

Trifecta Perfecta in Washington's Tri-Cities By Lou Jurassic



Good things come in threes—and then some—in Washington's Tri-Cities area. Three distinct communities—Pasco, Richland and Kennewick—benefit from 300 days of sunshine, proximity to 160 wineries and countless recreational advantages. Much of the area's allure has to do with a unique landscape carved by the confluence of three rivers—the Snake, Yakima and mighty Columbia. The starkly beautiful high-desert topography, punctuated with white cliffs and the lush rivers, adds up to a tourism bonanza. Here are some of the many reasons to visit.

RIVER-JOE NICORA, WWW.SEECREATE.COM

Climate: If you think the Pacific Northwest is all rain all the time, think again. The Columbia River Valley surrounding the Tri-Cities works some meteorological magic and produces 300 days of sunshine annually. In this part of south-central Washington, winters are typically mild, snow rarely falls and when it does, it hardly ever lingers. Duffers make the most of the area's ten top-notch golf courses. It's not unusual to see folks on the greens all year long. The sport is so popular many area hotels and inns join together with public courses to offer special discounted golf packages.



The terrace at Terra Blanca Winery

Fine Wine: All that sunshine and a high-mineral-content soil combine to make the area one of the nation's top-spots for growing wine-grapes. No surprise, once you realize it even shares its latitude with the acclaimed French Bordeaux and Burgundy regions. Washington is second only to California in terms of production volume and the Columbia Valley produced 99% of the state's grapes. (The area grows 26 varieties.) Vineyards also enhance the valley's natural beauty. Winemakers amplify the fun-factor. There are more than 160 wineries within a 50-mile radius of the Tri-Cities airport in Pasco. They range from tiny mom-and-pop operations to major national names such as Columbia Crest—the state's largest winery. Brochures, available from the Tri-Cities Visitors and Convention Bureau and most hotels, detail wine trails, tasting rooms and tours explaining the wine-making process. There are plenty of do-it-yourself options. Commercial guides are also available.

Rich Chocolate and other Artisanal Foods:



All that wine begs to be paired with equally well-crafted comestibles. The Tri-Cities do not disappoint. The region is home to purveyors of fine handcrafted chocolates and other specialty foods. Adams Place near Kennewick sells a huge array of novelty chocolates. Their themed creations commemorate every imaginable holiday and festive occasion (candied leprechauns for St. Paddy's Day... chocolate computers for Secretaries' Day... red-hat confections for ladies of a certain age). They also craft jellies and jams from homegrown fruit. Baum's House of Chocolate in Richland is the consummate heritage chocolatier. In business for almost 30 years, it recently expanded into a new West Richland Store. The chocolates, especially the truffles, are world-class. Selections range from "wild and fruity" Hawaiian Milk Chocolate to Spicy Columbian Bittersweet. A vast selection of regional specialty products amplifies the options. In Pasco, the Country Mercantile is an emporium of hand-made and homemade goods, ranging from premium chocolates to pickled vegetables. (Marinated mushrooms or hot asparagus bullets anyone?) They create the gourmet candy on-site and offer tours of the chocolate factory. No golden ticket required. However, there is a small admission charge.

Abundant American History: The confluence of the Yakima, Snake and Columbia rivers figured prominently in Lewis and Clark's expedition to the Pacific. When they reached this valley, the explorers finally figured out where they were. It was the first time they'd had any inkling of their whereabouts since they crossed the Missouri River. They passed through the area again on their way back to civilization. The visits are commemorated throughout the Tri-Cities. Check out the interpretive info and overlook at Columbia Park West. (The intersection of Columbia Center Boulevard



and Columbia Park Trail in Kennewick.) It looks out on the Columbia and connects to the Sacajawea Heritage Trail. This 23-mile greenway along the river's shore features educational displays about history and nature. In Pasco, the Sacajawea State Park and Interpretative Center details the fascinating life of Lewis and Clark's female guide.

For a glimpse of a landscape pretty much as it was when Lewis and Clark visited, head to the Hanford Reach National Monument. The nation's only free-flowing, non-tidal stretch of the Columbia benefitted from an interesting twist of fate. For

more than 40 years, the area played a significant role in the federal government's nuclear research programs, including World War II's Manhattan Project. Off-limits to development due to security concerns, it now preserves the largest remaining tract of sagebrush grassland in the country. As such, this land that time forgot harbors a staggering array of plant and animal life and a wealth of adventure.

Outdoor Recreation: The Tri-Cities' lovely weather and ample water mean lots of outdoor recreation. Beginning in April, jet boat and kayak tours ply the Columbia's waters through the Hanford Reach's stunning white-cliff landscape. The Yakima and Snake rivers also create an outstanding aquatic playground. Spectacular scenery amps up the good times for sailors, power and pleasure boaters, water-skiers and windsurfers. Fishing, hunting, hiking, camping and cycling are also popular. In any season, this Northwest travel treasure is a sure bet for good times and great adventure. ■

| KENNEWICK, WASHINGTON'S

Laura Gable: *Painting from the Heart*



Laura Gable, the artist responsible for this edition's cover painting, brings heartfelt intuition and a well-honed eye to her work. A natural talent who completed college degrees in both art and accounting, she spent a decade in the corporate world before transitioning into a freelance career as a

graphic artist who also painted with a passion.

