounding valleys, there's plenty more to explore. While the wineries that have been around since the region's beginnings in the 1970s and '80s certainly deserve a visit—**Leonetti Cellars**, **Woodward Canyon** and **L'Ecole**, for example—we asked industry insiders to point us toward even more buzz-worthy options that showcase what the region can do today.

# Wineries in Walla Walla Valley

## Abeja

Frost includes Abeja, a winery and inn set on a historic homestead estate that dates to 1863, on his shortlist for visitors. Named 2023's Winery of the Year by Great Northwest Wine, Abeja is dotted with turn-of-the-20th-century buildings, vineyards, gardens and lavender fields, with the creek cutting through. It produces light and accessible [Chardonnay](#) and a sophisticated and balanced flagship [Cabernet Sauvignon](#) in addition to other notable pours.

At the appointment-only tasting room, housed in a renovated barn, the \$40-a-person Traditional Abeja Tasting includes sips of current-release wines from the winery's Beekeeper and Columbia Valley collections. On sunny days, tastings move outdoors to the patio, which affords a panoramic view of the Blue Mountains.

**Where to Eat:** At the [Kitchen at Abeja](#), don't miss the five- and seven-course menus with dishes like lemon ricotta agnolotti swimming in porcini broth and Snake River Farms Denver steak served with mashed potatoes.

Alternatively, [Valdemar Estates](#), a quality winery, is also home to tapas spot [Pintxo by Valdemar](#). Here, diners can tuck into slivers of jamon Iberico and piquillo peppers stuffed with Dungeness crab, in addition to charred octopus crowned with chorizo aioli. "I don't know that there is better food in Walla Walla," says Brook.

Finally, if you're up for a drive, Brook says the 18-seat [Bar Bacetto](#) is worth the 30-ish-minute journey north to Waitsburg. Here, James Beard Foundation Award nominee Mike Easton whips up freshly made pasta and focaccia alongside [classic cocktails](#). Reservations are necessary for this intimate, 21-and-up spot.

**Where to Stay:** Brook also strongly recommends [the Barn B&B](#). The property is all suites, each with its own zen-like, 205-square-foot private garden. In the common areas, relax in the outdoor heated pool and hot tub, and enjoy international cuisine in the dining room, which boasts a soaring 30-foot-tall ceiling and tables made with local live-edge black walnut. In addition, several wineries offer lodgings, such as the peaceful [Inn at Abeja](#) and [Casa Grosgrain](#), a four-bedroom, remodeled vineyard house at [Grosgrain Vineyards](#).