

Grapes grow on all sides of Y-shaped Keuka Lake.

Fanatical about the Finger Lakes

An idyll in the making

Unspoiled and idyllic: these words spring to mind after a relaxing tour of New York State's Finger Lakes (FLX) wine region. Undulating carpets of green pastures and forests, the lacework of rural roads, glittering lakes rimmed with verdant vines and unfailingly hospitable local folk, all serve to lull visitors into a sense of serenity, good humour and general well-being. And then there is the wine.

This blissful region is easily reachable,

only a four-hour drive from downtown Toronto or Manhattan, which likely explains why more than a million visitors descend annually. But wineries are spread out across the network of parallel lakes, so wine touring never has the frantic, overcrowded feeling that is all too common in places like Napa or the Okanagan Valley.

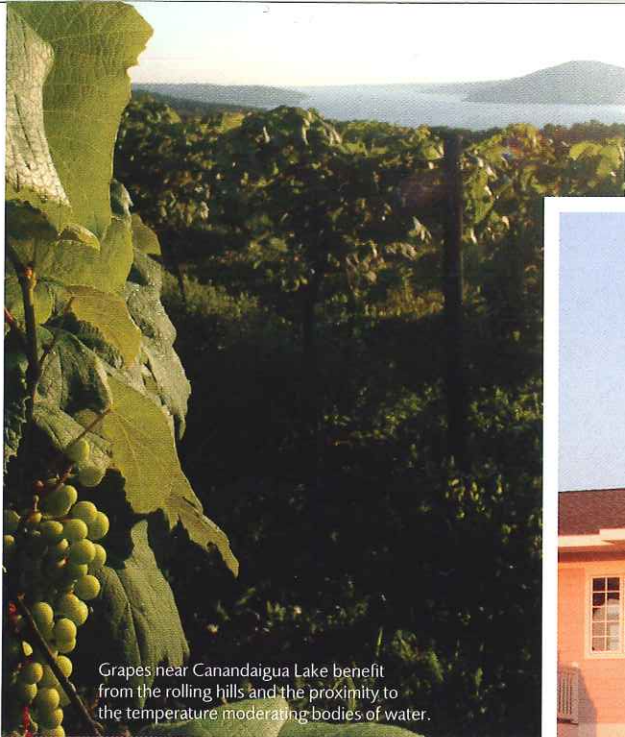
Smack dab in the heartland of New York State lie 10 slender lakes. On a map, the five largest, named Canandaigua, Keuka, Seneca, Cayuga and Skaneateles by the Iroquois,

approximate the fingers of a human hand. Although icy cold winters with warm, but short, summers define this wine region, the lakes' mass of water tempers the extreme climate in a crucial way.

These deep, cold slivers of water slice through some of the earth's most spectacular geology and create very special growing conditions for grapes. Grapevines love rocks, and the Finger Lakes offer 400 million-year-old Devonian sediments, pressure-fused to form flakey layers of shale and sandstone. Geologists



Early morning cool can bring on "lake effect" (the cloud rising from the lake in the background).



Grapes near Canandaigua Lake benefit from the rolling hills and the proximity to the temperature moderating bodies of water.

flock here, as well as wine-lovers.

The softened climate, combined with well-drained soils atop the layers of shale, slate and limestone, supports scores of grape varieties. There is a long tradition of growing characterful but rustic native labruscas (Concord, Catawba, Niagara) and hardy hybrids (Cayuga white, seyval blanc, vigneoles and baco noir). But thanks to the pioneering work of Odessa émigré viticulturist Dr. Konstantin Frank in the 1950s, vinifera vines now dominate. Frank guessed that if noble vines could withstand Ukrainian winters, the Finger Lakes were a no-brainer. He was resoundingly and famously right.

Riesling is the star white performer, but gewürztraminer, pinot gris and chardonnay are also outstanding. For reds, cabernet franc and pinot noir can be stunning, especially in vintages like the generously warm and balanced 2005. Unabashedly cool-climate with vibrant purity, precise varietal character and an enviable refreshing quality, Finger Lake wines exhibit a distinct regional character. And as the vines get older and ongoing site and clone selection are lovingly fine-tuned, the distinctiveness will become even more pronounced.

Tasting wines in Finger Lakes has a very special spirit of conviviality. Wineries enthusiastically welcome visitors and there are many delightful spots to lunch, dine or just bask in the lake-reflected sun. Inns, B&Bs and modest motels make lodging easy and comfortable, and there are plenty of diversions like farmers' markets, gorges, vistas and even Watkins Glen's famous NASCAR speedway if you need a break from incessant imbibing.



