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Six Great American Wine Country Harvest Getaways

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By Jordan Simon

There are few more glorious times of year than autumn in wine country: Pickers combing the gold-and-green fields, warm weather with a hint of chill, the scent of both ripe and fermenting grapes the air. Harvest features fall-focused fairs, food, music, and activities to suit all tastes, budgets, and even ages (wineries increasingly feature kid-friendly activities). Plus wine regions often occupy historic areas, with burgeoning arts scenes and activities aplenty for adrenaline junkies from hot-air ballooning to dirt biking.

Yet the best time to visit, mid-September to late October, is also the busiest for winemakers; Napa and Sonoma are swarmed with visitors on fall weekends. Fortunately, all 50 states now produce wine (pineapple sparkler from Hawaii?) in such prime real estate as Virginia's Shenandoah Valley, the Texas Hill Country, and New York's trendy Long Island East End. We're toasting six wine regions—with tips on lodging, dining, and even the best bottles—heating up the grapevine. Remember that some wineries offer tastings or tours by appointment only.



California: Mendocino

For many, [Mendocino County](#) conjures images of rugged coast and vaulting redwoods, not neatly trellised vines. But nearly 100 wineries craft an astonishing range of wines over 10 appellations. Unsurprisingly, given its Technicolor grandeur (one that rivals Big Sur's coastline), the terroirs embrace coastal fog-shrouded valleys, forested mountain ridges, rolling green hills, and river benchlands. With a predominantly cooler climate yet higher sun-drenched elevations, grapes receive more hang time, intensifying flavor.

While the "noble" varietals, especially Chardonnay and Pinot Noir thrive, adventuresome vintners experiment with everything from Riesling to Roussanne, Syrah to Sangiovese. Fittingly, Mendocino boasts California's highest percentage of herbicide- and pesticide-free acreage (of all produce), with such industry leaders as Frey, America's oldest and largest purely organic operation, where even building materials were recycled from older wineries.

Where to Stay: The 130-year-old [MacCallum House](#) mixes old-fashioned romance with modern luxe. Many rooms in the renovated barn, main house, and water tower boast stunning Pacific views. Executive Chef Alan Kantor forages for fresh local ingredients, crafting everything in the acclaimed restaurant from scratch. The contemporary [Stevenswood Lodge](#) reflects Mendocino's back-to-nature philosophy. The 20-unit hotel is set amid acres of greenery teeming with wildlife;

most rooms feature fireplaces and ocean vistas. Indigo Eco-Spa uses locally formulated organic products, while the chef sources fresh, biodynamic ingredients for his Mediterranean cuisine.

Where to Eat: [Table 128](#), the restaurant at the Shaker-inspired 1865 Boonville Hotel, elevates comfort food to an art form with seasonal local ingredients. Johnny Schmitt, son of the French Laundry's former owners, and team prepare one three- or four-course prix-fixe meal per night, served family-style. [Cafe Beaujolais](#) serves Asian-accented French fare, from Dungeness crabcakes with scallion vinaigrette to Niman Ranch beef tartar, in a lemon-hued 1893 Victorian cottage surrounded by a garden with heirloom and exotic plants.

Where to Sip: 2007 and 2009 were excellent vintages. The bluff-top [Pacific Star](#) is the nation's westernmost winery and the most dramatically situated. February-June the crew takes whale-watching breaks while racking the wines, and owner Sally Ottoson claims her wines are naturally clarified without filtering by waves crashing into the sea caves under the cellar, gently rocking the barrels; salt deposits accelerate osmosis, further intensifying the juice.

Anderson Valley's [Handley Cellars](#) is noted for its sparklers; the Alsatian stalwarts, Riesling, Gewürztraminer, and Pinot Gris, are also marvelous. Owner Milla Handley's parents collected international folk art, so the tasting room doubles as a gallery, with pieces from Bali to Benin. Other must-stops: [Fetzer](#) (known for its five-acre garden with edible flowers, flowering herbs, and seasonal vegetables in addition to grapevines); [Navarro](#) (terrific-value Gewürztraminer, old-vine Zinfandel, and Pinot Noir); and [Roederer Estate](#) (owned by the famed Champagne house, crafting magnificent, unmistakably California sparklers with French finesse and complexity).

