



# A New York State of Wine

One of America's most spectacular wine regions is in the Northeast—which means it's even more beautiful in the fall. On a weekend jaunt through New York's Finger Lakes, **Ray Isle** samples crisp Rieslings and farm-to-table cuisine.

**THERE ARE DAYS** when life makes you feel as though you've been poured into a blender and whizzed into a froth of nervous exhaustion. As a resident of New York City, I find this happens to me with disconcerting frequency. But when it does, I have a solution: hightail it 200 miles northwest, to the Finger Lakes.

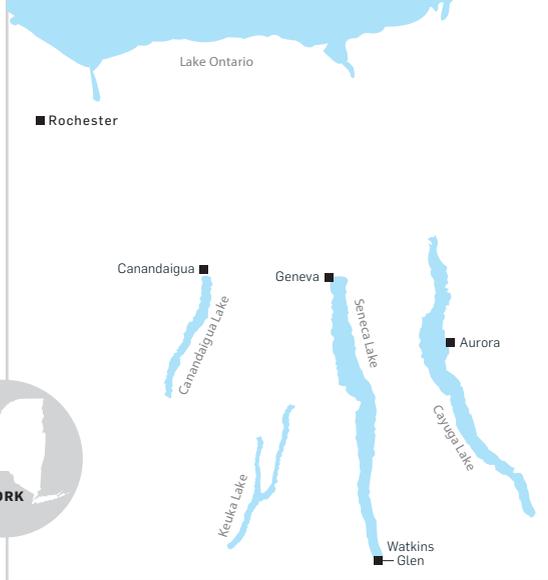
A patchwork of vineyards, apple orchards, hiking trails, and small, thriving towns, this bucolic region of New York State takes its name from 11 narrow glacial lakes between the cities of Rochester and Syracuse that run north to south, like the fingers of an extremely unusual hand. The five largest lakes, where you'll spend most of your time in the region, are Seneca, Cayuga, Skaneateles, Canandaigua, and Keuka. They are quite deep (more than 600 feet, at some points), and because water warms and cools more slowly than air, their immense volume helps moderate the surrounding temperatures. Grape varieties like Riesling and Pinot Noir in turn can flourish, despite the bitter winters.

Add the region's rocky soil and a new generation of ambitious winemakers to the mix, and you've got the ingredients for truly exciting wine. While there are still a fair number of uninspiring bottles produced for the bus-tour crowds, several top-flight wineries have opened over the past decade or so. (Note: when winery hopping, consider bringing along a designated driver or, if you're going solo, enlisting the help of Uber.) Most are open year-round, but fall is the ideal time to visit. It's harvest season, and the weather is cool and breezy. Here's how to spend three perfect days exploring the region.

## FRIDAY

A 1½-hour flight from LaGuardia brought me to Rochester, the easiest entry point to the Finger Lakes. I headed 35 miles southeast to the town of Canandaigua for a quick lunch at **New York Kitchen** ([nykitchen.com](http://nykitchen.com); entrées \$12–\$21), a nonprofit culinary center that highlights the work of Empire State farmers, brewers, and vintners. I tried a few Pinots in the tasting →

*From left: A sourdough tartine with ricotta, tomato confit, egg, and broccolini rabe at Graft Wine & Cider Bar, in the town of Watkins Glen, which serves wines exclusively from New York State; Serenity Vineyards, a family-run winery bordering Seneca Lake.*



room, then dug in to a decadent “Adirondack”—a pizza named for the mountains to the east, with wild mushrooms, grilled ham, Gruyère, and fresh pea shoots.

I decided to kick off my wine tasting in the place where quality bottlings in the Finger Lakes got started—**Dr. Konstantin Frank** ([drfrankwines.com](http://drfrankwines.com)), on the western shore of Keuka Lake. In the 1950s, this winery’s eponymous founder proved that the region could grow classic grape varieties such as Riesling and Pinot Noir. I skipped the main tasting room and headed down the road to my reservation at the serene 1886 Reserve Room, which offers a more personal experience, as well as older vintages and food pairings.

A quick swing around the southern tip of Keuka Lake took me to **Domaine LeSeurre** ([dlwinery.com](http://dlwinery.com)), part of a new wave of ambitious wineries driven by young vintners convinced of the region’s potential. Here, French expats Céline and Sébastien LeSeurre fashion dry, elegant wines that hover between old and new

world in their sensibility—case in point, their thrillingly precise, Chablis-like 2015 unoaked Chardonnay.

I next checked in to **Geneva on the Lake** ([genevaonthelake.com](http://genevaonthelake.com); doubles from \$245), a grand resort in the lively burg of Geneva. It’s an excellent home base, since Geneva’s downtown has become the region’s restaurant and bar nexus thanks to places like the **Linden Social Club** ([thelindensocialclub.com](http://thelindensocialclub.com); small plates \$5–\$7), which is renowned for its cocktails. Despite my abiding love of wine, I couldn’t resist the Prescription Julep (Cognac, rye, Jamaican rum, and mint). Was it the perfect pairing for the “farmers’ market tostada,” made of marinated and grilled zucchini and yellow squash? No idea, but the duo seemed like an ideal balance of indulgence and health.