Wine-media from Ontario savour local offerings in one of the center's fine tasting rooms



The New York Wine & Culinary Centre in Canandaigua, New York, welcomes visitors to the FLX wine region.

THE FINGER LAKE EXPERIENCE IS FINE

THE NEW YORK WINE & CULINARY CENTER, CANANDAIGUA, NY

For visitors from Southern Ontario travelling east into New York via the I-90 from Buffalo, Canandaigua is the gateway to the Finger Lakes. It is a classic Upstate New York town. Like Geneva, Hammondsport and Watkins Glen, it is full of beautiful nostalgia-inspiring Neo-Classical and Federal-style houses. But it also happens to be home base for Constellation Brands, the world's biggest wine conglomerate. This is not insignificant: Canandaigua's splendid New York Wine & Culinary Center is a shining example of private/public partnership, with funding from Constellation, the New York Wine and Grape Foundation, Rochester Institute of Technology and local supermarket Wegmans. All in the name of sustainability: the Center's tagline is "Agriculture, Food, Wine." Ontario and British Columbia should take note.

The facility is state-of-the-art and not to

be missed. It features a stunning educational theatre sponsored by *Wine Spectator* and an equally stunning, hands-on teaching kitchen sponsored by Viking Range. Those who make a beeline for the upstairs tasting bar and restaurant will not be disappointed. Skillful executive chef Daniel Martello stars local ingredients matched to a wine list showcasing a generous cross-section of New York State wines, including the Hudson Valley, Long Island and Finger Lakes. The mission is simply "to celebrate New York wine and food," and they do it with a vengeance: goat cheese and beet salad with dry riesling; duck and pinot noir; spicy pork sausage with cabernet franc; or any wine you like with spectacular local cheeses. Bonus points for a superlative list of artisanal New York beers. Very useful wine shop, as well. Highly recommended.

LAKE-BY-LAKE WINERY HIGHLIGHTS

CANANDAIGUA LAKE

- 16 The New York Wine and Culinary Center
800 S. Main St., Canandaigua, NY, 14424
585.394.7070 www.nycc.com

KEUKA LAKE

- 1 Bully Hill Vineyards
8843 Greyton H. Taylor Memorial Dr.,
Hammondsport, NY, 14840,
607.868.3210 www.bullyhill.com
- 3 Dr. Konstantin Frank Vinifera Wine Cellars
9749 Middle Rd., Hammondsport, NY, 14840
800.320.0735 www.drfrankwines.com
- 2 Heron Hill Winery
9301 County Route 76, Hammondsport,
NY, 14840
607.243.7109 www.heronhill.com

SENECA LAKE — WEST SIDE

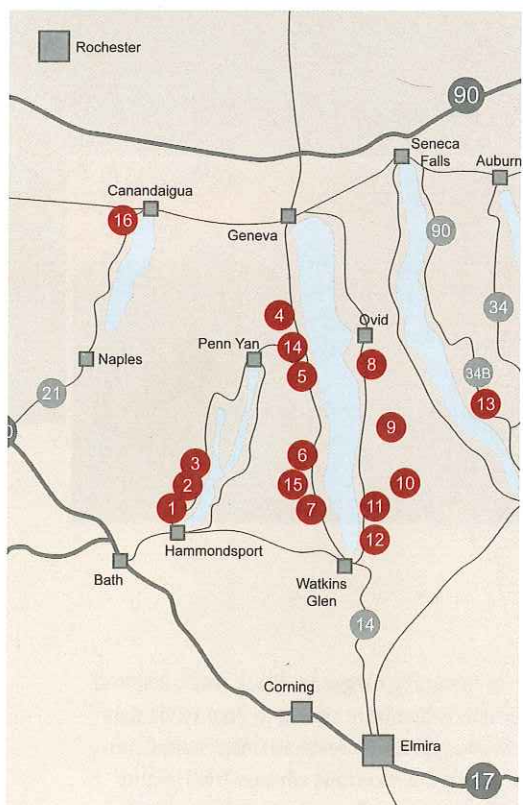
- 15 White Springs Winery
4200 Route 14 South, Geneva, NY, 14456
315.781.9463 www.whitespringswinery.com
- 4 Fox Run Vineyards
670 Route 14, Penn Yan, NY, 14527
525.536.4616 www.foxrunvineyards.com
- 5 Anthony Road Wine Company
1020 Anthony Rd., Penn Yan, NY, 14527
800.559.2182 www.anthonyroadwine.com
- 14 Red Tail Ridge Winery
846 Route 14, Penn Yan, NY, 14527
315.536.4580 www.redtailridgewinery.com
- 6 Hermann J. Wiemer Vineyard
3962 Route 14, Dundee, NY, 14837
607.245.7971 www.wiemer.com
- 7 Glenora Wine Cellars
5435 Route 14, Dundee, NY, 14837
800.243.5513 www.glenora.com

