

Adventures

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Sawtooth Winery

Follow the Trail

Discover trails through wine and farm country, pine forests, urban greenspaces, mountains and lakesides in Southwestern Idaho

BY CHRISTIE PORTER

FROM THE GRAPEVINE-STRIPED HILLS of the Sunnyslope Wine Trail to stretches of scenic highways, easy access to the great outdoors and a rich agricultural heritage, Southwestern Idaho is ready with homegrown adventures. This adventure takes us from the superior green spaces and cultural hub in Boise, west to the Nampa/Caldwell area for eclectic farmers' markets and wine tastings, then north along scenic routes to McCall for forest treks, whitewater canyon floats and hidden hot springs. ➔

PHOTO COURTESY SUNNYSLOPE WINE TRAIL



AG-VENTURE IN CALDWELL/NAMPA

Towns like Caldwell and Nampa sprung up in the late 1800s along the Oregon Short Line Railroad, which connected Wyoming to Oregon through Idaho. Wild and rustic, Caldwell also has the distinction of being the home of once-Idaho Governor Frank Steunenberg, who was assassinated by a bomb explosion at his home in retaliation to his severe anti-union views and suppression of labor protests.

The construction of irrigation canals and waterways provided the foundation for agriculture, which still largely supports the

neighboring economies today, and you can take part in that persistent agricultural history. Both towns have stellar, locally focused farmers' markets—**Nampa Farmers' Market** (*April–October, nampafarmersmarket.com*) and **Caldwell Farm to Fork Farmers' Market** (*May–September, indiancreekplaza.com*). **Downtown Caldwell** has invested in revitalizing much of its urban center, restoring Indian Creek, which was encased in an underground tunnel. Now, it's a central feature, along with walkable blocks, public art and local boutiques and restaurants.

Must Stop:
BOISE COMICS ART FESTIVAL

Boise Comics Art Festival (BCAF) is a more intimate affair, compared to some of the massive, more corporate cons, but BCAF has a lot of heart and a passionate commitment to the arts. BCAF is organized by the local public library system through grants, bringing top comic talent from around the country to the slightly unconventional comics convention (for instance, one of the days of the festival has Artist Alley set up at Zoo Boise). *Boise Comics Art Festival, Sept. 29–Oct. 1, 2023, boisepubliclibrary.org*

Caldwell's **AgVenture Trail** (*destinationcaldwell.com*) begins downtown and takes you to local farms and orchards, where you can pick fresh produce, meet farm animals and dine on farm-to-fork meals. Some of the stops on the AgVenture Trail coincide with the Sunnyslope Wine Trail.

Nearby hikes: If hiking trails are more your speed than wine trails, 35 minutes from Caldwell you'll find Jump Creek Falls trailhead. The trail is pet- and family-friendly, as a tight half-mile out-and-back trail to the falls. At the end, find a 60-foot waterfall at Jump Creek. The fall boasts vibrant rock walls that rise hundreds of feet above the canyon floor. The trailhead also has several fire rings and picnic spots.



PHOTOS: (LEFT) COURTESY MCINTYRE FAMILY FARMS; (BOTTOM) VISIT BOISE

Opposite Top: McIntyre Family Farms, one of the many stops on the AgVenture Trail. Opposite Bottom: Boise Whitewater Park. Right: Ste. Chapelle, Idaho's oldest continually operating winery. Below: Sawtooth Winery Tasting Room.



PHOTOS COURTESY SUNNYSLOPE WINE TRAIL

Sunnyslope Wine Trail—Vineyards with a view

Hop on the road and take a tour of the wineries in Idaho's Snake River Valley. According to the Idaho Wine Commission, Southwestern Idaho's four-season climate, ancient volcanic soil and abundant water supply make it an ideal place to grow grapes and make wine. The Sunnyslope Wine Trail represents the densest concentration of wineries within the region. Seriously, you can't pop a cork here without hitting a winery:

STOP 1

As farmers first and winemakers second, the Alger family's **Huston Vineyards** (*hustonvineyards.com*) harkens back to Southwestern Idaho's rich agricultural history. Huston Vineyards' Chicken Dinner Wine Series (named for the legendary street that borders the vineyard) has an impressive lineup of awards. Try a wine flight from the cozy tasting room.

STOP 2

Proudly anti-pretentious, **Free Dog Wines** (*freedogwines.com*) proclaim, "Wine should not be hard!" Likewise, the brand name is inspired by the owner's elderly dog, Tess, who was abandoned as a puppy. Try the excellent Albariño at one of their complimentary wine tastings.

STOP 3

Williamson Orchards and Vineyards (*willorch.com*) has been in the family since the early 1900s, and, over the course of four generations, their repertoire has expanded to wine grape varieties. The tasting room is a farmhouse full of family antiques and stunning views of the Owyhee Mountains. A glass of the Harvest Moon Red with a DIY charcuterie board will not disappoint.

STOP 4

Two wineries, one stop! **Ste. Chapelle** (*stechappelle.com*) is Idaho's largest and oldest continually operating winery. The Ste. Chapelle tasting chateau evokes the famous French medieval gothic chapel of the same name. Its neighbor, **Sawtooth Winery** (*sawtoothwinery.com*), sits astride the vineyards just a short distance below. Ste. Chapelle has a dangerously drinkable Soft Huckleberry wine, and Sawtooth's outstanding Classic Fly Series Dry Riesling is a perfect sipper for enjoying panoramic views of the Snake River Valley from their tasting room.

