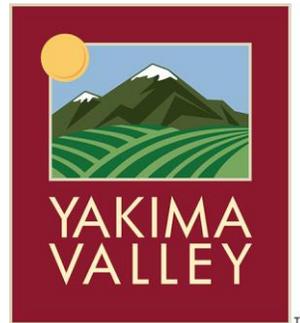


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## Wine Country

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The Yakima Valley is home to four American Viticultural Areas (AVAs), more than 70 wineries and over one third of the state's vineyards. It has a rich diversity of microclimates, rugged hillsides, and wetlands. These factors contribute to the many wine grape varieties and wine styles achieved from Yakima Valley grapes. The most widely planted varieties are Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, Chardonnay, Syrah, and Riesling.

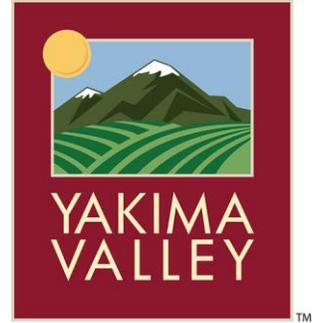
But the region's impact and influence on the wine industry haven't gone to its head. The Yakima Valley remains one of the friendliest, most affordable and laid-back destinations in the state. The Valley's approachability is outshined only by the diversity of its wine-inspired diversions. Choose a walking tour of tasting rooms in historic downtown Yakima, a leisurely scenic drive from vineyard to vineyard in and around Wapato and Zillah, a stroll through urbane tasting rooms in Prosser or rest easy overnight in a romantic wine-country inn.

Every day is a good day to visit Yakima Valley wine country, but the excursion is even more enchanting during one of the region's wine celebrations. At Spring Barrel Tasting, which takes place the last full weekend in April, you'll have the opportunity to sample wine straight from the barrel and stake a claim to the finished product before its even bottled. During Thanksgiving in Wine Country, the region's wineries invite enthusiasts to celebrate the season of plenty, which is especially fitting in this bountiful agricultural valley. At Red Wine & Chocolate over Presidents' Day weekend (and close to Valentine's Day), chocolate lovers and wine devotees come together to enjoy pairings of creamy confections and rich red wines.

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## Farm Fresh Fun

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Eating local is a snap when you're surrounded by farms and orchards. More than 40 commercial crops are grown in the Yakima Valley, which enjoys sunshine 300 days a year. Farm-fresh produce is within reach almost year-round, from asparagus in April to apples and potatoes in November. Some summer months are particularly fruitful, like July, which tempts with just-picked apricots, green beans, blueberries, corn, nectarines and squash.

Nowhere else in the state can you feast on food so close to where it was grown. Love cherries? Eat one in the Yakima Valley and if you toss the pit hard enough, you'll probably hit the farm it came from. You might say that in the Valley, the source of your next meal is just a stone-fruit's throw away. And a trip to a family-owned local farm beats a visit to the grocery store any day.

Visit one of these seasonal open-air bazaars and you'll have a unique opportunity to meet the friendly farmers who grow your food. They'll not only greet you warmly and supply you with samples of their mouth-watering produce they'll also happily share cooking tips and introduce you to new varieties of fruits and vegetables you may never have tasted.