

TRAVEL



MARCUS YAM Los Angeles Times

AS HAPPY AS A CLAMMER

Playing in the mud isn't just for kids. On the scenic Oregon coast, you can dig for clams on tidal plains such as those at Siletz Bay in Lincoln City (pictured) and catch Dungeness crabs from piers or boats. Then you can enjoy their fresh flavors. And if your car gets stuck on the beach, there's help. **L4-5**

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VINTAGE GEORGIA

Winemaking is an ancient art in this republic on the Black Sea. Raise a glass to doing things the old way.

By JOHN HENDERSON

TELAVI, Republic of Georgia—It was known as the “Tuscany of the Soviet Union,” a strange handle for a place better known for being overrun by Mongol hordes and the Red Army, among others.

Yet it fit. Everyone in the Soviet Union knew it, thanks to wine, the greatest gift the Republic of Georgia gave mankind.

Wine was already being produced south of Tbilisi, Georgia’s capital, thousands of years ago. Throughout its history and its op-



Sources: Nextzen, OpenStreetMap

Los Angeles Times

If you go

THE BEST WAY TO TBILISI, GEORGIA

From LAX, KLM, Delta, Turkish, Aeroflot, Lufthansa, United, Air France and LOT offer connecting service (change of planes) to Tbilisi. Restricted round-trip fares from \$1,497, including taxes and fees.

To reach Telavi, you can take a *marshrutka*, a big minivan, for about \$3.

TELEPHONES

To call the numbers below from the U.S., dial 011 (the international dialing code), 995 (the country code for Georgia) and the local number.

WHERE TO GO

The Telavi area has about 20 wineries. Make an appointment to visit through Kakheti Wine Guild (1 Rustaveli, Telavi, Georgia; 350-27-90-90, wine@kwg.ge). The English-speaking staff can arrange tours and taxis. Some tastings are free, most are \$8-\$10.

Kakhuri Winery, 1 Tbilisi Road, Telavi, Georgia; 350-270-200, lat.ms/kakhuriwinery, info@kakhuri.com. Collection of old winemaking machinery.

Rostomaant Marani, II Rcheulishvili St., Telavi, Georgia; 599-92-95-05, rmarani.com/en/, info@marani.com. Small family winery run out of a home.

Vita Vinea Winery, Village Shalauri, Telavi District, Georgia; 577-50-80-29, vitivinea.ge. Beautiful tasting room.

Telavi Wine Cellar, Kurdgelauri, Telavi, Georgia; 350-27-37-07, marani.co. One of Georgia’s biggest wineries.

Vaziani Winery, 42 Mshvidoba St., Telavi, Georgia; 322-90-47-74, vaziani.ge. Award-winning Saperavi 2017.

WHERE TO STAY

Tushishvili Guesthouse, 15 Nadickviri St., Telavi, Georgia; 577-75-66-25, globalsalsa.com/telavi. A five-minute walk from the Kakheti Wine Guild. Doubles from \$14 per person with breakfast.

WHERE TO EAT

Cafe Bravo, Nadickviri Street, Telavi, Georgia; 593-15-27-13, lat.ms/cafebravo. Open 24 hours. Excellent local dishes served on a nice terrace. Dishes \$3-\$8.

Barbarestan, 132 D. Aghmashenebeli Ave., Tbilisi, Georgia; 322-94-37-79, lat.ms/barbarestan. Elegant restaurant serving *khachapuri*. Dinner and two glasses of wine are about \$23.

TO LEARN MORE

Georgia Tourism Information Center, georgia.travel

pression, Georgia always had wine to fall back on.

It became a form of expression when Georgians had none. Georgia was the main source of wine for Russia. Since independence in 1991 and a Russian embargo in 1998, improved production and marketing have made its wines among the trendiest in the world.

I spent two weeks this summer in Georgia, at the eastern end of the Black Sea, and toured some of the 20 wineries around Telavi, the capital of the Kakheti region where 60% of the country’s wine is produced in an area of about 90 square miles.

