

WORTHY SIDE TRIPS: THE VERDE VALLEY WINE TRAIL

Page Springs Cellars

NEW BOUTIQUE WINERIES OFFER TASTING TOUR FOR VISITORS

by Sandra Chambers

Located in the heart of Arizona, the Verde Valley Wine Trail invites wine enthusiasts to experience exquisite wines while enjoying the history and beauty of the region.

New wineries are springing up all across north central Arizona as winegrowers are discovering a niche in the rich limestone and volcanic soils of the area and a climate that is comparable to great wine growing regions around the world.

Within an easy hour-and-a-half drive from Phoenix, visitors can experience four wineries and seven tasting rooms that surround the communities of Cottonwood, Sedona, Camp Verde, Jerome, Cornville and Clarkdale.

During the tour, don't miss the unique hand-painted wine barrels located at several wineries and tasting rooms on display through spring 2012. After this time, they will be auctioned off to support the Yavapai College Viticulture Program.

Begin at Alcantara Vineyards, the largest vineyard in central Arizona, with its 87 acres located at the confluence of the Verde River and Oak Creek. The Tuscan farmhouse, which serves as a tasting room, has a warm and inviting atmosphere and is surrounded by an abundance of wildlife. Proprietress Barbara Predmore stresses that Alcantara is all about "slowing down and appreciating both the land and the wine."

Next stop is Old Town Cottonwood, the oldest bootlegging city in Arizona. Four tasting rooms are located on Main Street. One of them, Arizona Stronghold Vineyards Tasting Room, is the result of a joint venture between Maynard Keenan of the band Tool and Eric Glomski, owner of Page Springs Cellars.



Alcantara Vineyards

A second, Pillsbury Wine Company, is a dream-come-true project by New Zealand film director and wine maker Sam Pillsbury. The winery produces blends that complement food while also producing stand alone single-varietal wines because Pillsbury believes "wine should be an everyday part of our lives." With funky names like "One Night Stand" and "Wild Child Red," guests will be entertained while sipping.

Three other stops include Javelina Leap Vineyard and Winery, a 10-acre estate known for its Zinfandel and Barbera grapes and deep full-bodied reds. Oak Creek Vineyards grows 4,000 plants on a little more than 10 acres and features Syrah, Merlot, Zinfandel and Chardonnay. Page Springs Cellars focuses on crafting fine, European-style wines, and offers cheese or bistro plates on a shaded patio. Guests may end their day with a massage in a private tent overlooking the vineyards and Oak Creek.

For more info see verdevalleywinetrail.com.