

US wine roads less travelled

Taste the freewheeling spirit of American winemaking in these five 'other' US states...

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America's big-name wine states – California, Washington, Oregon, New York and Virginia – are well known to wine lovers. But smaller (though no less quality-driven) appellations in Idaho, Colorado, Texas, North Carolina and Michigan are among other exciting US wine destinations worth exploring.

While vastly different, these less-famous wine states share some important universal truths. For a start, you won't find roads clogged with chauffeured limos, and your tasting fees are

more likely to be \$5 rather than \$50 per person. The wineries you'll visit are almost always intimate, family-run operations, and more often than not the person whose name is on the bottle will be the one pouring you a sample.

Most importantly, the wines will be anything but predictable – expect to find intriguing riffs on less-famous grape varieties such as Malvasia, Lemberger and Dornfelder.

A true taste of America's entrepreneurial soul is yours to enjoy when you take these wine roads less travelled.

Idaho

With its intriguing mix of volcanic and glacial soils, Idaho was once a promising wine-growing region. Indeed, some of the first vines planted in the Pacific Northwest were established in Lewiston, Idaho in the 1860s. Today, the state is home to 65 vineyards, 69 wineries and three AVAs: Eagle Foothills (an AVA within Snake River Valley with 32ha under vine), Lewis-Clark Valley and Snake River Valley.

There are more cows than people here, and the state's defining quality is its dramatic geologic history, which inspires the vivid-sounding nomenclature of destinations such as Hell's Half Acre, Sawtooth Mountains and Lava Hot Springs.

Idaho is a basin where glaciers melted and stayed, leaving a mix of sediment and soil. Several young volcanoes also influence the wines, says Ste Chapelle Winery winemaker Meredith Smith:

'We have cinder pits from volcanoes in our vineyards and they impart special flavours, such as dark red fruit notes, spice and cigar box.'

Its arid climate, long sunny days and cool nights, together with high elevation (upwards of

900m) are distinctive qualities. With 728ha under vine, the largest AVA, Snake River Valley [which also overlaps into Oregon state to the west] is spread across the cities of Caldwell, Boise and Garden City – all within a short drive from one another. 'Snake River Valley is on the same latitude as Rioja in Spain and the northern Rhône,' explains Earl Sullivan, winemaker for Telaya Wine Co (telayawine.com), 'so Tempranillo, Syrah and Viognier do really well.'

With just 39ha under vine, Lewis-Clark Valley AVA in northern Idaho [also overlapping into Washington state] sits at the base of the Bitterroot Mountains. Vines were planted here as early as 1872, and one might still stumble across abandoned vineyards. Lewis-Clark Valley is part of Idaho's 'banana belt', where more temperate conditions favour varieties such as Cabernet Sauvignon and other late-ripening Bordeaux grapes. ▶

'Snake River Valley is on the same latitude as Rioja in Spain and the northern Rhône'

—— Earl Sullivan, Telaya Wine Co





The most logical base for touring Idaho wineries is the capital city of Boise and the nearby Sunnyslope Wine Trail (about 30 minutes' drive away). Here, you can rent a bike and visit several wineries via the 40km Boise River Greenbelt. Stop for a private tour and tasting at **Telaya Wine Co** – its Turas 2018, a blend of Syrah, Petit Verdot, Merlot, Tempranillo and Sangiovese, won Best Red Wine at the 2020 Idaho Wine Competition.

In Sunnyslope, look for the richly textured Panoramic Shoshone Falls Malbec 2018 from **Ste Chapelle Winery** (stechapelle.com), one of Idaho's oldest producers and a standard-bearer for the Snake River Valley terroir. It also runs concerts and has yurts for overnight stays. Next door, **Sawtooth Winery** (sawtoothwinery.com) also hosts concerts and themed dinners, or just visit to taste its Classic Fly Riesling or Sparkling Brut.

At nearby **Williamson Orchards & Vineyards** (willorch.com), you'll have the chance to pick cherries and sip its wonderfully delicate Albariño 2019, a Best in Show winner at the 2020 Idaho Wine Competition.



Top: Ste Chapelle Winery at Sunnyslope, western Idaho

Above: barrels at Clearwater Canyon, which runs preview tastings for its club members

Idaho: stay & eat

Inn at 500 Capitol (innat500.com) is a contemporary property in the centre of Boise, with luxurious touches such as fireplaces and private balconies, and three top-floor penthouse suites.