In three trips to Moscow and St. Petersburg in the last 13 years, I had learned that a big Russian evening out involved a Georgian restaurant. Great food, such as its signature bread filled with cheese, attracted me, but the Georgian wines—dark, bold, mysterious—hooked me. When I moved to Rome in 2014, I put Georgia on my “must-see” list.

One with the winemaker

Georgia produces a variety of wines for nearly every palate, including semi-sweet wines that placated native son Joseph Stalin and the Soviet Union for decades. Its dry reds have spread across the world, and sparkling wines are growing in popularity.

Georgia is the same latitude as Tuscany and has similar conditions, with warm air from the Caspian Sea and mineral-rich water flowing from natural springs in the Caucasus mountains.

These are ideal conditions for growing its 530 varieties of grapes. The quality of Georgian wines is becoming recognized worldwide; last year its wine exports to 53 countries were up 60% from 2016 to 76.7 million bottles, generating \$170 million.

The best part about Georgian wine is you’re often one on one with the winemaker. In Napa and Tuscany you sometimes fight for space in crowded tasting rooms, but except for Georgia’s high season in July and August, you’re up close with the brains behind the wine. I saw only two other visitors in my stops at five wineries in May and June. With so few crowds, touring took little planning. I just called the well-organized Kakheti Wine Guild, which arranged five winery visits and a taxi driver for about \$63.

With that, here are some things to know about Georgian wine.

Fermenting in *qvevri*

Although Georgia has changed—this former Soviet republic attracted 2.7 million visitors in 2016—the way it produces wine has not. Georgians use the methods their ancestors did.

Irakli Rostomashvili stood in a small stone room surrounded by six holes in the ground. They are the production basins of Rostomaant Marani, his small family wine business, one of thousands of family wineries that dot the countryside.

The holes contain beeswax-lined clay pots called *qvevri*, in which wine is fermented and stored for as long as two years.

Last year archaeologists found ancient fragments, once part of large vases decorated with carvings of grapes, that were used to store wine. Pollen analysis showed that the hilly area, about 20 miles south of Tbilisi and populated by Stone Age farmers, had grape vines.

Rostomashvili uses the same types of *qvevri* today. “Today, it’s the same technique and it tastes better,” he said.

After two months the *qvevri* are examined, and the grape skin and seeds at the bottom are crushed and made into *chacha*, Georgia’s lethal brandy.

“It’s a lot of manual labor,” said Giorgi Dakishvili of Vita Vinea, another family winery. “Labor costs are high.”

What’s left, however, is an all-natural wine that is almost considered one of Georgia’s major food groups.

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A Georgian toast

Go online to read about Georgian wines and the toast, or *supra*, an essential part of drinking.



Photographs by MARCUS YAM Los Angeles Times

AT CANNON BEACH in northern Oregon, where land meets water in particularly picturesque ways,

beachgoers survey a misty morning. It’s one of many tempting coastal stops along U.S. 101—take your time to enjoy the scenery, go clamming or crabbing, and eat seafood.

COASTING IN OREGON

Meander the ocean’s edge in the north, where you can haul in the day’s fresh catch or just savor the scenery

By ROSEMARY McCLURE

PACIFIC CITY, Ore. — When you’re feeling crabby, nothing can compare to pulling a trap filled with Dungeness crabs up from the briny deep—unless it’s breaking open a steaming hot, just-cooked crab, dipping it in buttery lemon-caper sauce and devouring it.

Crabbing is one of the charms of the Oregon coast, a place as well known for its seafood as for its surf and sand. You can fish almost anywhere. Or you can get down and dirty and play in the mud; a shovelful can hold clams, shrimp and other tasty surprises.

I visited Oregon last month, driving the dramatic Pacific Coast Scenic Byway, U.S. 101, with my friend Wendt, who not only loves fresh fish but also owns a seafood restaurant and fish market in Los Alamitos. I wanted to see great scenery; she wanted to check out great seafood at its source. Both were easy tasks on the Oregon coast.

