



The Great Escape: Plan a Parents-Only Weekend in Walla Walla

2014/07/18 [Allison Sutcliffe](#)

Parents, there's no denying that we love our kiddos to the moon and back. But we also understand the truth in the equation "absence=fonder heart." Increase your fondness quotient with a parents-only weekend in charming Walla Walla. This friendliest small town in America (for real, they're rated!) ferments some of the best grown-up grape juice in the country. And lucky us, it's right in our backyard. It's time to get away!



Walla Walla Wow Factor

The wine industry started small in Walla Walla about 30 years ago, with just a handful of vineyards. Today, the area boasts around 270 wineries, pouring some of the boldest reds in the state, and has gained a reputation as a can't-miss wine destination across the nation for a reason. Not only are the wines seriously tasty, but the local eateries, events and activities have kept pace with the growing (viti) culture, transforming this small town into one awesome place to explore. Plus, the vibe in Walla Walla is pretty chill, which is a nice change from the often hurried pace of parenting. All this combined makes it a great respite for busy parents.



Around the Town

Definitely plan to spend one day wandering the downtown area, which is roughly a few blocks in any given direction from the city's center on Main St. It's surprisingly packed with things to do, but a quick glance makes it clear that wine is its epicenter. About every other storefront is a tasting room, and many boast at least one 90-point vintage (which is industry speak for "yummy."). The tasting room fees are easy on the wallet (generally between \$5-\$10) and many don't charge if you purchase a bottle. Be sure to check out [Spring Valley Vineyards](#), which has a history worth hearing about; [Rotie Cellars](#) for some robust Rhone-inspired blends; and the [Henry Earl tasting room](#), that also doubles as an official wine bar, so it's open a bit later in the evenings. You could taste all day and still have rooms to explore!



Stop at any number of cafes or trendy restaurants for lunch or dinner to soak up the wine and give your taste buds a break. [Brasserie Four](#) is a local favorite with a French flair that makes a great mid-

day pit stop, as does [Sweet Basil Pizzeria](#). And the truffle fries at [Public House 124](#) are worth a late afternoon detour (they don't open until 3 p.m.) or pre-dinner snack. When it comes to formal dinner fare, there are plenty of intimate restaurants serving up fresh and creative meals. But there are a few that especially appeal to that indulgent escapism that's the cornerstone of any memorable parents' weekend: [Saffron](#), [T. Macarrone's](#) and [Whitehouse-Crawford](#). All three serve up a quiet dinner, just for two, and reservations are a must. Bon Appetit!



Be sure to poke your head into the shops along Main as you stroll. Stop by [Inland Octopus](#) or the [Book and Game Company](#) to find something to take home to the kidlets. And be sure to make a post-meal confectionary connection at [Bright's](#) for some chocolate, fudge or an ice cream cone on a hot afternoon. Right across the street is [DeBouche](#), another great find. They've got outstanding vintage pieces, if you can catch them when they're open. So much to explore!



Out and About

After a day of in-town tasting, head out to the local vineyards and see where all that tasty grape juice got its start. It's amazing how peaceful the fields are compared to the hustle and bustle of parenthood. Enjoy some peace and quiet, coupled with bucolic views, as you tour the countryside, sipping reds and whites at each stop. In addition to great wines, [The Three Rivers Winery](#) has a cute little shop and a three-hole golf course that guests are welcome to play. [Walla Walla Vintners](#) is one

of the original wineries in the area and definitely worth the drive, as is [L'Ecole No. 41](#), located on the outskirts of town.



Beyond the Vine

Don't be fooled. After you've tasted and tasted and tasted some more, Walla Walla still has some tricks up its sleeve. For a small town, it's surprisingly cosmopolitan, in part due to Whitman College and the viticulture industry. Whether you're a casual or avid golfer, you can book a tee time at any number of the public golf courses around town. Or wander the art galleries in the area to take full advantage of that kid-free status. Then hit the [farmer's market on Saturday morning](#) to find some fresh produce and marvel at the crafts of local artisans. Small town, big adventure, we promise!



Where to Stay

When it comes to finding a hotel worthy of a parent-only vacay, the historic [Marcus Whitman Hotel](#) tops our list for its convenience (just one block from Main St.) and its luxury. Owner Kyle Mussman paid close attention to details when he restored the hotel to its original beauty in 2001. The ornate, pre-Depression era glory is in full effect and fun to marvel at when walking around the

lobby. Many of the original furnishings and architectural details have been preserved, and the expansion, that includes a workout facility, event ballrooms and conference rooms, blends nicely with the building's original style. The rooms themselves are a great place to hole up for a comfortable, relaxing getaway. And with six tasting rooms easily accessed right from the hotel lobby, parents don't need to go far to start their adventure.



During your stay, be sure to make a dinner reservation at the hotel's [Marc Restaurant](#), where James Beard recognized chef, Antonio Campolio prepares exquisite gourmet dishes, focusing on locally sourced and grown, seasonal meals that give some of Seattle's best restaurants a run for their money. It's a foodie parent paradise, but even non-foodies will appreciate Chef Campolio's tasty creations. Plus, the short elevator ride back to your room makes a leisurely dinner here taste that much better. Dessert to go? We think so.



Good to Know

The Walla Walla wine tasting tourist season runs from early spring through the first week in December, and makes a great getaway in the late summer or fall when the weather's a bit cooler and harvest is just around the corner.

Plan to arrive on Thursday night for this weekend getaway, as tasting rooms, restaurants and other sights are open Fridays and Saturdays, but are often closed on Sundays for an offset weekend.

Do you plan to visit Walla Walla for a weekend? Already been? Share your experiences in a comment below.

—Allison Sutcliffe, words and photos

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