Richard's Restaurant & Bar (richardsboise.com) is located in the hotel and serves sophisticated Italian fare along with a wine list that features several Idaho wines. Book early as it's a local favourite.

Located in Boise's hip Linen District, **The Modern Hotel and Bar** (themodernhotel.com) is a stylish, reimagined ex-Travelodge, owned and operated by a Basque family.

(Boise has the largest concentration of Basques outside Spain.) Guests love the hotel's popular cocktail bar and restaurant Txikiteo, helmed by James Beard Award-nominee Nate Whitley and focused on local ingredients. **The Grove Hotel** (grovehotelboise.com) is one of Boise's most luxurious properties, located in the heart of downtown and within walking distance of almost everything. It has a spa, hot tub, pool and a beautifully upscale restaurant, Trillium. In Caldwell, on the Sunnyslope Wine Trail, visit **Grit** (grit2c.com) for inspired comfort food – the slow-fried chicken is a must-try.

Colorado

High in elevation and anchored by the visually stunning Grand Mesa, the largest flat-top mountain in the world, western Colorado wine country is a study in superlatives. The state has two official AVAs, Grand Valley and West Elks, which range in elevation from 1,200m–2,100m, making them among the highest vineyards in the world. Indeed, Colorado's high desert has captivating scenery but it tends to be overshadowed by the deluxe appeal of the state's many ski towns. Here, close to the Utah border, you'll find fewer tourists, more locals, the world's second-largest concentration of geologic arches (Rattlesnake Canyon), and plenty of award-winning wine.

With a truncated growing season, unpredictable weather patterns and dramatic diurnal temperature changes (upwards of 10°C), many vintners describe winemaking here as a challenging adventure. 'We never know what Mother Nature is going to throw at us. You can't set a clock by nature's whim the way you can in California wine country,' explains Kevin Webber, co-founder of **Carboy Winery** (carboywinery.com), one of Colorado's largest wineries.

The Grand Valley's arid, high-elevation setting has soils that tend to be more alkaline than those of Napa, yielding wines that taste more Old World than New World. Syrah, Viognier and

'We never know what Mother Nature is going to throw at us'

— Kevin Webber, Carboy Winery

other Rhône varieties fare well in Grand Valley, as do Bordeaux grapes, especially Cabernet Franc.

Not far from Grand Valley, snug in the embrace of the Rocky Mountains, the West Elks AVA is home to true mountain terroir, with grapes cultivated at altitudes as high as 1,950m. The result is varieties such as Riesling, Pinot Gris and Pinot Noir, which can tolerate a cooler growing season with intense UVA sunlight.

The Grand Valley region is home to a mix of the old west and the new west, blended with the region's historic mining culture. The towns of Grand Junction and Palisade are 12 minutes apart and either one makes a good base for wine touring – several wineries have tasting rooms in both towns. In Colorado, getting outside is almost a requirement, so tour the tasting rooms in your hiking boots, or rent bikes and visit on two wheels. Grand Valley is one of the state's top mountain-biking destinations; it's also ideal for canyoneering, white-water rafting and lengthy hikes. West Elks, which is just over an hour's drive from Grand Junction, has a smaller wine trail featuring 10 wineries, making it an easy day trip.

Above: Mount Garfield and vineyards at Palisade in Grand Valley, western Colorado

Colorado: stay & eat

In Grand Junction, locals love **Bin 707 Foodbar** (bin707.com), where chef/owner Josh Niernberg (a 2020 James Beard Best Chef Mountain Region semi-finalist), serves up fresh, inspired Colorado cuisine from the best local provisions he can source. **Hotel Maverick** (thehotelmaverick.com) is a new, nicely appointed upscale hotel located on the campus of Colorado Mesa University. It offers a rooftop restaurant, and easy access to wine trails.

In the small, unassuming town of Palisade, **Pêche** (pecherestaurantcolorado.com) is an exquisite culinary discovery, serving simple and fresh ingredients, artfully prepared. Try the Thai fried chicken paired with Storm Cellar Riesling and finish the meal with a portion of its marvellous rhubarb cheesecake.

