



*Fun*

Fare

**Oregon isn't just one of America's most beautiful states—a thriving food and wine scene also makes it a destination for gourmet travellers.**

WORDS **BRIAN JOHNSTON**



Image by Lillian Payne



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OREGON, US

Population: 3.97 million

Size: 255,026 km<sup>2</sup>

Official language: English

Capital City: Salem

Official Currency: US Dollar (USD)

Oregon sounds like it ought to be a state of towering trees and timber cutters, moose-haunted hills, and men squinting from beneath cowboy hats. So it might be in places, but the north-west state features many tales of the unexpected. Oregon is arty, eco-friendly and alternative without being grungy; more hipster than home on the range. It has eye-popping, snow-covered volcanoes and a wild coastline. Most of all, Oregon explodes the stereotype that rural America knows nothing about good food, with an ever-growing reputation for wineries, breweries, fresh produce, and innovative eating.

Any tastebud travels would have to start in the laidback capital, Portland, where bearded men ride bicycles, edgy neighbourhoods flourish,



and cider is the new boutique beer. You could stay here a week and not tire of exploring breweries and hot new restaurants such as Taylor Railworks or Farm Spirit, whose vegan tasting menu has become the talk of the town. Portland's spectacular yet unpretentious food scene, however, is nowhere better typified than in its famous food carts, which cluster into 'pods' that will have you in a tizzy of indecision. A progressive lunch will take you around the block and the world: Chinese *jian bing* pancakes, Yucatan pork shoulder wrapped in banana leaf, slow-cooked Carolina ribs, Belgian waffles with candied pecan. And you can bet that Portland is one of the few places >>

**Opposite page** Food trucks are all the rage in Portland, Oregon.

**Clockwise from top left** Salmon Poke with avocado, black sesame, yuzu and yolk from Taylor Railworks; Grilled cuttlefish with Asian pear and Aji Amarillo sauce from Taylor Railworks; Crowds gathered around food trucks in downtown Portland.

**Fast fact**

Lions Portland has some 600 food carts (around 100 that change annually). Two of the best pods are across the river from the CBD in east Portland: Mississippi Marketplace and Tidbits.





Image by Gregory Westergaard



in North America where you can finish with a good coffee: sustainable, organic, single-origin Colombian coffee at that.

If beer first put Portland on the food map, then wine did the same for Oregon. Follow the Willamette River southwards out of town and you'll find yourself in Oregon's agricultural heartland. Grapes were first planted here in the 1960s, and now the world—aided by the current fashion for Pinot Noir, which does well in this region—is sitting up and taking notice.

There are hundreds of vineyards between Portland and Eugene, many with increasingly sophisticated cellar doors, though still on a modest-enough scale that you might well be able to chat with the winemakers themselves. You might want to stop at Ponzi Winery, Sokol Blosser Winery, The Eyrie Vineyards, and Brooks Wines, where your palate will pop with the earthy, fruity flavours of Pinot Noir—though in fact the Willamette Valley also produces interesting cool-climate varietals such as Gamay Noir, Pinot Meunier, Viognier >>



Image by Jenny Hill



**Far left** Horses graze in view of Mt. Bachelor in Central Oregon, which has an elevation of 2,764 metres.

**This page, clockwise from top left** Wine tasting sessions at Sokol Blosser winery in action; Sokol Blosser produces Pinot Noir, Pinot Gris, and other delicious blends; Wine Lab's tasting glasses ready to be filled; The beautiful rolling vineyards of Sokol Blosser Winery.



and Grüner Veltliner. Better yet, spectacular mountain scenery lurks on the horizon from just about every cellar door, culminating in the occasional show-stopping volcano.

The Willamette Valley unrolls 240 kilometres of purple hills, farmland, and orchards. Only a fraction of the crops here are vines, and farm-to-table freshness and innovative chefs from Portland have turned the region into a great place to eat as well as drink. True, country innocence is fading, and locals have become conversant with spa treatments and L'Occitane bath products. Still, when you're tucking into pulled pork or snuggling into 1,000-threadcount sheets, you'll have few complaints.

**A glorious two-hour drive south of Portland brings you to Eugene, outwardly a tidy Truman Show town of lovely parks, and old-fashioned stores.**

A glorious two-hour drive south of Portland brings you to Eugene, outwardly a tidy *Truman Show* town of lovely parks, old-fashioned stores, and manicured college-campus grounds. Yet Eugene has a lively arts and festival scene, and an unconventional population where timber workers, hi-tech



yuppies, and eco-hippies mingle, making it a place to linger. Check out the Fermentation District, packed with breweries and cider presses, and take in the surrounding cellar doors on the Urban Wine Circuit. In town, Oregon Wine Lab allows you to taste the produce of numerous micro-wineries in the area, which you can match with lunch from the food truck parked outside; there's a different one every day of the week.



**Fast fact**  
Premium American food retailer Harry & David is headquartered in Medford and owns 740,000 pear trees. The company produces 100-million sweets and 77-million chocolate truffles annually.

Further south, Ashland is another surprise: a middle-of-nowhere town renowned for its annual Oregon Shakespeare Festival, and agreeably eclectic. Hippies play bongo drums in the park and arty types discuss the finer merits of *Hamlet* and harissa in cafés. This is one of America's most delightful small towns, park-strewn and pretty, crammed with art galleries, and surrounded by leafy, hike-worthy hills. Naturally, the food is good. Standing Stone Brewing Company has craft ales and lagers, created from organic grains 10 barrels at a time; just the accompaniment to finger-sucking teriyaki ribs or fish tacos. Smithfields offers an upmarket, carnivorous feast of bone

marrow, porterhouse, and pork chops to make your jowls quiver.

You could live the rest of your life fat and happy in Ashland, plundering its eateries and the surrounding countryside's produce. Rogue Creamery's original Oregon Blue cheese knocked off the competition in France, and adjacent Lillie Belle creates small-batch chocolates from artisanal beans, stuffed with lavender-salted caramel or cherries simmered in balsamic vinegar. You can spot owner Jeff Shepard by his painted toenails and Hawaiian shirt. Not a cowboy in sight in Oregon, but plenty to make you yee-haa. ■

#### FACT FILE

**Where to stay:** The Benson's enormous wood-paneled 1912 lobby is a flamboyant statement by its original Portland timber-baron owner; rooms have a more contemporary luxe. Beef at the steakhouse and breakfast blueberry pancakes are deeply satisfying. [coasthotels.com](http://coasthotels.com)

**What to do:** A guided cycle around some of Portland's dozens of boutique breweries will acquaint you with the buzzing city's beer scene. [pedalbike.com](http://pedalbike.com)

Take a tour around Portland's famous food carts with aficionado Brett Burmeister, and eat your way around the world. [foodcartsporeland.com](http://foodcartsporeland.com)

**How to get there:** United Airlines flies from Melbourne to Los Angeles and from Sydney to San Francisco, with onward domestic connections to Portland. [united.com](http://united.com)

**More:** [travnd.com](http://travnd.com)

#### Left page, top to

**bottom** An Oregon vineyard in Autumn; Delicacies such as Arrowhead Chocolates from Joseph Oregon are hard to resist; Locally made cheeses can be enjoyed in the many cafes and restaurants in Portland and beyond.

**Above** Visitors are welcomed at the Standing Stone Brewery in Ashland, where the restaurant is renowned for its wood-fired pizzas and meals made from local and often organic produce.