## SATURDAY

To navigate around the lakes and avoid endless north-south shuttling, it’s best to concentrate on one body of water a day. For Saturday, I chose Seneca. Stretching for 35 miles between Geneva and Watkins Glen, it’s the largest of the five main lakes and is ringed with a number of good wineries. A to-go cappuccino from **Monaco’s Coffee** ([fb.com/monacoscoffee](http://fb.com/monacoscoffee)) fueled my drive down Route 14 to my first stop, **Forge Cellars** ([forgecellars.com](http://forgecellars.com)). A partnership between local talents Rick Rainey and Justin Boyette and acclaimed Rhône vintner Louis Barruol, Forge focuses on *terroir*-expressive Pinot Noir and Riesling. Their wines could go head-to-head with those from anywhere in the world. I stocked up on the smoky 2016 Forge Leidenfrost Vineyard Dry Riesling.

From left: F.L.X. Table, a 14-seat restaurant in Geneva, pairs local wines with dishes such as chicken royal with Burgundy truffle; visitors can take a break from wine tasting at the Linden Social Club, a craft cocktail bar in Geneva.





After Forge, it was time for lunch at **F.L.X. Wienery** ([flxwienery.com](http://flxwienery.com); *entrées* \$3–\$18), a roadside shack serving excellent house-made hot dogs and brats. There’s also a surprisingly extensive wine list that features everything from the house Riesling at \$5 a glass to a *Domaine de la Romanée-Conti La Tâche* for \$2,500 a bottle—a classic pairing with a chili dog, right?

Dozens of wineries line Route 14, so it’s important to choose wisely. One of my favorites is **Ravines Wine Cellar** ([ravineswine.com](http://ravineswine.com)), just south of Geneva. Winemaker Morten Hallgren’s stony *Argetsinger Vineyard Riesling* is not to be missed, nor is the winery’s *Ravinous Table* wine-pairing experience. This season’s dishes might include a 2008 *Blanc de Blanc* with a tart of potato and hazelnuts or a 2016 *Cabernet Franc* with pork loin and plums smoked over grapevine trimmings.

I drove back to Geneva for dinner, as I had scored a much-coveted reservation at **F.L.X. Table** ([flxtable.com](http://flxtable.com); *tasting menu* \$59), arguably the region’s best restaurant. Owned by the couple behind F.L.X. Wienery—Master Sommelier and chef Christopher Bates and his wife, Isabel Bogadtke—the restaurant has only 14 seats at one long dining table. In addition to sampling dishes such as wild salmon with a red-pepper-and-olive *panzanella*, you can’t help getting into a lively conversation with your fellow diners.

## SUNDAY

I started my day with a two-mile hike through the rock gorges at **Watkins Glen State Park** ([parks.ny.gov](http://parks.ny.gov)), where the leaves on the trees were at their scarlet-and-gold peak. Afterward, I nipped around the southern end of Seneca and over to tiny **Bellwether Wine Cellars** ([bellwetherwinecellars.com](http://bellwetherwinecellars.com)), on the western shore of Cayuga Lake. Winemaker Kris Matthewson is one of the region’s up-and-coming stars, and bottles like his violet-scented *Sawmill Creek Vineyard Pinot Noir* make it clear why.

**Dano’s Heuriger on Seneca** ([danosonseneca.com](http://danosonseneca.com); *entrées* \$9–\$26), a short drive west, is modeled on a classic Austrian wine tavern and probably the only place on the planet where you’ll find a “Viennese bento box” on the lunch menu. And yet the combination of classic



Austrian sausages, spaetzle, and tapenade served Japanese-style somehow makes perfect sense.

On the eastern shore of Cayuga Lake, **Heart & Hands Wine Co.** ([heartandhandswine.com](http://heartandhandswine.com)) is another cult, boutique producer. Husband-and-wife team Tom and Susan Higgins make a tiny amount of *Pinot Noir* and *Riesling* from their own estate vineyard. The wines come and go as they sell out, but if their fragrant, top-of-the-line *Mo Chuisle* (pronounced *ma-cush-la*) *Pinot* is there, grab a few bottles to take home.

For my final night, I checked in to the **Inns of Aurora** ([innssofarora.com](http://innssofarora.com); *doubles* from \$165), on the eastern side of Cayuga Lake. Owned by Pleasant Rowland, the creator of *American Girl* dolls, this quartet of historic buildings has been stunningly restored in recent years. Which of the inns you choose is a matter of personal taste—the furnishings in the *Aurora Inn* itself are classic, while *Rowland House* has a more contemporary feel. But no matter which you pick, be sure to sit by the lakefront firepit and have a glass of wine at sunset. Any last vestiges of stress you might feel, from a life anywhere in the world, will soon dissipate. ✕

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*From left: The historic E.B. Morgan House, one of the Inns of Aurora, has seven antiques-filled guest rooms; at Ravines Wine Cellar, guests can have a multicourse meal with pairings at its Ravinous Table.*

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