Best Bottles: Established during Prohibition (!) in 1932, [Parducci](#) offers fine values from its Small Lot series (\$11), including Petite Sirah and Sauvignon Blanc. [Black Kite](#) boasts two plush Anderson Valley Pinot Noirs, Angel Hawk and Redwood's Edge (\$75).



Northwest: Walla Walla, Washington

Think Washington and what comes to mind? Microbrews, Boeing, and Microsoft. But savvy oenophiles know there's more to drink here than Starbucks or Maibock. Though still in its infancy (wine growing didn't establish a foothold until the 1970s), Washington is already the country's second largest wine producer. Since 1999 a new winery has opened nearly every two weeks, despite the fact that conditions here are downright hostile for growing produce let alone premium grapes. Summer temps blaze to 110 degrees in the shade, and in winter, you'll feel the chill of 15F below.

But Washington's top appellations, Yakima and Walla Walla ("the town so nice they named it twice"), lie between the 46th and 48th parallels, just like Bordeaux, Loire, Burgundy, Piedmont, and northern Rhône. The town of Walla Walla is quaint and historic, where gourmet boîtes, B&Bs, and boutiques (in restored buildings showcasing an array of architectural styles) are sprouting nearly as quickly as grapevines, but its isolated location helps prevent total Napa-fication. Commissioned public art is

everywhere and weekend events, from hot air balloon stampedes to harvest fests prove equally colorful.

Where to Stay: [Abeja Inn](#) sits seductively in the Blue Mountains foothills. The original outbuildings on the 25-acre, century-old farmstead were restored and converted into the winery, barrel room, tasting room, and spacious accommodations with fully equipped kitchens, eclectic furnishings and antiques, and thoughtful touches like binoculars (for wildlife watching). Visit the winery, a Cabernet Sauvignon specialist, by appointment.

A \$30 million investment restored the [Marcus Whitman Hotel](#) to its 1928 splendor. Public spaces retain original chandeliers, sconces, and crown moldings, but the handsome rooms eschew historical accoutrements for the amenities and ambiance of a contemporary luxury business hotel (high-speed Internet to handcrafted Italian furnishings). Chef Antonio Campolio utilizes seasonal and organic local ingredients in The Marc restaurant, which offers 100 labels (showcasing local wines) and a chef's table.

Where to Eat: Converted from the 1880 Enterprise Planing Mill & Furniture Company, the [Whitehouse-Crawford](#) restaurant seamlessly blends 19th- and 21st-century architecture. The constantly changing menu, however, is strictly contemporary and is complemented by an extensive list of Washington wines.

Where to Sip: 2007 and 2008 have been real standouts for Walla Walla vintages. [Woodward Canyon](#), the valley's second oldest winery, occupies a 1870s farmhouse; despite "Woody's" well-deserved reputation (look for the Chards and Artist Series Cabs), production remains small. The Reserve House serves small plates, while the winery also runs the adjacent [Lazy S Arrow Market](#) with fabulous produce and gourmet goodies. Downtown's most remarkable architectural transformation is the [Seven Hills](#) facility in the Whitehouse-Crawford building. The tasting room and sky-lit barrel room have brick walls and whitewashed beams, with a picture window looking into the Whitehouse-Crawford restaurant. Also worth visiting are boutique Syrah specialists [K. Reiningger](#), and [Reynvaan](#), as well as [Three Rivers](#), [Bergevin Lane](#), [Dunham Cellars](#), and [Cougar Crest](#).

Best Bottles: Any of the single-vineyard 2008/9 [Cayuse](#) syrahs—En Cerise, Cailloux, Armada, En Chamberlin—(\$75) represent the blend of site-specific New World richness with French savvy. [L'Ecole No. 41](#) pours superlative handcrafted offerings; the 2010 Sémillon/Sauvignon Blanc (\$20) is wonderfully creamy with brisk minerality.