For an overnight stay in Palisade, **Spoke & Vine** (spokeandvinemotel.com) is a brilliantly renovated motel that offers a hip, friendly, no-fuss vibe. The owners take pride in the good coffee, plush beds and being pet-friendly, so leave any pretensions at the door.

Carboy is betting on sparkling wine and cultivating more cold-hearty hybrids. At its recently opened tasting room in Palisade, start with the Native Fizz Rosé, a co-fermented blend of North American hybrid grapes Verona, Aromella and Vignoles. **Red Fox Cellars** (redfoxcellars.com) is another fine choice to quench your thirst in Palisade. Sip a wine cocktail, sample one of its eight on-tap craft ciders, or try its Nebbiolo 2017, a Governor's Cup double gold medal winner in 2019.

Across the river is the **Colterris Winery** at the Overlook (colterris.com) tasting room, panoramic views of the Colorado river and rows of lavender and roses forming a beautiful backdrop – and the wine measures up as well. Order a charcuterie sampler and a bottle of the Petit Verdot 2017 – another Governor's Cup double gold winner. Around the corner, **Maison la Belle Vie Winery** (maisonlabellevie.com) makes a sumptuous Vin de Peche, a Muscat fortified with peaches, from a family recipe that dates back to the late-1800s. Ask about its wine-paired dinners as well.

In West Elks, **The Storm Cellar** winery (stormcellarwine.com), founded by sommeliers Jayme Henderson and Steve Steese, focuses on aromatic whites and rosés. Tastings are intimate affairs and private tastings are an option too. Top tastes include the 2019 RRV, a mouthwatering blend of Roussanne, Riesling and Viognier. ▶

Texas

Texas is the second largest US state. For perspective, it's about 20% larger than France, and has roughly 200 wineries and eight official AVAs (Bell Mountain, Escondido Valley, Fredericksburg, Mesilla Valley, Texas Davis Mountains, Texas High Plains, Texas Hill Country and Texoma). Despite its impressive size, winemaking is chiefly concentrated in two distinct areas: Texas Hill Country and High Plains. Most of the state's grapes are cultivated in High Plains, while most of the tourism and consumption takes place in Texas Hill Country. Spend a minute in the High Plains AVA and you'll appreciate why – dominated by semi-arid, windy conditions, it's a high-elevation, vastly flat region of roughly 3.2m hectares in west Texas. Andrew Sides, winemaker for Lost Draw Cellars, describes it as 'ideal for winemaking but not for the faint of heart'. The area has rich, sandy loam soils – primarily ancient seabed, underneath which is a deep limestone bed that imparts an intriguing minerality to the wines.

The High Plains may be the state's primary growing region, but it's the scenic charms of Texas Hill Country that draw the crowds. The climate here is more moderate, and the soils are more on a granite uplift. Concentrated around the town of Fredericksburg (which is equidistant from San

Texas: stay & eat

The universal favourite for overnight stays is **Hoffman Haus** (hoffmanhaus.com), a luxury bed-and-breakfast well situated in the heart of Hill Country. **Outlot 201 Guest Houses** (@outlot201GH), an 8km drive from Fredericksburg's historic Main Street, offers three guest houses designed in keeping with the area's traditional 'Sunday Haus' style homes. Each one has a pantry stocked with homemade banana bread, fresh fruit and drinks. For a boutique hotel experience, the **Trueheart Hotel** (thetruehearthotel.com) offers 13 rooms furnished in a colourful and playful style. Or for something quirkier, consider the adults-only 1940s aviation-centric **Hangar Hotel** (hangarhotel.com).

You'll have your pick of places to eat and drink in Fredericksburg, but a dish of goose and truffle ravioli with mixed farm greens, wine reduction sauce and pecans at **Otto's German Bistro** (ottosfbg.com) tops the list for a dose of the region's Hessian history. **Cabernet Grill** (cabernetgrill.com) is popular with locals, and has one of the largest selections of Texas wines in the state – a great place to taste options not on the Hill Country tasting trail.

