

Discover Hiking in the San Juan Islands

# Washington TRAILS

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## Harvest Hiking

Explore Autumn Trails and Local Flavor in Yakima

The Future of Wilderness  
Monitoring Olympic Marmots  
Camera Essentials for the Trail

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# Harvest Hiking

By Cassandra Overby

*In autumn, the golden glow of larches pulls focus to Washington's high country. But in the hidden folds and river canyons of central Washington, another color riot is taking place. Butter yellow, pumpkin orange, rhubarb red: For a few short weeks, the normally dry, hide-colored earth explodes with color and harvest bounty. Ripe apples decorate stout trees; plump grapes weigh down delicate vines. It's a feast in every sense of the word. It's also the ultimate autumn destination: **Yakima Valley.***

Spend an afternoon strolling the colorful grounds of the Yakima Area Arboretum. Photo by David Hagen

**F**all colors and fresh crops aren't the only reasons to visit Yakima Valley. The region boasts more than 300 days of sunshine annually and warm temperatures that stretch into October. Even then, when it's cold and rainy west of the mountains, most afternoons are sunny and 80 degrees. Adding to Yakima Valley's appeal are its accessibility (located in the center of the state, it's never more than a four-hour drive away) and its abundance of outdoor recreation opportunities. There are countless canyons to explore, rivers to raft and paths to wander. From color-inspired hikes to farm-fresh produce stands and family-owned vineyards, get ready to experience Yakima Valley like a local.

## ► Day 1: Canyon Country

One of the best things about driving to Yakima Valley is the abundance of scenic roads in the area that offer jaw-dropping views, especially in fall. To start your weekend adventure off right, access Yakima Valley from the north along Canyon Rd, which intersects with I-90 near **Ellensburg**. Before you head down into the canyon, fill up with a hearty breakfast from **The Yellow Church Cafe** (1; theyellowchurchcafe.com) on South Pearl St. The popular Ellensburg restaurant is a former church; you'll love the vaulted ceilings and choir loft tables.

Once your appetite is satiated, it's time to start driving. You'll want your camera handy—the **Yakima River Canyon** is about as picturesque as it gets. The road winds alongside the Yakima River for nearly 30 miles and showcases rolling shrub steppe, deep blue water and jutting basalt formations. Not content to just pass by? The road offers several pullouts that are great for taking pictures.

Keep an eye out for anglers—the Yakima River is Washington's only Blue Ribbon trout stream and is popular with fly fishermen.

For a closer look at the river, pull off at one or several of the Bureau of Land Management recreation sites along the way. There are four developed sites to choose from: Umtanum Creek (MP 16), Lmuma Creek (MP 12), Big Pines (MP 10) and Roza (MP 7). The most popular of these is **Umtanum**, where most people put in their inner tubes and rafts for a relaxing float down the river.

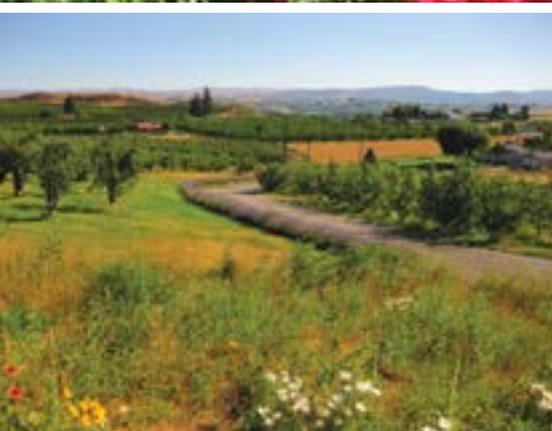
**RIVER TIP:** Floating the Yakima River is one of the best ways to explore the canyon. If you already have an inner tube and can leave a car at both ends of your float, put in at Umtanum and take out at Roza. Count on being in the water for 2.5 hours. If you'd like to rent a tube and use a shuttle service, check out Rill Adventures [rilladventures.com].

To stretch your legs and explore the canyon by foot, exit Umtanum via the well-marked wooden footbridge and enter the 105,000-acre **Wenas Wildlife Area**. There are a variety of trails here to choose from; try the 6.5-mile (700-ft elevation gain) **Umtanum Creek Canyon Trail** (2). It shadows Umtanum Creek for several miles, putting shrub-steppe and riparian habitat on display, as well as beautiful golden aspen. It also boasts plenty of wildlife viewing opportunities—keep your eyes open for bighorn sheep, beavers, muskrats and lots of upland birds. (More info on pg 43.)