Southwest: Hill Country, Texas

Texans don't do small: The [Texas Hill Country](#) wine region encompasses roughly 15,000 square miles, the nation's third-largest American Viticultural Area (AVA), bigger than any in California. Fall Creek planted the first vines (other than 17th-century Spanish missionaries) in 1975; there are already 32 wineries. Depending on the report, the Hill Country is the second- or third-most-visited wine region after Napa and Sonoma, thanks to its proximity to Austin and San Antonio, not to mention ruggedly lovely landscape stippled with oaks and

mesquite and filigreed with streams. After some success with Cabernet Sauvignon, Chenin Blanc, Riesling, and Sauvignon Blanc, wineries are experimenting with grapes like Tempranillo (Spain's Rioja), Barbera (Italy's Piedmont), and Touriga Nacional (the leading Port variety, also used for dry table reds).

Where to Stay: Epitomizing rustic chic east of Fredericksburg, [Settlers Crossing](#) comprises seven historic, restored houses and log cabins chock-a-block with country antiques. The individually decorated accommodations run from a former B&B with two wood-burning fireplaces to a cabin with a 40-foot porch with rockers. Fodor's Choice [Riven Rock Ranch](#), a hilltop 19th-century farmhouse and three ranch-style cottages, holds nine elegant yet comfy accommodations, with Oriental rugs, hardwood floors, and fireplaces. Don't miss the wild boar sausage pizzas the Terrace Grill.

Where to Eat: Decked out with sleek abstract art, [August E's](#) is a poster child for seasonal "Nouveau Texas" cuisine. Thailand-born co-owner/chef Leu Savanh spices his meat-and-potatoes fare with Asian flair; nowhere else will you find sublime sushi and cheddar grits on the same menu. Leu and wife Dawn also run the recommended, nearby Ebers' Haus B&B. [The Salt Lick](#) lures barbecue aficionados for miles around, with lines forming whenever the Texas Longhorns play, serving heaping helpings of tender smoked brisket, tangy baby back ribs, and sausages that threaten to convert any nearby vegetarians.

Where to Sip: 2010 was stellar, 2009 solid; and 2005 reds are drinking superbly now. Richard and Bunny Becker of [Becker Vineyards](#) in Stonewall epitomize hands-on winemaking, even constructing much of the limestone barn winery while planting lavender fields and over 50 acres of Petit Verdot to Viognier. Try the Cabernet-Syrah, Texas Port, Provençal Rosé, and southern Rhône-style Prairie Rôtie. Other worthwhile stops include [Alamosa Wine Cellars](#), [Perissos Vineyard](#) (try the Roussanne), and the eco-friendly [Texas Hills Vineyards](#).

Best Bottles: [Duchman Family Winery](#) occupies a Tuscan-style building, appropriate since it specializes in Italian grapes like Sangiovese and Pinot Grigio. The 2010 Vermentino (\$14) is superlative, with whiffs of wisteria and sage as well as lime zest and bosc pear. The dense, dark [Fall Creek](#) 2008 Meritus (\$40) Bordeaux-style blend is jamming with forest fruits and earthiness; their Chenin Blanc is a steal at \$8, too.



Midwest: Leelanau Peninsula/Traverse City, Michigan

Northern Michigan's Traverse City is celebrated for cherries and a burgeoning arts scene (as well as its [Mario Batali-approved food scene](#)), but the surrounding area including the Leelanau Peninsula produces exceptional Pinot Gris, Gewürztraminer, and Riesling (both dry and ice wines) and increasingly intriguing cool-climate reds like Pinot Noir. Dubbed the "Third Coast" by locals, [Lake Michigan](#) offers glorious beaches as well as the splendidly scenic Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore.

Where to Stay: [Grand Traverse Resort & Spa](#) just south of Traverse City offers a range of well-appointed accommodations, a tasting room, top-shelf restaurants, a top-notch spa, and three top-hole 18-hole golf

courses, including Jack Nicklaus and Gary Player designs. In the heart of the Leelanau Peninsula, agri-tourists plant themselves at the [**Inn at Black Star Farms**](#) with two farm-to-table eateries, eight cushy B&B rooms, an equestrian facility, orchards, vineyards, a distillery, and a winery noted for its Arcturos Cabernet Franc, Chardonnay, and Riesling Ice Wine.

