



Enjoying the water before the wine along the Verde River toward Alcantara Vineyards

WATER TO WINE: DAY TRIPPING ACROSS ARIZONA

OLD TOWN COTTONWOOD SHOWCASES ARIZONA WINEMAKERS

By Kate Wallace

Arizona has always been considered a land of contrasts. Cactus-studded arid lands and sweeping vistas in the south meet their counterpart of lush pine and ponderosa forests to the north. But in the middle of this state, the geographic center to be exact, there is Cottonwood. This historic Arizona town is named after the lush storied trees that grow along the Verde River. For visitors to the region, known as the Verde Valley, there is no shortage of welcome distractions. Most will stop here on the way to picturesque Sedona or on their return to Phoenix, but there are many reasons to stay awhile.

Cottonwood's Main Street began to take shape at the turn of the 21st century and today, this two-block stretch of charm is lined with wine bars, cafes and candy shops. Visitors will want to plan ahead to enjoy the collection of wine tasting rooms featuring Arizona's most notable vintners. The Pillsbury Wine Company Tasting Room offers its signature, Roan Red, a blend

of Grenache, Mourvedre and Syrah grapes all grown south of here. Also on the main drag is Arizona Stronghold Vineyards Tasting Room showcasing winemaker Eric Glomski's popular blends. Wines like the Taxi, a well-balanced white blend, and Mangus, a fruit-forward red featuring Bordeaux grapes, were some of the first to put Arizona on the country's wine map. Flights at both tasting rooms include a take-away wine glass and often will feature small-batch production wines exclusive to the tasting room experience.

Lounging on oversized couches and enjoying live music is a great way to be introduced to new wines. Sedona Adventure Tours takes wine tasting to a whole new level with their Water to Wine kayaking tour. Here, guides set inflatable kayaks on the banks of the Verde River and offer a quick instruction before letting Mother Nature do the talking. The river is easy to navigate and the kayak ride offers enough dips and rapids to make the journey both adventurous and gentle at the same time. Dense vegetation lines the river banks throughout the journey, while towering granite cliffs are home to wildlife and eagles are known to nest in the region. After the kayaking tour, a short trail leads guests to Alcantara Vineyards for the sommelier-led wine tasting included in the tour. The Tuscan-inspired farmhouse is a beautiful setting and perfect end to this inspired day trip north of the big city.

Cottonwood is a short drive north on I-17, approximately 100 miles north of Phoenix. To plan your visit, go to www.inerrall.com. ☀



Enjoy boutique wines and conversation at Pillsbury Wine Company