SENECA LAKE — EAST SIDE

- 12 Atwater Estate Vineyards
5055 Route 414, Hector, NY, 14841
800.331.7323 www.atwatervineyards.com
- 11 Chateau LaFayette Reneau Winery and Inn
5081 Route 414, Hector, NY, 14841
607.546.2062 www.clrwine.com
- 10 Red Newt Cellars Winery and Bistro
3675 Tichenor Rd., Hector, NY, 14841
607.546.4100 www.rednewt.com
- 9 Shalestone Vineyards
9681 Route 414, Lodi, NY, 14860
607.582.6600 www.shalestonevineyards.com
- 8 Lamoreaux Landing Wine Cellars
9224 Route 414, Lodi, NY, 14860
607.582.6011 www.lamoreauxwine.com

CAYUGA LAKE

- 13 King Ferry Winery
658 Lake Rd., King Ferry, NY, 13081
800.439.5271 www.treleavenwines.com



TOP EATS & RETREATS

GLENORA WINE CELLARS AND INN AND VERAISONS RESTAURANT

The 30-room cozy inn is snuggled up against lush vineyards with a panoramic lake view; Veraisons is the popular restaurant—breakfasts are glorious. 5435 Route 14, Dundee, NY, 14837 800.243.5513 www.glenora.com

MADDER LAKE CAFÉ

The unstoppable team of sommelier/manager Laura Kudla and chef Scott Snyder have partnered all over the US, happily settling on the western slopes of Seneca Lake; impeccably wrought wine-country cuisine, big-city service, focused wine list features local and global stars. 5286 West Lake Rd., Geneva, NY, 14456 315.781.2424 www.madderlakecafe.com

RED NEWT WINERY AND BISTRO

Local hero, chef Deb Whiting, conjurs up innovative regional cuisine to complement husband/winemaker Dave's excellent Red Newt wines. Sample flights of Finger Lakes wines at the lively bar, or snag a spot on the wraparound porch for a menu that responds to seasonal ingredients every three weeks. 3675 Tichenor Rd., Hector, NY, 14841 607.546.4100 www.rednewt.com

AURORA INN

The idyllic heritage village of Aurora on Cayuga Lake sports the Federal-style Aurora Inn, built in 1833 and lovingly restored. Posh rooms, dining room grandeur, seamless service; renowned clam chowder; wine list sprinkled with local picks. 391 Main St., Aurora, NY, 1306 886.364.8808 www.aurora-inn.com

MAXIE'S SUPPER CLUB AND OYSTER BAR

Perennial favourite hangout in Ivy-League Ithaca, Maxie's is crammed with Cornell students and profs alike, and any lucky wine-trail travellers who have done their homework. Fresh Eastcoast bivalves, virtuoso cocktails and some of the best Louisiana vittles ever. Do not pass on the jambalaya or shrimp and grits with plump, juicy andouille sausage. Souvenir T-shirt a must. 635 W. State St., Ithaca, NY, 14850 607.272.4136 www.maxies.com

TEN COOL FLX WINES

Everyone is trying to catch the cool-climate bus. The FLX could well be driving it.

1. LAMOREAUX LANDING 2001 Brut	\$28
2. DR. FRANK 2006 Dry Riesling	\$18
3. HERMANN J. WIEMER 2006 Riesling	\$20
4. RED TAIL RIDGE 2006 Chardonnay	\$15
5. TRELEAVEN 2005 Chardonnay Reserve	\$17
6. ATWATER 2006 Gewürztraminer	\$18
7. ANTHONY ROAD 2005 Martini-Reinhardt Selection Pinot Gris	\$22
8. HERON HILL 2005 Finger Lakes Reserve Pinot Noir	\$30
9. SHELDRAKE 2005 Pinot Noir	\$20
10. SHALESTONE 2005 Cabernet Franc	\$20

*Prices are winery direct