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Wine in the Wild

Experimental vignerons and a stylish hotel transform the Columbia River Gorge from an outdoorsy day trip to a foodie destination. *By Hannah Wallace*

A decade ago, after graduating college, Jure Poberaj moved to Hood River, Ore. (population 7,806) in search of outdoor adventure. Born in Slovenia and raised in Washington, D.C., Poberaj, now 31, was drawn to the magnificent Columbia River Gorge an hour east of Portland for its mountain biking and world-famous kitesurfing (gusts of wind here, where the river stretches about a mile across, can reach 70 mph). The lively brewery scene didn't hurt either.

As life happens, he met his girlfriend, pastry chef Nina Jimenez, and together they decided to create their own shop, with Poberaj learning how to bake bread by apprenticing around the Northwest. The duo opened the White Salmon Baking Co. four years ago on the sunny Washington side of the gorge, and it's been crowded ever since, its counters

heavy with luscious huckleberry galettes, rhubarb-poppysed scones, and hearty wood-fired sourdough loaves. As I sat on the patio savoring a messy bacon-avocado toast topped with jammy egg, Mount Hood's snow-capped 11,250-foot peak standing majestic in the distance, Poberaj told me of his plans to convert some of his land in White Salmon into a vineyard.

In 2017 the Eagle Creek Fire razed almost 50,000 acres of forest in the area, leaving many hiking trails closed and causing \$8 million in economic loss to the region, according to a study commissioned by Travel Oregon. Today, as the forest slowly recovers, tourists aren't waiting, particularly foodies seeking out-in-the-wild wine experiences such as tasting natural vintages produced with native yeasts. And as of

May, there's a new stylish place to stay: Society Hotel Bingen.

The Scandinavian-chic property just down the hill from White Salmon, in the blink-and-you'll-miss-it town of Bingen (population 737), is the second Society property from a Portland hospitality group. They converted a 1920s schoolhouse into a book-lined lobby that winks to its past with library carts and a door marked "Principal's Office." The gym still has a basketball hoop and original bleachers—and now some kettle bells and yoga mats. "We want to appeal to the adventurous traveler at various stages of life," says co-owner Matt Siegel.

To that end, there are modern, well-designed bunk rooms and standard rooms with king or queen beds, all with shared baths, while the 20 interconnected private cabins (from \$269) offer kitchenettes and hammocks. A spa—complete with saltwater soaking pool, cold plunge, and spacious sauna—has a bar and several fire pits.

The Wineries

Start your wine-tasting circuit with Savage Grace, about 7 miles west of Bingen in the bucolic community of Underwood, Wash. Winemaker Michael Savage recently bought a vineyard here and is organically farming all 10 acres. Pull up a stool at his new tasting room and gaze down at the spectacular beauty of the gorge as you sip an unexpected 2017 orange gewürtztraminer.

On the other side of Bingen, in Lyle, James Mantone at Syncline Winery makes Rhone-style varietals including mourvèdre, syrah, grenache, and carignan, as well as a bone-dry picpoul and a spicy Gamay noir. Pack a picnic lunch for the picturesque garden under white oak trees.

At Domaine Pouillon, a winding 4-mile drive east past fields with roaming horses and grazing cows, Juliet Pouillon pours her husband Alexis's fruity and biodynamic Alsatian-style wine, edelzwicker. Their first fizzy *pétillant naturel* will be released on Bastille



White Salmon Baking Co.



The new tasting room at Savage Grace

Burn Those Calories

The food and wine may be great, but the best part of the gorge is the outdoors

BIKING

Rent an e-bike from Sol Rides for the 16-mile round-trip journey from Hood River to the hamlet of Mosier via the Historic Columbia River Highway, now a pedestrian and bike path. The 1920s feat of engineering clings to sheer cliffs and burrows through basalt rock.

HIKING

On the Oregon side of the gorge, the popular, short-but-steep Angel's Rest Trail has reopened after the fires, though the forest service still urges caution. Head to the Washington side

for views of Mount Hood. Beginners can try Catherine Creek; the longest trail is just 5.5 miles round-trip. East of Bingen, the 7.8-mile Coyote Wall Trail is more of a challenge and also popular with mountain bikers. For more hikes, the Friends of the Columbia Gorge maintains a detailed list—just remember to be on the lookout for poison oak and ticks.

KITESURFING

For lessons, Kite the Gorge is the best place to find a pro. Private two-and-a-half-hour lessons start at \$285.

Day. (Most tasting rooms don't serve food, but Domaine Pouillon will whip up a cheese or salmon plate on request.)

Back over the bridge to Oregon, a picturesque 10-minute drive east to Mosier, Analemma Wines' Steven Thompson makes some of the best terroir-driven biodynamic wines around—from a single-vineyard sparkling blanc de noirs to a vibrant tinto blend, which tastes of dark red cherry and dried herbs.

Dining and Beer

Resolutely casual Hood River is your best bet for healthy, delicious fare. Start your day with Broder Ost's *aebleskivers*, Danish-style spherical "pancakes" dusted with powdered sugar and served with lingonberry jam and housemade lemon curd. Upstairs, the funky—and reportedly haunted—1912 Hood River Hotel has 41 rooms and suites, many with fantastic gorge views.

PFriem Family Brewers, one of Oregon's best breweries, offers about 20 beers on tap—from a hazy IPA to a Belgian strong. The new seasonal menu is excellent, too, in which sambal honey kicks up buttermilk fried chicken and a lentil-mushroom veggie burger with spring garlic aioli sets a new standard.

Down the street, New Yorkers Dan and Jenn Peterson opened Ferment Brewing Co. last August. Dan, who cut his teeth at Brooklyn Brewery, makes flavor-packed Belgian and French farmhouse ales as well as lagers, pale ales, and stouts. In a state where hoppy IPAs are king, this is a refreshing change, and the offerings pair perfectly with the Mediterranean-inflected menu of flatbreads and slow-roasted meats—plus Jenn's housemade frozen yogurt.

On the upscale end of the dining spectrum, Celilo still stands strong after 14 years, with skillet-roasted Totten Inlet clams and rich pork sugo over

rye-flour gnocchi, served with purple broccoli sprouts.

But the area's most memorable reservation is high in the hills above town at Hiyu Wine Farm. *Hiyu* means "the big party" in Chinook Jargon, a Pacific Northwest pidgin language, and Nate Ready and his partner, China Tresemer, don't disappoint, bringing in chefs such as Gunnar Gislason from Michelin-starred Dill in Iceland to collaborate on locally legendary dinners. If you aren't in town for one, opt for a lavish family-style weekend lunch. Otherwise, wine tastings are Thursday through Monday by appointment and include seasonal snacks such as Columbia River smelt *escabèche* and griddled pea shoots with cured duck yolk. Ready's field blends are wild experiments in natural wines: Some 120 grape varieties are grown side-by-side, then fermented together. Some Hiyu wines are served at White Salmon Baking Co., where Poberaj pours them at Monday night pizza parties. **B**