

THE RADAR WEEK ENDER

BY SAXON HENRY



GRAPE ESCAPE

Limos clog Long Island's North Fork as East Coast wine country is an oxymoron no longer

THE NEW NAPA

From the feet of the snow-capped Andes to sloping lands surrounding Cape Town, a vineyard's location is as important as the quality of its grapes. So it's no wonder that Long Island Wine Country, with its proximity to Manhattan, idyllic maritime climate that yields classic French grapes, and dozens of award-winning vintages, is becoming an in-demand destination for vinophiles.

Susan Wilber and Jean Charette cater to such wine lovers through East End Excursions, a company that offers an insider's view of the wineries dotting the North Fork of Long Island. The tours are housed in former potato barns or equally scenic structures, and EEE tours open doors to the local industry's biggest names, such as Barbara Shinn of Shinn Estate Vineyards. "We give you access that people who visit the tasting bars don't get," says Wilber. "We may walk through a vineyard with Shinn at bud break, taste wines from the barrel, or sip juices right from the fermentation tank or from the crush pad during harvest."

The tours take place from May to November, and cover every nuance of viniculture from bud break to harvest. If you're looking for a novel way to entertain, it's even possible to book a private party for up to 45 people. Now that definitely beats a hum-drum dinner party—especially if you skip the spits in the bucket. www.eastendexcursions.com.

COLONIAL CUISINE

After a day of swirling and sipping, the North Fork Table and Inn in Southold offers a quaint segue into an evening of indulgences. The English Colonial inn is tucked into a canopy of trees, but don't be fooled by its unassuming character—the establishment is known for its fine gastronomic experiences orchestrated by Executive Chef Gerry Hayden, formerly of Aureole and Amuse in Manhattan; Claudia Fleming, who was awarded the James Beard Award as pastry chef while at Gramercy Tavern; and Mike Miraz, whose program is designed to further enhance knowledge of North Fork wines. The city may be less than an hour away, but after a meal like this, you'll want to spend the night. www.northforktableandinn.com.

FRESH DIRECT

With a nearby megalopolis teeming with food and drink superstars, is it any surprise that the North Fork has become New York's artisanal food-production capital? A glance at the region's farm-to-table scene shows there's plenty for fresh-food fanatics to love.

SATUR FARMS: One of the first to stake its claim in the region was Eberhard Müller, who founded Satur Farms with wife Paulette Satur in 1995. The couple sells edible flowers, vegetables, herbs, micro-greens and vinegars from their Cutchogue farm. www.saturfarms.com.

BRIERMERE FARMS: Along with jams and preserves, this farm stand in Mattituck is touted as one of the best pies on Long Island (flavors include blueberry cream, raspberry peach and babka). You'll want to go early in the morning because the pies go quickly. www.briermerefarms.com.

SANG LEE FARMS: Karen and Fred Lee founded Sang Lee Farms, a certified organic farm in Peconic. Along with heirloom tomatoes, Asian greens and more, the farm offers homemade salad dressings, pestos and more. They are available at the farm stand. www.sangleefarms.com.

CATAPANO DAIRY FARM: Karen and Michael Catapano produce artisanal cheeses, goat cheese, and skincare products from goat milk. Their Chèvre has been awarded a place by the American Cheese Society. Getting to pet the curious, leggy goats is a bonus. www.catapanodairyfarm.com.

VINELAND

From top: The dining room at North Fork Table and Inn; sunset at Bedell Winery, part of the EEE tour; scene from a harvest.