Clockwise from right: visitors enjoy a stop on the Texas Hill Country wine trail; Lost Draw Cellars, THP Rosé blend; the tasting room at William Chris Vineyards; co-founder and winemaker David Kuhlken of Pedernales Cellars

Antonio and Austin), Hill Country enjoys a lingering Germanic influence as many Germans settled here in the mid-1800s. It is also the home of former president Lyndon Johnson and known for its profusion of bluebonnet wildflowers in the spring. Warmer-climate varieties such as Viognier and Tempranillo thrive in both High Plains and Hill Country. You'll also find Sangiovese, Roussanne, Mourvèdre and some Tannat.

At **William Chris Vineyards** (williamchriswines.com), 32km east of Fredericksburg, a glass-walled tasting room looks out over the vineyards. Order a picnic lunch if you want to enjoy wines al fresco, or consider a seat inside for the Library Tasting experience that features an in-depth look at the range and breadth of its terroirs and vintages.

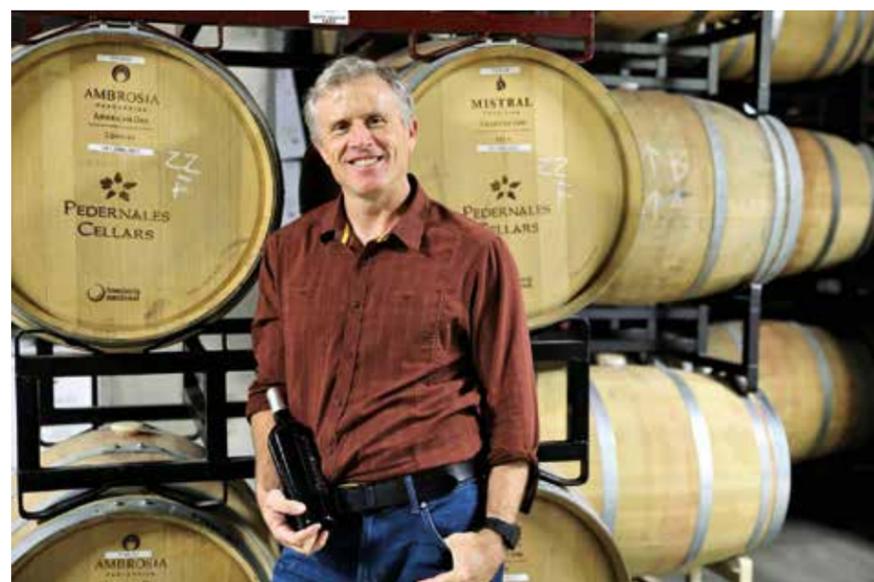
The Signature Series of wines at **Pedernales Cellars** (pedernalescellars.com), back towards Fredericksburg, features delicious single-barrel expressions, best enjoyed in the tasting room with views over the Pedernales river valley. **Becker Vineyards** (beckervineyards.com) has a long history of winemaking in Hill Country (former first lady Ladybird Johnson was a fan of its Chardonnay). Book a tour and reserve library tasting paired with cheeses for the best experience, and if you visit in the spring you'll enjoy the full bloom of its fields of wildflowers and lavender plants.

Another worthy stop is at **Bingham Family Vineyards** (binghamfamilyvineyards.com). It scooped five awards at the 2021 San Francisco Chronicle Wine Competition – including gold for its Dugout 2018 Bordeaux blend.

The charming courtyard at **Lost Draw Cellars** (lostdrawcellars.com) in Fredericksburg is a big draw for live music at weekends, and a glass or two of its Reserve Roussanne (2018). Book a wine and charcuterie tasting if you want some light bites. ►



'It's the scenic charms of Texas Hill Country that attract the crowds'



North Carolina

The geography in this long and narrow state ranges from mountains to coastline; in between the two is where the finest winemaking happens – the North Carolina Piedmont. The entire state has more than 200 wineries and six AVAs (Appalachian High Country, Crest of the Blue Ridge, Haw River Valley, Swan Creek, Upper Hiwassee Highlands and Yadkin Valley) spread across a wide distance; it is a daunting state to explore and grape expressions vary widely. In fact, explains Louis Jeroslow, owner of Elkin Creek Vineyard in Yadkin Valley: ‘We haven’t found many grape varieties that don’t do well here. It’s an exciting time where people are planting everything they can get their hands on. Right now, variety diversity is the defining feature in North Carolina.’

