

Tasting Trip to Cascade Valley Wine Country, Washington

By **Allen Cox** - Jan 10, 2017



Photo © Rocky Pong Winery

In Cascade Valley Wine Country, the Columbia River makes a wide sweep against the eastern flanks of the Cascades. Summer afternoons can send you rushing to the nearest swimming hole, but nights cool down. The landscape is rich with nuanced microclimates capable of growing an amazing range of wine grapes.

This fruit-growing region is not new to vineyards and wineries, but, in recent years, more vineyards have appeared where orchards once stood, and more wineries dot the towns of Leavenworth, Wenatchee and Chelan. A driving time of only about 2.5 hours from Seattle to Leavenworth (the nearest town in the valley) makes Cascade Valley an ideal wine-tasting getaway. At least three days will give you plenty of time to experience an array of boutique tasting rooms in all three towns and might even allow time to visit with the winemakers.



Photo © Karma Vineyards

Day 3, Lake Chelan

Few places in Washington are as scenic as Lake Chelan, a 50-plus-mile-long lake that snakes into the North Cascade Mountains. Vineyards undulating through the hillsides and riding down to the lake shore just add to the beauty and whisper, “You’re in wine country now.”

In Chelan, you’ll have plenty of lodging options, and, for a summer visit, you’ll want to make reservations far in advance. This is especially true to book the guest house at Nefarious Cellars. This two-bedroom guest house, adjacent to the winery and tasting room, is worth standing in line for the views alone. A few steps away and you’ll be in the tasting room or on the sunny patio, overlooking the vineyards and lake. Owner Dean Neff makes the reds and his wife Heather makes the whites, sourced from their own blocks and other select Washington vineyards.

If you are lucky enough to stay at Nefarious Cellars, be sure to shop for breakfast groceries; the guest house comes equipped with a full kitchen.

The next morning, drive into downtown Chelan and stop in at the new, state-of-the-art Visitor Center (216 East Woodin Ave.) for a museum-quality overview of the region and its viticulture. Next door to the Visitor Center, you’ll find Rocky Pond Winery’s contemporary tasting room, where you can sample their award-winning wines; a particularly good wine to start your day of tasting is their 2014 Viognier, which won a double-gold medal at the 2016 Seattle Wine Awards.

For lunch and a flight of fine bubbly, drive the south shore to Karma Vineyards to dine on the outdoor patio overlooking the lake and vineyards. Karma winemaker Craig Mitrakul takes making sparkling wine using the *méthode champenoise* very seriously, and the award-winning results speak for themselves.

At the edge of downtown, you'll find One Wines (526 East Woodin Ave.), where Greg and Jo Cowell make one red, one white and one rose. If you make only three wines, they should be good, and these are delightful. A few short blocks away from One Wines, enjoy a hearty meal and local wines at a spot frequented by the locals: Fox & Quail Café (303 East Wapato Ave.).