Where to Eat: Mario Batali swears by the sustainable fare at [**The Cooks' House**](#), like braised oxtail with cheddar cauliflower and walleye with arugula and chorizo vinaigrette; the five- and seven-course tasting menus are sensational value. From the Bambis mounted on the pine walls to the Leland River backdrop, [**The Cove**](#) offers an authentic Michigan northwoods experience; try the signature Chubby Mary, a bloody Mary with a smoked chub fish "standing proud."

Where to Sip: 2007 was a banner year, 2010 was excellent, and 2011 looks to be exceptional. Fittingly, [**Bel Lago's**](#) tasting room offers panoramic lake views worth savoring alongside its nicely done sparklers, Pinot Gris, and Riesling. [**Shady Lane Cellars**](#), set in a fieldstone century-old chicken coop, and [**Chateau Fontaine**](#) are among the other top wineries.

Best Bottles: It's cheating, since the winery is on the neighboring Old Mission Peninsula, but [**Chateau Grand Traverse's**](#) 2008 Riesling Old Mission Peninsula Ice Wine (\$70/half-bottle) gives any Sauternes or Tröck a run for your money. [**L. Mawby**](#) made a name with Riesling, then Cabernet Franc, before focusing on sparkling wines. The non-vintage, Chardonnay-dominant Blancs de Blancs and Consort (both \$20) feature delicate mousse, with toast, smoke, ginger, and grapefruit notes; the Talisman (\$33) is worth it, while the second line, M. Lawrence is terrific value for newbies.



Northeast: North Fork, Long Island, New York

Think of [**Long Island's East End**](#) and the Hamptons come to mind, with its celeb mega-manses. But the savviest real estate investment may be vineyards, with high-profile honchos like Robert Entenmann and Leslie Alexander (Houston Rockets owner) buying or building wineries. While the South Fork (where the Hamptons lie) holds four wineries, the charming and less glitzy [**North Fork**](#) has 46. It's bucolic, with boats bobbing in harbors and roadside stands exploding with fresh produce.

The East End sits at the same latitude as Bordeaux, whose varietals thrive in similar soils and maritime climatic conditions; Peconic Bay slices the land as the Gironde cleaves Bordeaux. No surprise Long Island wines achieve their ultimate expression through the red Bordeaux varietals, especially Merlot and Cabernet Franc. Whites (notably Chardonnay, Riesling, Sauvignon Blanc, Viognier, and Gewürztraminer) combine creamy mouth feel with lively acidity and minerality, excelling with food. Indeed, most Long Island wines are produced with an eye to pairing with the region's famed products, from ducks to oysters; and the region's dining scene has become increasingly sophisticated.

Where to Stay: Old World ambiance and modern amenities combine at Jamesport's beautifully restored [**Jedediah Hawkins Inn**](#), an 1863 ornate Italianate sea captain's home. The six individually decorated rooms

pamper with fireplaces to Frette linens; don't miss the two smashing restaurants, Luce + Hawkins and the more casual Luce's Landing.

Southold's **North Fork Table & Inn** is intimate, with four handsome rooms with flat-screen TVs, Wi-Fi, and luxury products. Recent James Beard Award nominee, Chef Gerry Hayden uses local ingredients, from Peconic Bay and Long Island Sound seafood to artisanal Long Island cheeses, in dishes like crispy Peconic Bay sea bass with Peconic Bay clams, saffron-braised fennel, picholine olives, and spicy clam broth.

Where to Eat: At the **Frisky Oyster**, chef-owner Robert Beaver deftly juxtaposes textures and tastes with plates like braised beef short ribs with pomegranate, corn pudding, and summer asparagus, or oysters "Friskafella" with garlic-scented spinach, chipotle, and parmigiano aioli. On your way to or from the North Fork, try Port Jefferson's harbor-front **Fifth Season** where chef Erik Orlowski likewise utilizes the overflowing cornucopia of local produce, fish, and game. Pastas like sweet corn agnolotti with leek-tarragon-heirloom tomato-Pecorino pan sauce are to die; wife Jennifer selects savvy pairings.

Where to Sip: 2010 is the winner among recent vintages; 2007 and 2008 were also strong. Italianate **Raphael** impresses with thick wood beams, stone columns, zigzagging staircases, and medieval tapestries. Try the Merlots or Chardeaux (Chardonnay/Sauvignon Blanc).

