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TRAVEL & LIFE

52

Annual

Getaways

Display until February 28, 2022



NWTRAVELMAG.COM

2022
EDITOR'S
PICKS



40 Road Tripping Oregon's OLD HIGHWAY 99

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Up until the completion of Interstate 5 in 1964, U.S. Route 99 was the main north-south highway running the entire length of the west coast from Mexico to Canada. Though the route has had a number of realignments through the years, the once major thoroughfare is still more or less intact. In Oregon, it is mostly signed as Route 99, 99E, and 99W. And it's that 99W segment of road that is of particular pertinence to this story.

For roughly 125 miles, 99W travels from Portland to Eugene, west of I-5. Along the way, it passes through some of the most beautiful scenery that the Willamette Valley has to offer. The highway itself delivers visitors to the doorsteps of an unending series of unique eateries, wineries, tasting rooms, breweries, boutique lodgings, parks and wildlife refuges. And if you wander off of the byway a few miles in either direction, you'll find enough road trip gold to keep you mining the route for years to come.

Technically, one could drive the length of the 99W in one morning or afternoon. But that's what I-5 is for—getting from Portland to Eugene with scenery-free efficiency. However, if you're looking for a timeless road trip and an I-5 antidote, 99W might be just what the doctor ordered. From north to south here are a number of recommended food and drink, lodging and recreation options. It's a trip that can be as short as an overnighter or as long as three, four or more days. So pace yourself accordingly.

Portland to McMinnville

From the downtown Portland waterfront, hop onto Naito Parkway southbound, and off you go. The road soon becomes 99W, heading off in a southwest direction toward Willamette Valley wine country. It takes a few miles and a few red lights before the highway escapes the metro area, but just as it does, you'll enter the town of Newberg and north valley wine country.

Sure, Newberg is known as a wine town, but if you or anyone in your traveling party is into beer, a stop at Wolves & People is a must. The unassumingly pleasant beer garden is where you'll find some of the finest barrel-aged, farmhouse-style beers produced in all the land. For wine drinkers, the Chehalem Winery tasting room & wine bar is where you'll want to find yourself. For outdoor activity, the Chehalem Glenn Golf Course is an affordable, accessible, but pleasantly scenic and challenging option tucked into the edge of town. Lunch and dinner options include two of Oregon's best destination dining spots: Jory and the Painted Lady. Speaking of Jory, the restaurant is located on the grounds of the luxurious Allison Inn & Spa. If you're looking for more budget-friendly accommodations in the heart of the walkable downtown, the Yamhill Flats are perfect.

Just a few miles down the road from Newberg is another mandatory check-in for the wine aficionado, Dundee. So many great options right along the highway: Trellis Wine Bar & Kitchen, Alit Wines, Fox Farm Vineyards, and Cathedral



The Painted Lady, Newberg, OR
© The Painted Lady, photo by Maricella Dezanick



Coetho Winery, Amity, OR
© Coetho Winery



Nick's Italian Cafe, McMinnville, OR
© Kari Young



Independence Hotel,
Independence, OR
© Independence Hotel



The Vintages, Willamette Valley, OR
© Autumn Schrock

Ridge to name a few. Get all sorts of food and provisions from the iconic Red Hills Market or grab dinner at the Field + Stream restaurant. Lodging options here are as varied as they are wonderful. The Dundee Hotel provides luxury and accessibility to town, the La Bastide Bed and Breakfast is a boutique inn on the fringe of Dundee and the Vintages Trailer Resort provides the ultimate in glamping.

After Dundee, the landscape opens up and becomes more rural for just about 11 miles until you reach the town of McMinnville.

McMinnville to Corvallis

There isn't much that can be said about McMinnville that hasn't already been written. The little slice of Willamette Valley heaven is the envy of Main Streets around the country. Check out any number of boutique shops, but don't miss the newish Mac Market community gathering place. For some exercise, visit local favorite Miller Woods with its miles of forested trails. Choice lodging options that also come with great on-site food and drink include McMenamins Hotel Oregon and the remarkable contemporary vintage feel and aesthetic of the Atticus Hotel.

South of McMinnville, the wine country scenery gets a little showier, and you begin to get glimpses of what Interstate 5 has been hiding behind the curtain all this time. The next town down the road is Amity. If you blink, you'll miss it, but there's a lot to miss. The Coelho Winery, Amity Bakery & Cafe and the bucket list-worthy pies at the Blue Raven Farmstand. Additionally, one of the best lodging options in the valley, the Bella Collina Bed & Breakfast sits perched in the hills high above the town. As the trip continues south of Amity, the Baskett Slough National



1st Street, downtown Newberg, OR
© EPIYA7 © Krista Rossow | Alamy Stock Photo



Bierly Brewing, McMinnville, OR
© Bierly Brewing



McMenamins Hotel Oregon, McMinnville, OR
© Karin Young

Plan Your Trip

Willamette Valley Visitors Association,
willamettevalley.org

Travel Portland, travelportland.com

Eugene, Cascades & Coast,
eugenecascadescoast.org/regions-cities/eugene

Wildlife Refuge is a stop worth taking for wildlife viewing and the opportunity to hike through a native parcel of oak savanna.

Next up, the neighboring towns of Monmouth and Independence should be considered a cornerstone of any 99W road trip. Food and drink abound, and the fairly new Independence Hotel is a wonderful choice for an overnight and placed perfectly on the banks of the Willamette River. Just down the road, the Luckiamute Landing State Natural Area and the McDonald-Dunn Forest afford a wide array of hiking options.

Corvallis to Eugene

In addition to Oregon State University, Corvallis is home to 4 Spirits Distillery. The award-winning craft distillery honors all service members past and present and is well worth a visit. Much of the wine country scenery is in the rear-view at this point, but that doesn't mean all the natural beauty is back there with it. The William L. Finley National Wildlife Refuge is one of the best in the state for hiking and wildlife viewing combined.



Independence Hotel, Independence, OR
© Independence Hotel

In the home stretch, 99W passes through Junction City before reaching its southern terminus in Eugene where the in-city food, drink and outdoor recreation options are as good as you'll find anywhere. For the latest and greatest, stay at the new art-centric hotel, The Gordon, in the expanded 5th Street Public Market. From there you can walk to Skinner Butte or Alton Baker Park. As well as countless premier food and drink stops.

And just like that, a proper 99W road trip draws to a close. Although, if you have the time and inclination, you could always yo-yo it and head back up to Portland to pick off some of the things you had to forego the first time. In fact, I would advise it. 🔄