First, we learned that all the cool kids call it the Coast. Not the Beach, as we do in California. Oregonians will know you’re a tourist if you call it the beach.

We flew into Portland and hit the road, driving southwest on Oregon 18 for a couple of hours until it intersected with U.S. 101 near Lincoln City.

The 101, we quickly found, is a stunner. Its 363 miles along the sea stretch from the Columbia River in the north to the California state line in the south, passing headlands and giant sand dunes, lighthouses and fishing villages.

Don’t go that way if you’re in a hurry. There are too many tantalizing vista points, too many amazing state parks (more than two dozen) and too many poky drivers ogling the scenery.

Oregon residents claim this is the best stretch of road along the Pacific coast. I don’t want to bicker, but California 1 through Big Sur is fantastic too. I will admit that Oregon’s favorite highway offers an epic drive. And an epic place to play in the mud.

We did just that at Siletz Bay in Lincoln City, where we borrowed boots, a shovel and a bucket and began digging for purple varnish clams. (Don’t forget to get a license, and check the Oregon Department

of Fish and Wildlife website (lat.ms/shellfishguide) for information on season closures.

There’s something therapeutic about stomping around in big boots and digging holes in squishy mud. Scientists say playing in the mud has lots of pluses: It helps increase brain and physical activity and reduces susceptibility to depression and allergies. Of course, these studies focus on why it’s good for kids, not adults. But we’re all just big kids, right?

We were pretty happy slogging around on the tidal plain and managed to capture two dozen clams, but the tide was turning, so we donated our catch to another clam digger and moved on.

It’s always time to eat

All that digging had made us hungry. After washing off the mud, we headed south on the 101 to Newport, which is one of Oregon’s most popular coastal towns.

Newport is home to the state’s largest fishing fleet, two lighthouses, lots of shops and some great seafood restaurants.

Wendt wanted to try Laura Anderson’s popular Local Ocean Seafoods, known for its flavorful fresh fish. We sat at a counter overlooking the open kitchen and dished with chef Enrique Sanchez-Rodriguez as he put the finishing touches on an elegantly plated tuna mignon made with albacore (\$25).

My friend talked shop and invited the chef to visit her restaur-

ant. He told her Local Ocean’s key to success is its location across the street from the fishing fleet. “They catch it in the morning, you eat it for dinner that night,” he said.

Traveling with a restaurant has its benefits: You always eat well.

Stop to take a hike

We turned north and hopscotched our way along Oregon’s central coast, backtracking now and then to talk to seafood distributors and to check out the sights, including Oswald West State Park.

The park, considered one of the system’s most spectacular, is named for late Oregon Gov. Oswald West. From the parking lot, it’s a quarter-mile hike through a forest to the summit and an outstanding view of the Pacific and Short Sand Beach. You might want to stay all day: The beach is in a tranquil cove that makes it seem private, despite the boogie boarders and surfers.

Ten miles north of Oswald, we stopped at Cannon Beach, a fun place to shop and walk. The town is sort of a Laguna Beach North, with galleries and an arty feel.

It’s also known for Haystack Rock, which towers 235 feet above the water, and Ecola State Park, which offers panoramic coastal views from its perch at the edge of a headland. Cannon is a 90-minute drive from Portland, making it an easy choice for California visitors who are short on time.

We saved our most interesting experience—Dungeness crabbing—for last. You can catch crabs in Oregon from a pier or from a boat. We decided to try crabbing from a dory, a small, flat-bottomed craft launched from shore. Exciting and pricey, like most fishing trips: \$200 a person.

It sounded like fun when I had planned it. But when we arrived in Pacific City, home of the dory fleet, the waves seemed enormous and the dories seemed tiny.

I tried not to think about the adventure, scheduled for the next day. Thankfully, there was a lot going on in Pacific City, which proved to be a wonderland of activities.