Once you've explored to your heart's content, it's time for lunch. Continue your drive through the Yakima Canyon to the city of **Yakima** (3) and **Taco El Grande** on East Nob Hill Blvd. This



Float the river or hike a trail in the Yakima River Canyon or the Umtanum Recreation Site. Photo by Cassandra Overby.



Sample the Topcutter IPA at Bale Breaker Brewing Co; Satisfy your post-hike hunger with a Mountaineer pizza at Snipes Mountain Brewery; See an explosion of color at the Yakima Area Arboretum; Combine wine tasting and gorgeous views at The Tasting Room. Photos by Cassandra Overby.

food truck is known far and wide for offering the best Mexican food in the area. Try a *huarache*—it's the house specialty. Just don't forget cash.

By now you've driven through Yakima, but you haven't gotten to know the city. Spend some time in the afternoon wandering around town. A great first stop is the **Yakima Visitor Information Center** on North Fair Ave, where you can gather pamphlets on the area's attractions to your heart's content. Ask for a self-guided walking tour map of historic downtown Yakima. The map also includes interesting snippets and stories on different buildings you'll pass by. On your walk, grab dinner at **Barrel House** on North First St and try their selection of local craft beer.

**URBAN HIKE:** For a beautiful sunset stroll, walk the Yakima Greenway. The paved trail runs for 10 miles and has access points at several places, including the Yakima Area Arboretum, the Oxford Suites Yakima and Sarg Hubbard Park.

When you're ready to call it a night, it's time to settle into your home for the weekend. There are several notable options. For camping, head over to **Yakima Sportsman State Park** (4; parks.wa.gov). With 30 tent spaces and 30 utility spaces—as well as 140 species of birds—it's a great spot that offers a touch of nature near the city. Reservations are required. For an indoor stay, check in to **Oxford Suites Yakima** (oxfordsuitesyakima.com). This comfortable hotel offers its guests suites that overlook the beautiful Yakima Greenway, as well as free drink tickets, free soup and salad in the evenings, and a free breakfast buffet. To go more upscale (and quirky), book a stay at the **Cherry Wood Bed Breakfast and Barn** (cherrywoodbbandb.com) in Zillah. Sleep in a Ralph Lauren-decorated teepee, bathe under the stars in an outdoor bathtub or go wine tasting by horse. Proceeds help support a horse rescue program.

## ➤ Day 2: Discover Downtown

Start the next morning off right with a trip to **North Town Coffeehouse** (northtowncoffee.com) on North Front St. This space used to be a train depot; the building was recently renovated but its old-time charm and architecture were left intact. Dine in the coffeehouse or take your breakfast to go. You're off to the **Yakima Area Arboretum** (4; ahtrees.org) for a morning stroll.

The arboretum, home to more than 1,000 specimens of trees, grasses and shrubs on 46 acres, is a fantastic place to view fall colors. Wander through the grounds on the many gravel and dirt paths, bird watch at the pond behind the interpretive center or test your map skills with a self-guided orienteering course (available from the interpretive center during business hours or online at the Yakima Area Arboretum's website). For a lengthier stroll, hop on the Greenway trail, which runs through the back of the arboretum property.

After you've warmed up your legs, it's time to explore Yakima Valley's agricultural past and present. If you enjoy museums, visit the **Central Washington Agricultural Museum** (5; centralwaagmuseum.org) in Union Gap. It's huge—the museum offers multiple living history exhibits, 29 covered buildings and 15 acres of displays. To sample the fruits (and vegetables) of local agriculture, hop in the car for a tour of **Yakima Valley farm stands**. For a printable produce map and harvest schedule, check out the map section of visityakima.com. Two farm stands not to miss: **Barrett Orchards** and **Johnson Orchards**.

**LOCAL TREATS:** For great caramels and pies, check out the Little Bake Shop at family-owned [for 110 years!] Johnson Orchards. The main produce stand [located next door] also offers u-pick.

You may have been snacking on fresh produce all morning, but when you're ready for lunch, head to the **historic soda fountain** at the **Yakima Valley Museum** (3; yakimavalleymuseum.org). It was recently voted one of the West Coast's top 10 old-fashioned soda fountains by *Sunset* magazine. Then pop into the museum for a spot of afternoon entertainment: *Sasquatch Revealed*. This exhibit explores ancient Sasquatch legends, as well as recent sightings and evidence. There's a Yakima connection too. Roger Patterson and Bob Gimlin of the famous 1967 Patterson-Gimlin film (which contained footage of an alleged Bigfoot) were from Yakima. Although Patterson

passed away in 1972, Gimlin is a frequent visitor to the museum. If you'd like to try spotting Sasquatch for yourself, rumor has it Bumping Lake is the place to go.

