

# WHY THE COLUMBIA GORGE IS AMERICA'S HOTTEST WINE REGION

Forget Napa Valley. For the ultimate wine vacation, go here.

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Nestled along the Washington/Oregon border lies an up-and-coming wine region unlike any other. Established in 2004, it's one of the younger wine cultures in these United States. Producers are known for their inexpensive blends, laid back vibe and for taking full advantage of the area's mountainous landscape.

Let's put it this way: If Washington's Columbia Valley is Napa-Sonoma's less expensive kid brother, then this region—**the Columbia Gorge**—is their overlooked cousin who quietly got into Harvard while people looked the other way. Now, even the most prestigious wineries in California are shelling out millions to buy land in this soon-to-be-famous territory.

The Gorge is spliced in half by the pulsing Columbia River, with young winemakers snapping up land on either side of the state divide. Despite its breathtaking scenery and ample outdoor activity (enough to satisfy an Eagle Scout), its location that makes this place so desirable. And since it's only 45 minutes from Portland by car, you can experience the best in both urban and country living with a single visit to the region.

This perfect storm has made the Columbia Gorge an increasingly hot destination for bachelor parties and other gentlemen seeking unconventional destinations. It may not have Vegas' nightlife or NOLA's gumbo—and who are we kidding, Bourbon Street—but only here can you windsurf in the morning, relax on a vineyard through the afternoon, and then party in Portland all night.



### What To Taste:

What makes the Columbia River Gorge such an interesting place to grow grapes is the presence of mountains, which divide the region into two distinct climates. There are high altitude rain-lands to the West, and arid, almost desert-like conditions to the East—within five minutes of each other. The difference in altitude, rainfall and temperature between vineyards continues to have a strong influence on the wines they produce.

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The Grüner Veltliner grape, for example, comes from Austria, where colder, mountainous regions lend to its strength and flavor. [Syncline Wine Cellars](#) in Lyle, Washington has recreated the Austrian climate by planting their vines on the subalpine terroir of the Underwood Mountains. Basked in nearly 50 inches of yearly rainfall and enjoying consistently cool temperatures, these European grapes have been made to feel right at home in the Pacific Northwest.



If you're looking for old world wines—which are often lower in alcohol and highly balanced—look no further than [Memaloose](#) and [Idiot's Grace](#). Owned by a father/son team, the McCormick family has managed to produce some truly outstanding European varietals. The Sauvignon Semillon (white) and Barbera (red) are the clear standouts. You should also be sure to introduce yourself to their resident Shar Pei, Woody, who guards their tasting room each weekend.



Those seeking a pretty place to wile away the afternoon, but concerned with tasting the best wines, should head straight to [Marchesi](#) across the river in Oregon. Their Italian-inspired patio looks just like Tuscany, but with mountains rising in the background and a killer Barbera Dolcetto rose to boot.

#### **Where To Stay:**

For the full resort experience, Stevenson's [Skamania Lodge](#) has an 18-hole golf course, a variety of hikes, and a full-service spa. The best part? Their two and a half hour zip lining excursion, which exposes you instantly to lush, Washingtonian forests.

30 minutes further from Portland you'll find the thriving city of Hood River, Oregon— this is where you'll find the action. Almost all of the area's nightlife (think gastropubs, low-key bars and live music) is in the historic city center. Those looking to be in the thick of things should consider the [Carson Ridge Cabins](#) just across the river. They're more expensive than the Skamania (prices start at \$245), but are located just minutes from Hood River. You'll also be able to luxuriate in the privacy of your own cabin—a must when visiting the area with a lady friend.

### **What To Do:**

In addition to the region's more obvious activities (hiking, waterfalls, horseback riding), visitors can also take advantage of the Columbia River itself. You might not guess it, but Hood River has long been nicknamed the windsurfing capital of the world — a nod to the strong winds that shuttle up the Gorge from the Pacific Ocean. Kiteboarders also retreat to this wind-rich location, giving visitors the option of a more adventurous, airborne experience. Hit up [Big Winds](#) and [Hood River Waterplay](#) for rentals and lessons.

### **What To Eat:**

Much like nightlife, the culinary scene centers in Hood River. There's no shortage higher-end dining options—like [Celilo](#) and [Stonehedge Gardens](#)—but burgeoning gastropubs provide a less expensive, higher energy alternative. Try eating at Oregon's beloved [Full Sail Brewing Company](#), or the nearby [Pfriem Family Brewers](#). [Big Horse Brew Pub](#), also in Hood River, has mediocre food but the best view. If it's a burger you're craving, make a beeline to the recently re-opened [Kin](#).