For the purposes of touring, and to ensure access to a nice density of wineries, Yadkin Valley and Swan Creek offer the greatest opportunity. This slice of North Carolina is the envy of the state with its serene, smooth-edged mountains. Located northeast of Asheville, North Carolina’s groovy, beer-loving town, Yadkin Valley is the oldest, most established AVA in North Carolina (circa 2003). There are 48 wineries in the region and vines here grow in the type of sandy clay found in Tuscany, while the temperature and humidity averages are almost exactly like those in Bordeaux. ‘These vines don’t know they are in North Carolina,’ says Jeroslow. ‘Their roots are in Italy and the fruit and leaves are in France.’

During your exploration of Yadkin, you can take an interesting detour into the Swan Creek AVA, a sub-appellation of Yadkin Valley. These wines tend to have a distinctive mineral note – thanks to the area’s proximity to the Brushy Mountains, an isolated spur of the Blue Ridge Mountains with unique mineral deposits.

Kick off your Yadkin Valley wine trail with stops at the new **Pilot Mountain Winery & Vineyards** (pilotmtwineyards.com) and **JOLO Winery & Vineyards** (jolvineyards.com). Both wineries enjoy amazing views of the distinctive Pilot Mountain – a quartzite dome that’s unlike any other mountain in North Carolina and the defining geographical feature in Yadkin Valley.

Further north, **Round Peak Vineyards** (roundpeak.com) is popular for both its Nebbiolo

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— Louis Jeroslow, Elkin Creek Vineyard



Clockwise from top: JOLO Winery & Vineyards lies close to the domed Pilot Mountain; tasting room at Pilot Mountain Vineyards, Yadkin Valley; vines extend over 4ha at Stony Knoll Vineyards; one of the Klondike Cabins at Grassy Creek

North Carolina: stay & eat

The **Rockford Inn** (rockfordbedandbreakfast.com) is an historic antebellum home that dates back to 1848. Located in the village of Rockford, it offers a quiet escape, with pretty gardens and easy access to the Yadkin Valley wineries. Nearby, the **Wine Lodge at Stony Knoll Vineyards** (stonyknollvineyards.com) is a carefully restored 1860s homestead that features two winery houses overlooking the vines at Round Peak Vineyards.

For a more rustic vibe, consider a stay at **Klondike Cabins** (theklondikecabins.com) at **Grassy Creek Vineyard** (grassycreekvineyard.com), 24km west; they were formerly the hunting cabins for the Hanes family of Hanesbrands textile fame.

In Pilot Mountain, **End Posts Restaurant** at **JOLO Winery & Vineyards** is a wonderful option for a lunch of shared plates and tapas. **Harvest Grill** at **Shelton Vineyards** is a local favourite, while on Sundays, **Elkin Creek Vineyard** serves up brick oven gourmet pizzas, but plan ahead and make a reservation – it’s very popular.



and its 18-hole disc golf course that wanders through the vineyards; it has two cabins for rent, and a brewery. Visitors to **Shelton Vineyards** (sheltonvineyards.com) enjoy the local speciality sonker with their wine at the winery’s **Harvest Grill** restaurant – it’s a cobbler-style dessert handed down through generations in the area.

At **Elkin Creek Vineyard** (elkin creekvineyard.com) they’ll pour the flagship wine, the Bordeaux blend *Rossa* (2017), but Jeroslow admits it’s the *Dornfelder* that sells like hotcakes. ‘We make it in the traditional German table-wine style, just a touch off dry to accent the herbal character; visitors love it,’ he says. Llama-trekking is on offer at **Divine Llama Vineyards** (divinellamavineyards.com), where you can sip the well-regarded *Reserve Merlot* before taking a 3km llama trek – a perfect way to explore the mountainous terrain. ▶



Michigan

Michigan winters are notoriously brutal and yet its winemaking industry thrives, owing much of its success to a particular microclimate created by ancient glacial activity. While there are five AVAs in the state (Fennville, Lake Michigan Shore, Leelanau Peninsula, Old Mission Peninsula and Tip of the Mitt), the two most prominent (Leelanau, Old Mission Peninsula) got their start more than 10,000 years ago as powerful glaciers formed the Great Lakes and created the peninsulas.