After looking at the evidence for Bigfoot, you may just need a drink. Try **Bale Breaker Brewing Company** ([balebreaker.com](http://balebreaker.com)) in Moxee for hand-crafted ales and a look at a commercial hop farm. Little-known fact: Yakima produces 77% of the nation's hops. When you're ready to switch from beer to food, head to **Taj Palace** on West Nob Hill Blvd for amazing Indian food that rivals anything you'll find in Washington.

## ► Day 3: A Taste of Yakima

On your final day in the area, it's time to go a little farther and explore the rest of Yakima Valley. You'll also learn why the region is called the Napa Valley of the north. After a big breakfast at much-loved family-owned **Papa Baird's Restaurant** on Terrace Heights Dr, drop by the **Yakima Farmers' Market** on South Third St to gather goodies for a picnic lunch. The market runs from 9am to 2pm every Sunday from May to October and features everything from local goat cheese to artisan bread to fresh produce.

Your picnic will come in handy as you head to the **Cowiche Canyon Winery Trail** (6; [cowichecanyon.org](http://cowichecanyon.org)) for a refreshing morning hike that winds through a gorgeous canyon replete with fall foliage—and ends at a winery. The best place to access the trail is off Weikel Rd. Take Summitview Rd 9 miles west of Yakima and turn right onto N Weikel Rd. In half a mile you'll find the parking lot and trailhead on the right. Your hike starts on the Cowiche Canyon Trail, a great 6-mile hike. Just prior to bridge 8 (in approximately 1.5 miles) you'll see the winery trail branch off to the north. Take this side trail and climb to the canyon rim. The 0.8-mile section has several switchbacks and is pretty steep, but the climb is worth it. At the top, you'll find a path to **The Tasting Room** ([tastingroomyakima.com](http://tastingroomyakima.com)), one of the most charming, cozy and picturesque wineries in the area. Spread out a blanket, eat your picnic lunch and soak in the peace and calm that permeate the grounds.

After lunch, get ready for a mini road trip. The rest of your afternoon will be spent wine tasting in Zillah. Although nearly every road in town leads to a winery, get a bird's-eye view of the area from **Rattlesnake Hills** (3; [rattlesnakehills.com](http://rattlesnakehills.com)). If everyone in your party will be tasting, there are many shuttle services that will take you from winery to winery. In some areas, you can even walk.

**TOUR BY BIKE:** If you'd like to see several wineries by bike, ask at the Yakima Visitor Information Center for the "Bicycling in Washington Wine Country" guide. It offers suggestions for short, medium and long rides.

After sampling some of the great wines in Zillah, you may never want to leave Yakima Valley. But there's more to taste—and see. Yakima Valley has more than 100 award-winning wineries in total. You won't have time to see them all, but a sunset drive through Yakima Valley to **Sunnyside** (7; approximately 15 miles SE) will give you a better idea of the scope of the valley—and give you great ideas about where to visit on your next trip. Avoid the interstate and go for the **Yakima Valley Hwy** instead; it's much more scenic. Don't forget to stop for pictures—the orchards and vineyards you'll see along the way will be drenched in color. If you time it right, you'll even be able to capture the magical glow that blankets the fields as the sun dips down.

Once you reach Sunnyside, take the last stop of your journey at **Snipes Mountain Brewery and Restaurant** ([snipessmountain.com](http://snipessmountain.com)) on the Yakima Valley Hwy. It's a great place to sit in front of a roaring fire and reflect on your trip. The house beer is made on site (you can see into the area where it's made), and the wood-fired pizza is delicious. Can't decide which pizza to order? Try the Mountaineer—it's a perfect blend of sweet barbeque sauce, tangy meat and homemade crust.

Your time in Yakima Valley is coming to a close, but there's good news: You can come back any time. After all, it is just a short drive away. You never know—Yakima Valley might just become your go-to Northwest weekend destination. ♦



## Yakima Fall Festivals and Events

Sept 19-28: Central Washington State Fair

Sept 26-28: Great Prosser Balloon Rally

Sept 27-28: Wine Country Bicycle Trek

Oct 4: Pirate Plunder Adventure Race

Oct 4: Fresh Hop Ale Festival

Oct 4: Wapato Tamale Festival