

Ashland and its surrounds are Oregon's less-celebrated—but equally delightful—wine country.

Trip Planner

Ashland Wine Tasting Shakespeare and chardonnay, a fine pairing in Southern Oregon

written by Kevin Max

THERE IS NO better place in America to combine bold wines and the boisterous Bard than in Ashland. So far south in Oregon, Ashland feels as much northern California as it does Southern Oregon. Climate doesn't strictly respect state borders, but the climate for wine growing in Southern Oregon does have its boundaries.

There are warmer Spanish tempranillos and cooler pinots, with syrahs and chardonnays in between. The stages of the Oregon Shakespeare Festival bud and bloom with wit, sarcasm, churl and charm. Spring and summer in the Southern Oregon tasting rooms and vineyards bring a full-bodied intensity with a note of drama and an air of openness. >>>

Day 1

VINES • WINE • TAPAS

For visitors who have never been to Ashland, the first thing you'll notice is the beautiful hills and rolling terrain surrounding it to the west, south and east. It's on the faces of these hills that hundreds of acres of wine grapes form the taste profiles for Oregon's most up-and-coming AVAs (American Viticultural Areas). The direction of the hillside—the aspect—helps determine how much sun each block of grapes gets. Ashland's climate, its warm days and cool nights, is an ideal cycle for creating small clusters, concentrated flavors and the requisite sugars of great wines.

It's best to learn about wine in the vineyards, where you can often talk directly to the owners, the growers and the winemakers and where it's small enough that they are often the same person. Southern Oregon has five main wine-growing areas—Applegate & Jacksonville, Elkton, Illinois, Rogue and Umpqua.

For those who want a different, more concentrated, way to discover regional wines, plan your trip for the Oregon Wine Experience event, August 17 to 23, at Brigham Knoll in Jacksonville. There, you can sip your choice of hundreds of wines and across many varietals.

On this day, choose just two vineyards to visit and get a more personal experience. Just south of Ashland is the Weisinger Family Winery and its very good cabernet sauvignons, syrahs and the estate tempranillo. On hot summer days, try a flight of the chilled whites: gewürztraminer, pinot blanc and viognier.

Or buzz out to Irvine & Roberts, a few miles east of town on Emigrant Creek Road, for stunning views and well-made wines around outdoor gas firepits. My favorite wine from Irvine & Roberts is a pinot meunier with a blackberry finish.

Head back into town for dinner with Spanish on the mind and Ostras! Tapas on your agenda. Share paella or tapas and enjoy a bottle of Southern Oregon tempranillo.

If you're lodging at Ashland Springs Hotel, plan on having at least one meal at the adjacent Larks Home Kitchen. No detail is overlooked in this farm-to-table-to-perfection restaurant. The menu changes with the seasons and the whims of chef Franco Console.

Day 2

CLEANSE • TRAILS • THEATER

Ashland's Lithia Park is a peaceful unity of water and park and meanders with Ashland Creek down from afar to Angus Bowmer Theater on the edge of the park. This is a tranquil spot to take your morning coffee and pastry. Serenity itself comes here to sit in the mornings and listen to the babbling creek, the coo and caw of birds, the deep voice of a cellist's song and the singsong of kids chasing bubbles.



FROM TOP Weisinger Family Winery has a perfect tasting setting. Ashland Hills Hotel's swank factor will impress.

Mark Widner



Ken Roberts

You can add steps and exercise by walking or running through the park and a mile up to the top of the trail to its terminus at the water treatment plant.

If you plan your day correctly, give yourself time to head 30 miles northeast to Grizzly Peak Trail for a 5-mile lollipop hike with views of surrounding peaks and even the Crater Lake rim. In the Ashland area, there are countless trails for running, hiking and biking, or simply for forest bathing. One of my favorites is Toothpick Trail in Siskiyou Mountain Park, south of town and off of Tolman Creek Road. If your lodging is Ashland Hills Hotel, you can find this nearby.

Besides wine, one of the state's biggest cultural attractions is the Oregon Shakespeare Festival (OSF). The national stage for Shakespeare and contemporary theater dates back to 1935, when a determined Angus Bowmer, himself an incipient stage actor, became the lead campaigner for what would become a world-renowned cultural icon. >>>

**EAT**

Amuse
www.amuserestaurant.com

Larks Home Kitchen
www.larksrestaurant.com

Ostras! Tapas
www.ostrasashland.com

Morning Glory Cafe
www.facebook.com/morninggloryrestaurant

STAY

Ashland Hills Hotel
www.ashlandhillsotel.com

Ashland Springs Hotel
www.ashlandspringshotel.com

Ashland Creek Inn
www.ashlandcreekinn.com

PLAY

DANCIN
www.dancin.com

Pallet Wine's Urban Cork
www.theurbancork.com

Fences Wine
www.fenceswinery.com

Irvine & Roberts
www.irvineandrobertsvineyards.com

RoxyAnn
www.roxyann.com

Weisinger Wineries
www.weisingers.com

Oregon Shakespeare Festival
www.osfashland.org

Siskiyou Trail running and hiking
www.ashland.or.us

Grizzly Peak Trail
www.ashlandtrails.com



FROM TOP DANCIN Vineyards is an old-world Italian winery. Pallet Wine Company in Medford crushes many of the region's grapes and has a great tasting room.

Skipping a play while in Ashland is akin to visiting London without seeing the crown jewels.

OSF's season stretches from the end of February to the end of October and brings to stage Shakespeare classics and reinterpretations and modern plays by new playwrights. Over its long life, OSF has brought to Ashland such notables as Bing Crosby, Duke Ellington and Brian Cranston.

Make this trip a bit more global with dinner reservations at Amuse before your show. A short walking distance to the theater, Amuse serves French-inspired cuisine such as Parisienne gnocchi and truffle-roasted game hen with a curated list of regional wines.

Keep the night going, and Shakespearian, after your show by popping into Oberon on Main Street for conversation, a cocktail and a late bite.

Day 3**BREAKFAST • BATH AND TEA GARDEN**

Morning Glory Cafe in Ashland feels like the birthplace of breakfast. Inside is bustling with breakfast fiends and waitstaff, coffee and

bright colors. Large plates of lemon ricotta-stuffed French toast, Alaskan red crab omelets and chorizo scrambles draw looks of anticipation, jealousy and sweet-versus-savory regrets.

If you want to leave Ashland in a good place, book body work, Japanese soaking tubs and a personal pot of tea at Chozu Bath & Tea Garden. After a busy weekend of wine tasting and theater going, Chozu will leave your mind and body in a good place.

Heading north out of town, there are two more compulsory stops to complete this vinified retreat. Roll north and west, taking the scenic South Stage Road. DANCIN Vineyards is an old-world Italian winery with a wood-fired pizza oven, a small piazza for sipping and conversation and truly amazing wines from its estate grown grapes. DANCIN's wine labels are further testimony to the beauty and delicacy of its wine.

Then take a quick detour into Medford proper. Many of the region's grapes are crushed at Pallet Wine Company in Medford. Pallet Wine Company's tasting room, Urban Cork, is a great way to bring the best wines of the region together for you in an unassuming urban and industrial setting. ■



Amuse's Parisienne Gnocchi is the perfect pre-show meal.