BIKING BOISE

No Southwestern Idaho experience is complete without a cruise on the Boise River Greenbelt by bicycle. The Greenbelt is a 25-mile tree-lined pathway that follows the north and south sides of the Boise River through the heart of the city. It provides scenic views of wildlife habitat, access to Boise's riverside parks and some fun stops along the way:

1. Fuel up for your ride at **Push And Pour** (*pushandpour.com*), a coffee shop with decor inspired by the owners' passion for skateboarding and set up in a renovated autobody shop.
2. Tour **Telaya Wine Co.** (*telayawine.com*) and taste local wines on a shaded patio overlooking the Boise River.
3. Kayak or surf **Boise Whitewater Park** (*boisewhitewaterpark.com*), which uses wave-shaping technology.
4. Catch free, live music and grilled lunch on the outdoor patio at the **Sandbar Patio Bar & Grill** (*sapphiresocietyboise.com*) and stay the night at the on-site Riverside Hotel.
5. Check out the beer garden at **Payette Brewing** (*payettebrewing.com*), where you can play a game of bocce or grab a

6. Stop by **8th Street**, an area of Downtown Boise closed to vehicle traffic and the enviable center of Boise's nightlife and dining scene. The street is lined with restaurants, lounges, open-air patios, sports bars, late-night eateries and tap rooms.
7. Finish your day there, or continue on and take a walk on the wild side at **Zoo Boise** (*zooboise.org*).
8. For glimpses of wildlife—like foxes, deer, mink and herons—take a stroll through the **MK Nature Center**. GreenBikes are available for rent from any of the stations scattered throughout town. There is some etiquette to keep in mind while cruising the Greenbelt, including yielding to pedestrians and keeping off unpaved paths.

OUTDOOR ADVENTURES TO AND FROM MCCALL

From Boise, take Highway 55 toward McCall. The Payette River Scenic Byway winds through the rugged mountains along the Payette River. This is an absolutely stacked outdoor road trip adventure, with hot spring soaks and places to stay along the way to recover between watersports and hiking.

STOP RAFT THE PAYETTE RIVER

About 30 miles north of Boise, book a whitewater adventure on the Payette River at the Cascade Raft River Center (cascaderaft.com) or Bear Valley Rafting (bearvalleyrafting.com). Depending on which river fork you take, experience a chill adventure for the whole family (north fork) or a more intense guided river trip through class-IV rapids (south fork).

STAY SMITH'S FERRY

Smith's Ferry is a popular Payette River access point with a rustic lodge and gas station. During snowy months, there's also access to snowmobiling and snowshoeing trails. Stay the night at Cougar Mountain Lodge (cougarmountainlodge-idaho.com), a throwback to the traditional mountain lodge.

STOP LAKE CASCADE STATE PARK

Take the turn-off to Cascade Lake (parksandrecreation.idaho.gov), where you'll find a serene blue lake surrounded by ponderosa pines and sandy beaches. Enjoy a cool swim or set out on a paddleboard on one of the largest lakes in the state. After a day out on the water, camp at one of the lakeside campsites.

STOP GOLD FORK HOT SPRINGS

At Gold Fork Hot Springs (gold-forkhotsprings.com), soak in one of the six tiered pools overlooking mountain meadows. Your feet will love the heated sidewalks and sandy-bottomed pools.

STAY MCCALL

Continue to McCall, near the shores of Lake Payette, and



PHOTOS VISIT IDAHO

stroll streets lined with cafes, boutiques and galleries. McCall is a charming mountain town with ideal access to the outdoors. Spend a day at the lake, where everything from kayaks to jet boats and pontoons are for rent or book a lake cruise. Find sanctuary for the evening at Shore Lodge (shorelodge.com), and, for winter adventures, check out the nearby Brundage Mountain Resort (brundage.com).

Nearby hikes: Goose Creek Falls Trail is a short, 3-miles out-and-back, dirt trail. Once you reach the falls, you might have to do a little bit of rock scrambling to get an unobstructed view, but it's worth it.

STOP PONDEROSA STATE PARK AND PAYETTE LAKE

Hike or bike the variety of trails at Ponderosa State Park (parksandrecreation.idaho.gov). Most of the park's trails are interconnected, making it easy to navigate. The Ridgeline Trail can be accessed through the Lily Marsh Trail, an easy 2.3-mile out-and-back trail for the whole family. The Ridgeline Trail is a moderate-to-difficult hike that takes you up to the Narrows Overlook and Osprey Cliff Overlook to take in stunning views of Payette Lake. ■



Osprey Cliff Overlook



Must Stop: PEACEFUL BELLY FARMS

Tucked away on Sunnyslopes, between the first and second stops on our Wine Trail, **Peaceful Belly Farms Cafe & Stack Rock Cider House** (peacefulbelly.com) provides an intermezzo for your palate between wine tastings or it can stand all on its own. A rustic, intimate spot for the more adventurous eater, Peaceful Belly's menu is seasonal and they make everything in small batches, inspired by the plants grown on the property. Enjoy a glass of their Stack Rock Cider with your meal, or pick up chilled bottles of your favorites from the Farm Store. For autumn, we love the sweet and tart Kin Folk cider, made with cranberries and sage.