She credits her sweetheart Doug Bragg with giving her the courage necessary to make the transition to full-time painting 10 years ago. His career also brought them to the Tri-Cities where life amid the scenic wine country informs much of her work. "My art is eclectic and intuitive and sensitive in that the subject matter is typically drawn from what's going on inside of me. I've also been doing more painting outdoors. Nature has so much to teach us. There is so much to attend to from the study side because art is training your eye to see."

Even when capturing the essence of inanimate objects, Gable typically paints from life rather than photographs. "I'll set up a still life in my studio. I once had a teacher who said he could tell if an

image was painted from a photo. He meant that the colors in the background look as strong as the colors in the foreground. Photos tend to fade away the atmospheric veil that affects how we see things."

Much of Gable's work melds her imagination with the real world. To see more visit www.LauraGable.com. Her Kennewick Gallery is open during each first Thursday ArtWalk and also by appointment. ■



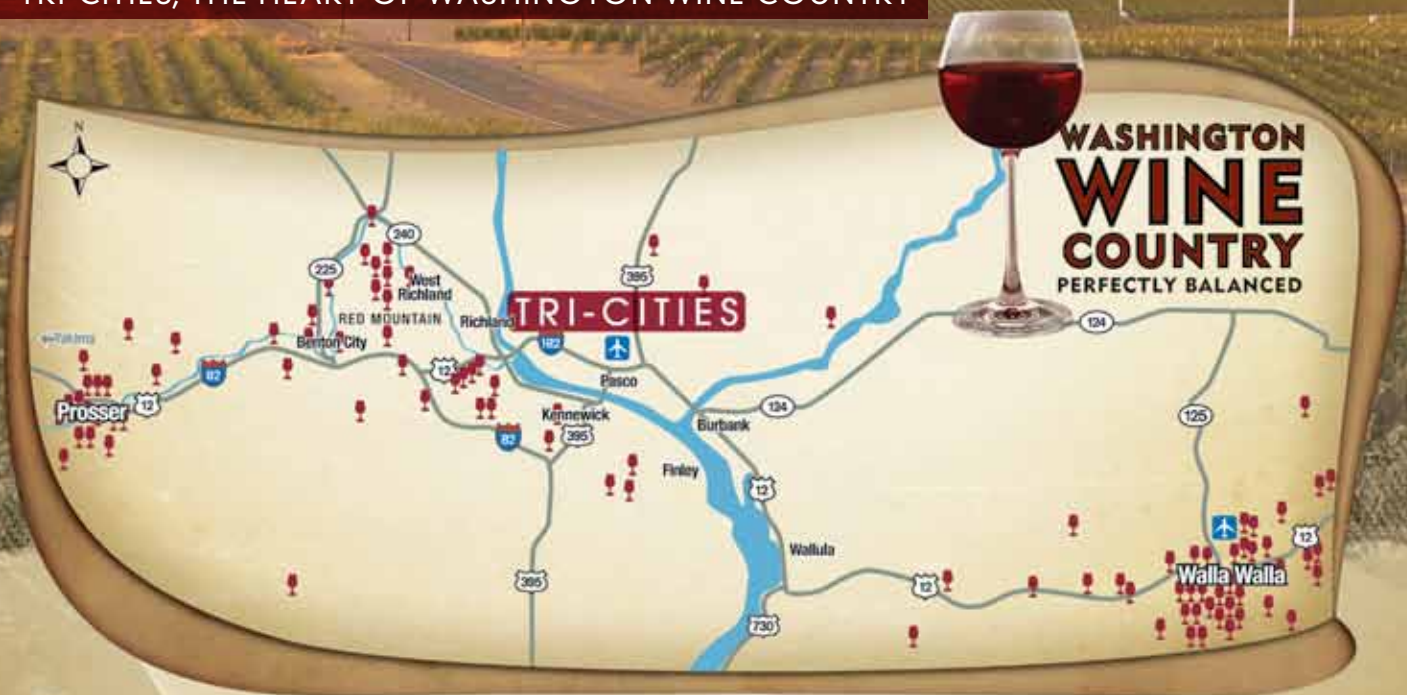
ABOUT THE COVER: *Through the Vines*, an 11" x 14" oil painting, was created for a local charity auction. "I wanted to do the grapes with a sense of our place," Gable explained, "The hills here are soft and rolling. I've heard them referred to as 'sueded' and I wanted to capture that essence. I love the way it turned out."

Laura Gable: Dan McCool



Bliss just doesn't quite describe it.

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