



# Seattle Refined



Wilridge Vineyard's Pinot Gris block (Image Frank Guanco / Seattle Refined)

## A Newbie's Guide To Yakima Valley

By Frank Guanco | Published: May 23, 2015



It started on a bus. As I hopped on a Greyhound and it made its way east on I-90, then south on I-82 to Yakima, I knew that I was in for something different.





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I was invited as a guest by [Yakima Valley Tourism](#) to take in Yakima and it's restaurants, wineries, distilleries, breweries and more. My knowledge of Yakima prior to last weekend was nascent. Heck, it was non-existent. While I've lived my entire life in Washington, I can count on one hand the number of

times I've spent any time in central or eastern Washington. After spending a weekend in Yakima that will change. And you should make it a point to visit Yakima for a weekend getaway.

Our first stop of the weekend typified what makes Yakima different. Going into this trip, I did know about Washington's hop industry. I knew that our state grows almost three-quarters of all the hops in our country. But I didn't know the scope and scale of the hop and beer scene in Yakima. That Yakima is a hotbed of hop growers and the craft beer industry looks to Washington for what's new in hops. I learnt how brewers across the world head to Yakima to visit [The Haas Innovations Brewery](#). This facility tests hops and fields focus groups as Haas delves into the science and nuance that occurs with hops and the brewing process. In fact, they test some of their beer at Cowiche Canyon Kitchen & Icehouse in downtown Yakima.

'Different' made itself on display at a tour of [Bale Breaker Brewing Company](#). Meghann Quinn is part of a longtime Yakima family that has grown hops and the site where Bale Breaker sits on their hop farm. A few years ago, she, her husband and her brother started Bale Breaker with beer that featured what Yakima hops are capable of. The rest, as they say, is history. The synergy between the farm side and the beer side has made for the explosive popularity and growth that's been a hallmark of Bale Breaker. If you want to try their beer locally, make your way to [Safeco Field](#), as they are one of the few places in Seattle where it is available.

What's also different is Yakima's restaurant scene. Take the aforementioned [Cowiche Canyon](#). A restaurant like this would be right at home on this side of the Cascades; seasonal menu with local ingredients. Graham Baba architecture. Craft cocktails, local beer, and local wines. Thoughtful and considered design. House made bread in abundance. Cowiche Canyon was like a meteor to me. It'll be exciting to see what downtown Yakima has in store with a restaurant like Cowiche Canyon bringing in the crowds.

But it's not just a hip and modern restaurant that typifies a community. You'll need markets, small shops, and restaurants that give a feel for a neighborhood. Restaurants are important as they are the beacon for a community. Where diners visit to take in the theatre of food and service. In Yakima, there are places like [Los Hernandez](#) that draw crowds for their tamales. You'll see visitors from all throughout the northwest stock up on their frozen tamales as they head out of town. Be sure to visit soon as their asparagus and pepper jack cheese tamales are only available seasonally. Or head north to Ruben's Tortilleria for their fresh made corn tortillas. Or head further north to [Los Primos #2](#); a taco truck in the parking lot of a laundromat that serves up delicious tacos (be sure to get the cabeza). Or check out [Sports Center](#), a classic sports bar that uses seasonal ingredients and makes their 'Insanity' hot sauce. (Fun fact about the Sports Center building, it used to be a brothel. So the sports that occurred in the building were a bit more hedonistic).

A place that you should have on your food to-do list is the Yakima Valley Farmers Market. In particular, Lutong Pinoy. This Filipino food stand at the market makes one of the finest chicken adobo that I've had. Lip smacking, full flavored, and balanced with the savory and tart notes that typifies great chicken adobo, this was a surprise of a dish. Big meaty, bone-in drumsticks, served for nine bucks with rice and lumpia, it was a screaming deal.



Any great weekend destination should have points of interests that make for a memorable weekend. If you love to travel to eat and drink (who doesn't?), Yakima Valley has unique things to do. Like [Tieton Cider Works](#). They recently opened their tasting room and production facility in Yakima this past winter. As cider is a growing category in the beverage industry, you can take in the ciders that Tieton Cider Works pours on tap. From their dry-hopped to their cherry cider, the ciders were unique and delicious. As the weather heats up, cider is welcomed at any porch party. (Capitol Cider on Capitol Hill will be [featuring Tieton Cider Works at an event on June 15](#)).

Another point of difference are the wineries in Yakima Valley. As the earliest and largest AVA in Washington, Yakima Valley's wineries are unique and highlight their sense of place. Take [Hackett Ranch](#). On this ranch sits [Gilbert Cellars](#), with stunning views of a lavender field, chardonnay vines, and apple orchards, it's an idyllic setting. Gilbert Cellars also shares this space with [Wiley City Brewing Company](#) and [Glacier Basin Distillery](#). By visiting these places and talking with the team, it's easy to see their investment and desire to make Yakima great. And the three venues want to support each other, for example the grape musts that come from Gilbert Cellars, Glacier Basin uses it for their grappa. Their intent is to integrate with one another, to better Yakima Valley, and to raise the awareness of their town.

Head up to [Wilridge Winery](#) and [Naches Height Vineyard](#) to taste some wine and hike the vineyard. Located at the high point of Yakima Valley, you can look in all directions and take in the sights and sounds. Or walk through the [Wilridge vineyard](#) to see Wilridge trying out varietals not often seen amongst Washington vineyards; Touriga Nacional, Zweigelt, Sagrantino, and Nebbiolo. While you take in the wines of both tasting rooms, you can learn about Wilridge's biodynamic farming practices. Or how Naches Heights Vineyard's Riesling will be served at this summer's US Open in Chambers Bay. Back in town, [Kana Winery](#) and [Lookout Point Winery](#) share the intersection with Cowiche Canyon. For a night out on the town, an itinerary could be an early Friday night dinner at Cowiche and wine at Kana for their open mic night. Or swing by Lookout Point for their suite of Malbec.

Within a few moments of my time in Yakima Valley, I started to ponder my return. As my stay continued, I couldn't wait to get back. To go back for Essencia's pain au chocolat. To try even more Mexican food around town. Eat more of Tieton Farm & Creamery's cheese. Finally try Miner's burger. Taste even more beer. Visit even more wineries. The great thing about Yakima is that it's a scant two-hour drive from Seattle. You can fit in all of this stuff into a weekend and find yourself wanting even more and plotting a return trip to Yakima.