People were walking on the beach, playing in the surf and flying kites. But mostly they were watching cars that were being driven on the beach. The cars would get stuck in the sand, so there were always



CLAMMING is popular on the Oregon coast. Elijah Promma, 8, gives it a wholehearted effort at Siletz Bay in Lincoln City.

guys pushing cars, attaching chains to axles, letting air out of tires. I was told people visit this beach just to watch these follies.

Pacific City is adjacent to Cape Kiwanda State Natural Area, where the Great Dune awaits those hardy enough to climb this massive hill cloaked in drifting sand. And in the bay is another Haystack Rock, a classic basalt sea stack.

The next day, we jumped on board a 216-foot dory manned by Capt. Joe Hay. I closed my eyes as the Haystack Fishing boat seasawed crazily in the surf. Hay turned on appropriate music: Richard Wagner’s dramatic “Ride of the Valkyries.”

Soon we were in calm waters and headed to one of Hay’s crab pots. A large cache of the shellfish appeared when the trap was raised, garnering a cheer from the four passengers. Hay and a crew member sorted the crabs, throwing back the small ones. We headed for shore, detouring to say hello to a gray whale that appeared near the boat.

A crab feast at the captain’s nearby home was the high point of our outing. Within two hours we were cracking and eating incredible Dungeness crabs.

“They’re so fresh,” Wendt said. “You can’t help but love this.” I had to agree.

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BOATS take visitors fishing and crabbing. Capt. Joe Hay pulls in a crab pot near Pacific City, Ore.

If you go

THE BEST WAY TO THE OREGON COAST

From LAX, Delta, American, Alaska and Southwest offer nonstop service to Portland, Ore., and United, Alaska, Southwest, Delta, American and Frontier offer connecting service (change of planes). Restricted round-trip fares from \$178. From Portland, drive southwest on Oregon 18 to U.S. 101.

WHERE TO STAY

Headlands Coastal Lodge & Spa, 33000 Cape Kiwanda Drive, Pacific City, Ore., (503) 483-3000, headlandslodge.com. Charming, new, ocean-view resort with excellent views of Pacific City’s Haystack Rock. Cozy lobby, fine-dining restaurant, 33 rooms and 18 cottages. Doubles from \$300 a night, depending on season.

Stephanie Inn, 2740 S. Pacific St., Cannon Beach, Ore., (844) 374-2107, stephanieinn.com. Beachfront resort with fireplaces and wrap-around verandas. Popular choice in one of Oregon’s favorite coastal towns. Doubles from \$289 a night.

Salishan Resort, 7760 U.S. 101, Gleneden Beach, Ore., (800) 452-2300, salishan.com. Family activities, including golf course, tennis center and spa are available at this 205-room central Oregon coast hotel. Most accommodations include fireplaces and decks. Doubles from \$126 a night.

WHERE TO EAT

Local Ocean Seafoods, 213 S.E. Bay Blvd., Newport, Ore., (541) 574-7959, localocean.net. Check out this Oregon favorite where fresh crab and other seafood dominate the menu. Expect a long line. Entrees \$8.50 to \$32.

Side Door Cafe, 6675 Gleneden Beach Loop Road, Gleneden Beach, Ore., (541) 764-3825, sidedoorcafe.com. Small, converted warehouse is so popular that aficionados fly here from Portland for lunch. Soups, salads and sandwiches at lunch, when prices start at \$8.50. Try the bay shrimp melt, \$13.50.

Pelican Brewing Co., 33180 Cape Kiwanda Drive, Pacific City, Ore., (503) 965-7007, pelicanbrewing.com. At first people came for the beer, now they come for the food—and the beer. Beachfront brewpub is a great spot to watch surfers, fishermen and giant Haystack Rock. Soups, salads, flatbreads, sandwiches, burgers. Most entrees less than \$20.

TO LEARN MORE

Travel Oregon, travloregon.com

Oregon Coast Visitors Assn., visithetheoregoncoast.com



ANA BEDIANDZE

WINE in the Republic of Georgia typically ferments in beeswax-lined clay pots called *qvevri*. These are at Telavi Wine Cellar.