

Founded in 1921, St. Julian Winery in Paw Paw is Michigan's oldest winery.

# Grape escape

Southwestern Michigan is the Midwest wine mecca you never knew existed





**Tabor Hill may be best known for its elegant restaurant, which offers breathtaking vineyard views.** CAROL FOX AND ASSOCIATES PUBLIC RELATIONS

**Matt Alderton** | Special to USA TODAY

Whether they crave a buttery Chardonnay, an earthy Merlot, a fruity Sauvignon Blanc or a spicy Syrah, oenophiles know exactly where to find it: California. France. Italy. Maybe even Australia or Chile. Oh, and ... Michigan? ■ Because it borders four of the five Great Lakes, Michigan is best known for its relationship to water. Its wines, however, have spent the past 40 years slowly making a name for themselves. And if you ask the winemakers behind those vintages, they'll proudly declare that their time has finally come. ■ They might be right: In February, *Wine Enthusiast* magazine gave the 2015 estate-grown Cabernet Sauvignon from **Dablon Vineyards** ( 269-422-2846; *W. Shawnee Rd., Baroda; dablon.com*) 90 points on its 100-point rating scale — the highest rating ever for a Michigan Cabernet Sauvignon.

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Round Barn Winery, Distillery & Brewery in Baroda gets its name from a turn-of-the-century Amish barn that was moved to the site about 20 years ago. JOSHUA NOWICKI

# Wineries

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“The wines being made in Michigan today are not the same wines that were being made 15 years ago,” says Karel Bush, executive director of the Michigan Grape & Wine Industry Council. “Not only have the winemakers become much more experienced, but so have the growers. ... They’re growing varietals consumers want and managing their vineyards in a way that produces the best-quality grapes. Because without good grapes, you can’t make good wine.”

Better wine has generated more wine tourism, according to Bush, who says 94% of Michigan’s 132 wineries receive tourists at their businesses, totaling approximately 1.7 million visits each year.

Although most of the state’s wineries



are concentrated in northwestern Michigan, near Traverse City, southwestern Michigan — less than two hours from Chicago — is a rising star. Brimming with year-round activities, agricultural ambience and, of course, lots of wine, it’s an ideal destination for anyone who measures fun in glugs.

## A shore thing

Southwestern Michigan owes its wine cred to its big blue neighbor to the west: Lake Michigan.

“Lake Michigan has a moderating effect throughout the year,” Bush explains. “In the winter it blows snow, which in-

**Round Barn Winery holds events such as a summer concert series.**

ulates vines and protects them from the bitter cold we get throughout the season. In the spring, cool breezes off the lake keep vines in hibernation so they don’t bud too quickly, making them less susceptible to damage from late frosts. Because the lake warms up over the summer, in the fall it produces warm breezes that keep the temperatures in vineyards a little higher, which extends the growing season and mitigates risk from autumn frosts.”

Whether you prefer red, white or rosé, the best way to uncork it is to explore the **Southwest Michigan Makers Trail** ([makerstrail.org](http://makerstrail.org)), which includes 20 wineries, as well as brewers and distillers, or the **Lake Michigan Shore Wine Trail** ([miwinetrail.com](http://miwinetrail.com)), which lists 19 wineries. Here are a few can’t-miss stops along the way:

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Lemon Creek Winery

The Lemon family settled in Berrien County in 1834 and has been farming there since 1855. The family opened its winery in 1984 and now makes wine from 26 different grape varieties. Come for a flight in its tasting room, but stay for the fruit: Guests can roam the orchards and pick their own seasonal fruit, starting with cherries in late June. (269-471-1321; 533 E. Lemon Creek Rd., Berrien Springs; lemoncreekwinery.com)

St. Julian Winery

Michigan’s oldest and longest-operating winery, St. Julian was established in 1921 and has been in its current location since 1936. Named for the patron saint of the Italian village from whence its founder came, the winery is home to Michigan’s first female winemaker, Nancie Oxley, who oversees the production of more than 90 products, including wines, non-alcoholic sparkling juices, ciders and spirits from its distillery. In addition to tastings, free tours are available year-round. (269-657-5568; 716 S. Kalamazoo St., Paw Paw; stjulian.com)

Round Barn Winery, Distillery & Brewery

Founded in 1992 as Heart of the Vineyard Winery, Round Barn is a family-owned operation. Its headquarters (and namesake) is a turn-of-the-century Amish barn that founders Rick and Sherrie Moersch saved from demolition. Moved 70 miles from its original location in rural Indiana, it was reassembled at the winery in 1997 and is now home to guided tastings, as well as a lively summer social scene that includes live music and outdoor events May-October. (269-422-1617; 10983 Hills Rd., Baroda; roundbarnwinery.com)

Tabor Hill Winery & Restaurant

Tabor Hill began in 1968 and was acquired in 2017 by Round Barn’s Moersch family, whose patriarch began his winemaking career there in 1979. A foodie’s winery, it’s best known for its elegant restaurant, where its wines are showcased with chef-made food pairings and breathtaking vineyard views. (269-422-1161; 185 Mount Tabor Rd., Buchanan; taborhill.com)

SOBER SUGGESTIONS



The Silver Beach Carousel in St. Joseph, Mich., occupies the site of a former amusement park. JOSHUA NOWICKI

EAT

Sober up with pizza from **Silver Beach Pizza** (269-983-4743; 410 Vine St., St. Joseph; silverbeach-pizza.com); a sandwich from **Round Barn Public House** (269-326-7059; 9151 First St., Baroda; roundbarn-publichouse.com); or fish tacos from **The Stray Dog Bar & Grill** (269-469-2727; 245 N. Whittaker St., New Buffalo; thestraydog.com).

SLEEP

**The Harbor Grand** (888-605-6800; 111 W. Water St., New Buffalo; harborgrand.com) was inspired by architect Frank Lloyd Wright and is just steps from the beach. So is its sister hotel, **Marina Grand Resort** (877-945-8600; 600 W. Water St., New Buffalo; marinagrandresort.com). Farther north, try **The Inn at Harbor Shores** (269-983-1111; 800 Whitwam Dr., St. Joseph; innatharborshores



The Inner (foreground) and Outer Lighthouses at the entrance to the St. Joseph River. JOSHUA NOWICKI

.com) or the **Hilton Garden Inn Benton Harbor/St. Joseph** (269-926-5000; 1300 Cinema Way, Benton Harbor; hiltongardeninn.com).

SEE

Historic St. Joseph is home to the **Silver Beach Carousel** (269-932-1141; 333 Broad St., St. Joseph; silverbeachcarousel.com) on the site of the former Silver Beach Amusement Park, as well as the **St. Joseph North Pier Inner and Outer Lighthouses**, built in 1907 on the site of the second-oldest lighthouse on Lake Michigan, erected in 1832.

DRIVE

Most Michigan wineries offer non-alcoholic beverages for designated drivers. If your group doesn’t have one, taxis, limousines and luxury coaches will transport you safely. There’s even a tractor-pulled open-air wagon: **Fruitful Vine’s Wine-O-Wagon** (269-978-8777; fruitfulvinetours.com).