



GLASSES HALF FULL

*Come sample the many fruits of
Washington's wine country.*

JUST TWO AND A HALF hours east of Seattle lies Washington's main wine country, an area that boasts arid soil, temperatures that fluctuate by about 40 degrees between day and night, and low rainfall—making this an ideal grape-growing location. In the area's more than 160 wineries, visitors will find many common grape varieties, such as cabernet sauvignon, merlot, syrah, and chardonnay.

In the Tri-Cities region (Richland, Pasco, and Kennewick), the geographic heart of wine country where the Yakima River meets the Columbia, visitors can sample the bottlings of Goose Ridge Estate Winery (509-628-3880; www.goosridge.com)—with luck, the Sol Duc Meritage, a rich red-wine blend—or taste at the Columbia Valley's pioneer in organic, no-sulfite-added wines, Badger Mountain (800-643-9463; www.badgermntvineyard.com). For sheer concentration of excellent wineries, enthusiasts can head to Red Mountain, where roughly a dozen wineries in close proximity—among them Benton City's Kiona (509-588-6716; www.kionawine.com), Terra Blanca (509-588-6082; www.terrablanca.com), and Hedges Family Estate (509-588-3155; www.hedgesfamilyestate.com)—craft some of the nation's most sought-after red wines with grapes from Washington's smallest designated viticultural area.

Farther east, the charming college town of Walla Walla also boasts red wine grapes of exceptional character and quality, which vintners such as Leonetti Cellar (509-525-1428; www.leonetticellar.com) and Woodward Canyon (509-525-4129; www.woodwardcanyon.com) have been turning into outstanding wines since the 1980s. And to the north and west in Yakima, avid oenophiles can visit a number of tasting rooms right downtown. Masset Winery even has a wine lounge (509-248-5251) that serves appetizers and desserts until 11 p.m. on weekends.

For those who want a full day outside with their tasting, a bottle of wine goes down well with a picnic by the river at peaceful Sacajawea State Park, at the confluence of the Snake and Columbia Rivers, just east of the Tri-Cities. Several wineries also offer tables for picnicking, including Tefft Cellars (888-549-7244; www.tefftcellars.com) in Outlook and Wapato's Windy Point Winery (509-877-6824; www.windypointvineyards.com), which, as its name suggests, offers hilltop views of the Yakima Valley. —AMANDA BALTAZAR