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MAGAZINE AUGUST 2018

PLUS

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PAGE 88

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PAGE 130

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WILLAMETTE VALLEY GETAWAYS

Outdoor activities in Oregon's wine country *By Danielle Centoni*

IN THE KITCHEN OF SOKOL

Blosser's airy tasting room, chef Henry Kibit leans intently over a plate, meticulously arranging the first dish of our multicourse lunch made from ingredients he harvested from the property's garden. Kibit, who honed his craft in notable Portland restaurants such as The Fireside and Noble Rot, is preparing lunch for eight of us who are sitting at the tasting room counter in front of him, sipping

wines and eagerly watching as the elegant plates take shape.

Sokol Blosser's Farm & Forage lunches are part of a trend of Willamette Valley wineries offering sophisticated, chef-driven meals made to highlight the winery's latest vintages. It seems that as the valley's reputation as a world-class wine destination has grown (*Wine Enthusiast* magazine named it Wine Region of the Year in 2016), so have its attractions.

The Willamette Valley runs about 150 miles from Portland to the Calapooya Mountains south-east of Eugene, and sits between the Cascade Range to the east and the Oregon Coast Range to the west. Visitors to this area are not only thirsting for award-winning wines from the region's more than 550 wineries, they're also hungry for a distinctly Oregon experience, and Willamette Valley wine country is more than happy to oblige.

A group of friends picnic at the Brick House Vineyard, near the Willamette Valley town of Dundee.

This is a place where you can enjoy wine-tasting excursions and also experience outdoor adventures, where you can get a taste of Oregon's renowned food-and-drink scene while also discovering family-friendly local attractions.

One of my favorite examples is the town of McMinnville, located about 40 miles southwest of Portland. Just outside of town are the fascinating Evergreen Aviation

and Space Museum and the fun Wings and Waves indoor water park next door. The aviation museum includes such famous aircraft as Howard Hughes' Flying Boat H-4 Spruce Goose, one of the largest planes ever built, and the SR-71 Blackbird, one of the world's fastest aircraft, which reached speeds of more than 2,000 mph.

Keeping with the aviation theme, the Wings and Waves Waterpark offers four waterslides that begin inside an actual Boeing 747, stationed on the roof of the water park, and wind into the building and down to pools below.

For wine lovers, there are more than 200 wineries within 20 miles of McMinnville, including Archery

Summit, The Eyrie Vineyards and Yamhill Valley Vineyards.

For unique lodging options, visit The Vintages Trailer Resort, located about 7 miles northeast of McMinnville. It boasts fully renovated retro trailers, plus outdoor barbecues, fire pits, free use of bicycles and a swimming pool. In McMinnville, there is the Atticus Hotel, a 36-room boutique hotel that prides itself on sourcing every detail locally, from the sofas to the artwork to the custom-made soap.

To tour some of the region's top wineries, try riding the NW Wine Shuttle, the area's first hop-on, hop-off wine bus. A group of shuttles make stops at 13 wineries in the Dundee Hills area

every 30 minutes. The shuttles pick up riders in McMinnville, in Dundee, at The Vintages Trailer Resort, and even in Portland.

The southern section of the valley includes the college town of Corvallis, home to Oregon State University. The city is known for its variety of hiking and biking trails, and various breweries and nearby wineries.

Northeast of Corvallis is the quaint town of Albany, where you'll find the Albany Historic Carousel & Museum. Take a ride on the carousel and marvel at the 52 carousel animals that were hand carved by local volunteers. If you fancy spending the night, book a room at The Hanson Country Inn, a charming bed and break-

fast located on 6 acres of land just outside of town. About 10 miles south of Corvallis is the William L. Finley National Wildlife Refuge, which has 12 miles of trails and is home to a variety of animals, such as Roosevelt elk and more than 200 species of birds.

About 50 miles south of Corvallis is Eugene, home to the University of Oregon and known as TrackTown USA because of its long history as a center for U.S. track and field events. Here, you'll find both award-winning craft beer as well as wines, and you're even closer to some of Oregon's top outdoor destinations, such as hiking along the McKenzie River and sandboarding in the Oregon Dunes National Recreation Area.

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