Surrounded by the waters of Lake Michigan, the Leelanau Peninsula and Old Mission Peninsula AVAs enjoy the moderating influence of the lake effect on winter's bitter temperatures, extending the harvest season and ultimately benefiting the aromatic, acid-driven varieties that do best here. Traverse City is the central point between both AVAs, which together comprise the Traverse Wine Coast, an easily navigable tasting trail comprising 40 wineries, making it the largest collection of winemakers in the Midwest.

The glaciers may have done the landscaping, but most locals agree the Michigan wine industry really owes its reputation to the late Ed O'Keefe,

the founder of Chateau Grand Traverse winery (cgtwines.com). According to Mike Kent, public relations manager for Traverse City Tourism, in the 1970s, O'Keefe 'had the crazy idea that because of the moderate microclimate on these peninsulas, you could pursue winemaking. He was right, and in just 30 years we've seen tremendous growth and our wines have won many prestigious awards'.

Today, the Traverse Wine Coast and its two peninsulas are home to 60% of Michigan's total wine production. The focus in this area is on cool-climate aromatic reds and whites such as Riesling and Pinot Gris, as well as rosé made from Pinot Noir and Cabernet Franc – and the occasional Lemberger. Incredible views of Lake Michigan framed by picturesque hillsides ▶

'The Traverse Wine Coast is an easily navigable tasting trail comprising 40 wineries, the largest collection of winemakers in the Midwest'

Above: vines at the Ciccone Vineyard & Winery on the Leelanau Peninsula



topped with quaint lighthouses can be found throughout the region.

Any visit to this area must include a stop at O'Keefe's pioneering winery. It's a great place to watch the sunset while enjoying a flight of wines paired with seasonal menu offerings. It also has accommodation – The Inn at Chateau Grand Traverse – if you want to make a night of it. **Left Foot Charley** (leftfootcharley.com) in Traverse City has a century-old historic root cellar where it now ages its wines. Try the Sparkling Island View Vineyard Pinot Blanc 2018, crafted from Michigan's oldest Pinot Blanc planting (dating back to 1995).

On the Leelanau Peninsula, **Ciccone Vineyard & Winery** (cicconevineyard.com) is well-known for red expressions, especially the Cabernet Franc and Lee La Tige Bordeaux blend, both medal-winning wines. You may recognise the name – the owner and founding winemaker is pop star Madonna's father. **Black Star Farms** (blackstarfarms.com), recognised for its quality Riesling, has wineries on both peninsulas, but the Suttons Bay location (5km away) delivers an all-in-one winery experience with a luxury inn (Inn at Blackstar Farms), restaurant (Hearth & Vine Café), and access to several hiking trails spread over 64ha. Just a 10-minute drive away, **45 North Vineyard and Winery** (fortyfivenorth.com), so named for the 45th latitude line that runs right through its winery, invites visitors to wander a lovely 5km trail that winds throughout the vineyards; or take a seat by the fire in the tasting barn, featuring handcrafted posts and beams, and indulge in the lemon cream notes of its extremely popular Unwooded Chardonnay. **D**



Clockwise from top left: at Chateau Grand Traverse, vines overlooking Grand Traverse Bay; Left Foot Charley, on the outskirts of Traverse City; the Boathouse restaurant on Old Mission Peninsula



Michigan: stay & eat

Traverse City and its wine coast are well known as havens for delicious farm-to-table cuisine. If you love a food truck, visit **The Little Fleet** (thelittlefleet.com), a permanent selection of food trucks serving up everything from local brews and wine to burgers and barbecue. More upscale, consider the waterfront dining option at the **Boathouse** (boathouseonwestbay.com), on Old Mission Peninsula – pair the local speciality, smoked whitefish pâté, with a crisp unoaked Chardonnay.

Village Cheese Shanty (villagecheeseshanty.com) in Fishtown, Leland, features more than 60 types of cheese and local

cherry preparations; people have been known to drive long distances to eat one of its epic sandwiches.

For an immersive wine country stay, book at **Chateau Chantal** (chateauchantal.com) on Old Mission Peninsula, which offers cooking classes and wine dinners, and rooms with a view over Grand Traverse Bay. **Park Place Hotel** (park-place-hotel.com) is one of the oldest hotels in town and a landmark in Traverse City, while the sprawling **Grand Traverse Resort and Spa** (grandtraverseresort.com), 13km from Traverse City, is owned by Ottawa and Chippewa Indians, offering everything from gambling to golf.