Paumanok Vineyards, one of the North Fork's oldest wineries (founded in 1983), excels in estate-bottled Bordeaux-style blends, and brisk Rieslings and Chenin Blancs. Other stops include **Macari Vineyards** (super Sauv Blanc and big Bordeaux), rosé-exclusive **Croteaux Vineyards** (serious enough to stand up to most foods), **Palmer Vineyards**, **Pugliese Vineyards** (zesty sparklers), and **Osprey's Dominion**.

Best Bottles: In the re-imagined loft-like tasting room of Bedell Cellars, try the muscular yet supple 2007 Musée—a blend of Merlot, Cabernet sauvignon, Petit Verdot, and Syrah. **Shinn Estate**, owned by restaurateurs Barbara Shinn and David Page, offers a zippy 2011 Rosé and white-blend called Coalescence (\$16-\$17) alongside terrific weekend entertainment.



Southeast: Shenandoah Valley/Monticello, Virginia

The Jamestown colonists cultivated America's first vines in 1608, while oenophile Thomas Jefferson planted over 20 varietals, hoping a fledgling wine industry would reduce the nation's dependence on imported spirits. Today, Virginia features more than 150 wineries (from six in 1979); Donald Trump and, reportedly Steve Case have invested. More than 25 leading wineries cluster in the **Monticello** American Viticultural Area (AVA) around historic Charlottesville, amid 18th-century plantations, thoroughbred farms, and the Blue Ridge foothills. You can also visit Monticello, Montpelier (James Madison's home), and **Shenandoah National Park**. Winemakers are achieving increasing success with "secondary" Bordeaux grapes like Cabernet Franc and Petit Verdot; Chardonnay has yielded *numero uno* status to the vivacious Rhône varietal Viognier among whites.

Where to Stay: Fodor's 100 Hotel Award-winning and Orient Express-owned **Keswick Hall at Monticello** is a luxe 1912 Tuscan-inspired villa

nestled amid 600 acres outside Charlottesville. The sophisticated mix of modern gadgetry and antiques, spa, Arnold Palmer Signature golf course, and superlative restaurants make leaving even for wine-touring a chore. A Relais & Châteaux hotel, the [Clifton Country Inn](#) also affords majestic Blue Ridge vistas from its 100 acres. Its 17 individually decorated rooms and suites swaddle guests in luxury with Molton Brown toiletries and Mascioni linens. Appropriately, the property boasts family ties to Jefferson: His daughter and son-in-law established their original home, Edgehill, on the grounds.

Where to Eat: Occupying a former motel diner, [Duner's](#) offers Continental fare with fresh local ingredients (peach-orange glaze for pork chops, heirloom tomato *beurre blanc* for soft shell crabs); expect a line since it doesn't take reservations. Another sumptuous landmark Virginia, the Boar's Head Inn is celebrated for its [Old Mill Room](#) restaurant, reclaimed from an 1834 gristmill and specializing in regional cuisine.

Where to Sip: [Barboursville Vineyards](#) occupies the ruins of Governor James Barbour's brick manor (a National Historic Landmark designed by his neighbor, Jefferson). Its restaurant, [Palladio](#), offers robust Northern Italian fare to complement Piedmont-born Luca Paschina's wines. The winery's [1804 Inn](#) is a Georgian villa boasting hand-hewn brick floors, antique inlaid furnishings, and 17-18th century European artworks (Piranesi to Poussin). Its Bordeaux reds—Cabernet Sauvignon, Petit Verdot, and the blend, Octagon—are full-bodied stunners. Look for 2008 and 2009. Other worthwhile stops: [Prince Michel](#) and [Veritas](#), both also offer lovely accommodations.

Best Bottles: Splurge on [Michael Shaps'](#) 2008 or 2009 Cabernet Franc, Petit Verdot, or Viognier, all \$28, or his massive 2007 Meritage, which will benefit from several years' cellaring. Both [Keswick Vineyards'](#) 2009 Viogniers (\$19) represent superb value: lovely honeysuckle and honeydew perfume yields to balanced acidity and lingering flavors of almond, apple, and anise.

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