

VINTAGE DESTINATIONS

BY MICHAEL VAUGHAN

NEW YORK'S FINEST

FROM THE GEMS IN THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST TO THE VIRTUALLY HIDDEN WINERIES OF PLACES LIKE ARIZONA, THERE ARE HUNDREDS OF WINERIES SPREAD ACROSS AMERICA.

Of all wine regions, California's Napa Valley is one of the world's most popular wine destinations. Ironically, it wasn't always that way.

More than 40 years ago, three youthful, enthusiastic, Toronto-based wine fans and I made a missionary trek to New York's Finger Lakes. The attraction was the cutting-edge work of Dr. Konstantin Frank who founded Dr. Frank's Vinifera Wine Cellars in 1962 just outside of Hammondsport (drfrankwines.com).

Dr. Frank fought a system that claimed the classic European *Vitis vinifera* vines could not survive our cold climate by successfully launching Riesling, Gamay, Pinot Noir, Gewurztraminer, Chardonnay, etc. He also introduced unheard of Russian varieties like the cold-weather-resistant Rkatsiteli from his native Ukraine.

Today, Konstantin's great grandsons, vineyard manager Eric Volz and president Frederick Frank, run the business. A wide variety of wines are produced, including some fine Rieslings and Champagne-styled sparklers. They, and more than 90 other Finger Lakes wineries, produce some top wines that are worthy of a detour.

BEST PLACES TO EXPLORE

May I suggest that you kick off your visit at the recently opened, state-of-the-art, five-star New York Wine & Culinary Center. You can learn to cook, attend tasting seminars, take advantage of various tasting flights, experience a special winemaker dinner or just enjoy a light bite (nywcc.com).

And it's not just wine. For only \$5, I had an amazing comparative beer tasting to accompany my lunch. I discovered some extraordinarily tasty brews made by the Ithaca Beer & Soda Co. (ithacabeer.com). I decided to go there to buy a case of Flower Power, but it was out of stock. I ended up picking up a case for less at the Ithaca branch of Wegmans, one of the best grocery destinations in the USA.

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS / INFORMATION CAN BE FOUND AT www.VintageDestinations.ca

Also, don't miss the weekend, open-air, Ithaca Farmer's Market (ithacamarket.com) from April through October. Unlike Ontario, winery participants can present their wares directly to the public. Looking for that special destination? Stay at the luxurious La Tourelle a deluxe quiet country inn with all the facilities could wish for - spa, tennis, hiking, etc. on the Danby Road adjoining Ithaca.

Perhaps the best place to explore the huge diversity of wines is at the annual Finger Lakes Wine Festival (flwinefest.com), a three-day extravaganza in Watkins Glen (July 17-19). Sunday is the least congested day to visit. Since the festival is held a few miles south of town, assign a designated driver because to get out of the parking lot you have to pass a Breathalyzer test.

Although the U.S. dollar is up, accommodation and dining can be quite reasonable. Many wineries have their own dining facilities and most are on the winery trails. There is something for everyone. Walter S. Taylor's Bully Hill Vineyards, for instance, is great for neophytes. Here you can taste hybrids and even the traditional *labrusca* grapes that were the foundation of the east coast wine industry. Destination wineries include Lamoreaux Landing (2006 Gewurztraminer), Hermann J. Wiemer (2007 Riesling), Fox Run (2005 Cabernet Franc/Lemberger) and Ravines (2006 Chardonnay). There are even great fruit wines like the gold medal winning Treleavan Apple Mystique, an under \$10 semi-sweet fresh fruity apple wine.

Once you get a taste of the Finger Lakes, you'll want to explore other wine regions—from the Hudson River Valley with 37 wineries to Long Island with its 50 wineries and delicious seafood.

Fox Run Vineyards in the Finger Lakes district of New York is considered one of the state's top wine producers. Finger Lakes Wine Country Tourism Marketing Association

