



Fairhaven Vino in the Village



B-town Kitchen & Raw Bar

# 16 BELLINGHAM, WA A LONG WINE WEEKEND

BY ALLEN COX

When I travel, even on a short weekend getaway, I want it all. I admit that sounds greedy, but in a place like Bellingham, it's not unreasonable. My summer weekend in this scenic Northwest Washington city includes a wine festival, outstanding eats, a country drive to some standout farms as well as delving into the city's sometimes-sordid past. And that just scratches the surface.

I time my trip in August with the Fairhaven Vino in the Village event and the Bellingham Northwest Wine Festival. If you detect a theme, you're spot on. Vino in the Village takes place on Thursday evening, so I get a jump on the weekend and arrive before 5:00 p.m. to check in at Fairhaven Village Inn, in the center of the action. Vino is a walking tour—wine glass and map in hand—with stops at merchants where wineries are dispensing tasting pours. Historic Fairhaven is walkable, artsy, charming and, on Vino night, a very affable place.

Next morning, I check out of Fairhaven Village Inn and set out to explore the city. But first, I'm faced with a tough

decision at Magdalena's Creperie, located on the street level below the hotel. Sweet or savory? I go for both.

When it's time to walk off breakfast, I head downtown to check out the city's newest civic accomplishment: Waypoint Park, a reclaimed industrial site turned waterfront park, right beside a reclaimed granary that is transforming into restaurants, an artisan marketplace and more.

I planned ahead and booked a ticket on the Sin & Gin Walking Tour, a guided and narrated romp by Good Time Girls Tours through downtown's sordid past. This eye-opening narrated tour is an introduction to Bellingham's rough-and-tumble pre-prohibition past and the social changes prohibition brought, led by none other than a costumed flapper whose pumps looked like they were not designed for a walking tour.

Inspired by talk of sin and gin, I work up a thirst (and another appetite) and head to Twin Sisters Brewing, home of the Bellingham Beer Garden, a family-friendly Bavarian-style restaurant and outdoor space. This establishment's modern,

creative approach to beer-hall cuisine hits all the right notes. I think I consumed all the food groups with my order of beer pretzel bites, Thai cauliflower tacos, truffle-Parmesan fries and salmon sliders, all washed down with a Twin Sisters Strawberry Zwickelbier.

I have long been fascinated by a downtown Bellingham landmark, and after lunch I allow time to explore it. Whatcom Museum's Old City Hall (ca. 1893) adorns the downtown cityscape with an ornate Victorian presence and was the first building in Washington to be listed on the National Register of Historic Places. I admire its imposing clock tower surrounded by its four spires. It typifies the ornate, stylized charm of late-Victorian design—it was meant to impress, and it does.

Fittingly, it's home to the county's history exhibits, and, history nerd that I am, I take my time browsing. The "sin and gin" perspective I gained earlier is both fortified and expanded by the museum's artifacts and interpretive displays. Fascinated, I stay until closing time. Afterward, for the sake of convenience, I find the Four Points by Sheraton Bellingham Hotel and Conference Center and check in; the Bellingham Northwest Wine Festival will be held there on Saturday evening.

The hotel is home to one of Bellingham's newest restaurants that's garnering acclaim: B-Town Kitchen and Raw Bar. Since I slid in at the tail end of happy hour, I settle on happy-hour menu selections: a half-dozen local oysters from nearby Samish Bay, salmon crostini, an almond-crusted calamari steak and a side of crispy Brussels sprouts. Dessert is a maple-brown sugar old fashioned.

Saturday morning, after a satisfying pork adobo benny at downtown's farm-to-table Cosmos Bistro and a turn through the thriving Bellingham Farmers Market (one of the best in the Northwest), I am primed for a few farm visits out in the Whatcom County countryside.

Cloud Mountain Farm in Everson is open to visitors, and I've heard that they are happy to share their experimental approaches to agriculture. Steep forested hills line the valleys as I drive into rural Whatcom County, and, with the help of my GPS, I find the farm. Wispy clouds drift overhead, but one is determined to hover in place on the side of aptly named Cloud Mountain behind the farm. Cloud Mountain Farm is a busy place. Not only do they have an on-site nursery,



Goodtime Girls Tours



Bellingham Beer Garden

but they also act as an incubator and teaching farm, with workshops, a farm internship program and more, helping the next generation of independent farmers get started. What's not to admire?

On the way back to Bellingham, I detour and find Samson Estates to sample and buy their acclaimed raspberry wine. The winery and tasting room sit on a raspberry farm, one of many in Whatcom County, which I learn grows 60 percent of the nation's raspberries. I decide to stash away my raspberry wine to accompany Thanksgiving turkey.

The last stop on my country drive is Dynasty Cellars, a family-owned winery on the north outskirts of Bellingham. The tasting room is busy—it seems it's the local hangout for a Saturday afternoon bottle of wine with friends. I taste my way through their lineup, chatting with the proprietor and winemaker, and I learn that he hails from many generations of Central European winemakers and uses skills passed down through centuries. On this warm summer day, the DCRose—a co-fermentation of riesling and malbec—hits the spot.

Back at Four Points, the evening unfolds in the ballroom with the Bellingham Northwest Wine Festival, a wine and small bites tasting event featuring dozens of wineries from around the state. It's a well-attended affair, yet there are plenty of opportunities to chat with winemakers about what they are pouring and their approach to the craft. After a few hours of browsing, tasting and nibbling, I am glad I decided to bed down in the hotel where the festival is taking place.

Will I be back next August? You bet—not only for the wine fest, but there's so much more Bellingham to explore. Plan your Bellingham getaway at [bellingham.org](http://bellingham.org). Book your lodging at Fairhaven Inn at [fairhavenvillageinn.com](http://fairhavenvillageinn.com), and at Four Points by Sheraton at [marriott.com/hotels/travel/blifp-four-points-bellingham-hotel-and-conference-center](http://marriott.com/hotels/travel/blifp-four-points-bellingham-hotel-and-conference-center). And get your tickets to the next Bellingham Northwest Wine Festival at [whatcombeerandwinefoundation.org/wine-festival](http://whatcombeerandwinefoundation.org/wine-festival).



Whatcom Museum Old City Hall

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Bellingham Northwest Wine Festival

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