

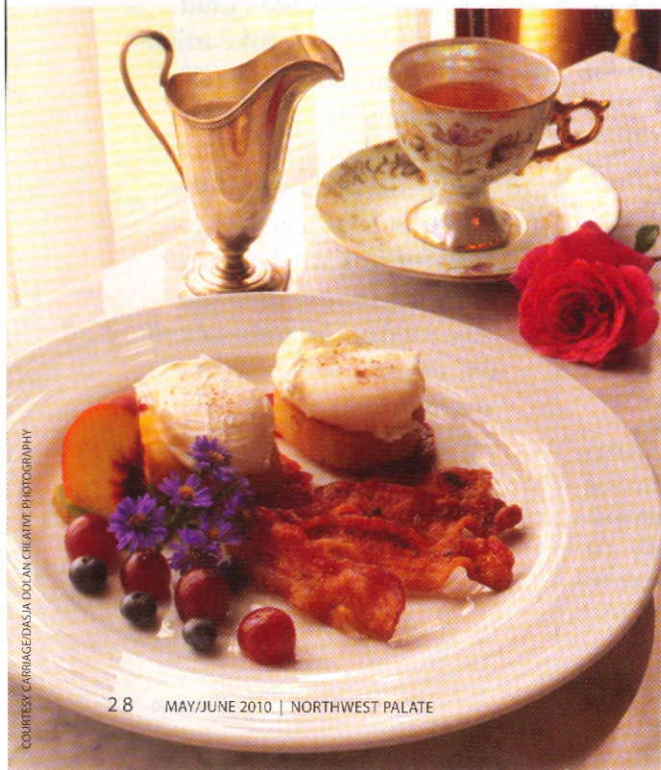


# Jackpot

## JACKSONVILLE

The historic Gold Rush town in Southern Oregon offers a bonanza of culinary, musical, and outdoor adventures.

By Kris Wetherbee



28 MAY/JUNE 2010 | NORTHWEST PALATE



PHOTO: KRIS WETHERBEE

COURTESY: CARRIAGE/DASJA DOLAN CREATIVE PHOTOGRAPHY



**Standing at** the corner of California and Third streets in front of Oregon's first bank, I feel like one of the early settlers awaiting the first morning's stagecoach ride. Opened during the Gold Rush in 1863, Jacksonville's Beekman Bank is the starting point on a four-day journey to discover the wealth of activities in this historic town and the surrounding areas.

Jacksonville is as much a travel destination today as it was in the Old West. Rooted on Highway 238 between the wooded foothills of the Siskiyou Mountains and the fertile fields of the Rogue Valley, Jacksonville is centrally poised between Ashland and Grants Pass, and just five miles west of Medford.

## Day 1 Digging into Jacksonville

My husband Rick and I hop aboard the town trolley and settle in our seats as our 1850s period-dressed guide reveals the hidden treasures of this 1.8-square-mile hamlet. At the beginning of the 45-minute tour, I detect the aroma of freshly brewed coffee and coconut-chocolate macaroons as we drive by the **GoodBean Coffee Company**. It's as if my senses are caught in a time warp somewhere between the Old West and the 21st century.

Once the center of Southern Oregon's gold mining activity, this walkable, early Western mining town has evolved into an attraction-rich area. The enclave of brick and wooden historic buildings that once housed gold dust banks and dry goods stores now houses an eclectic mix of modern-day merchants including wine shops, specialty food stores, restaurants, antique shops, boutiques, and galleries.

Now that we've got a good feel for the town, we walk a short block to **Mamma Mia Gelateria** for a sampling of their frozen desserts, homemade soups, and panini sandwiches. The aroma and ambience inside brings to mind a cozy Italian neighborhood café with a friendly mom and pop behind the counter, which here are owners Bill and Joyce Prahl.

Rick orders the pastrami, Swiss cheese, and sauerkraut, while I opt for the tomato, basil, and mozzarella. As good as the sandwiches are, they're upstaged by scoops of tiramisu gelato, with its rich flavor and

texture as smooth as silk—it alone is worth coming back for.

We walk off lunch by taking a stroll down California Street, the town's major avenue. We stop in at the **Pot Rack** and discover an awesome array of culinary products. Another jewel is just down the street at the **Carefree Buffalo**. Their line of William Henry pocket-knives, typically inlaid with semi-precious and precious gems, is an heirloom-quality testament to the art of knife making.

Dinner at the Nunan Estate's **Carriage House Restaurant** is more like culinary theater, a showcase of chef Tim Keller's talents behind a four-thousand-pound fluorescent-lit onyx stone bar that glows in orange and amber hues. Indigenous and specialty foods of the Rogue Valley play a coveted role in Keller's cuisine. But it's his timely precision, flair for enticing food combinations, and artistic expression that take center stage.

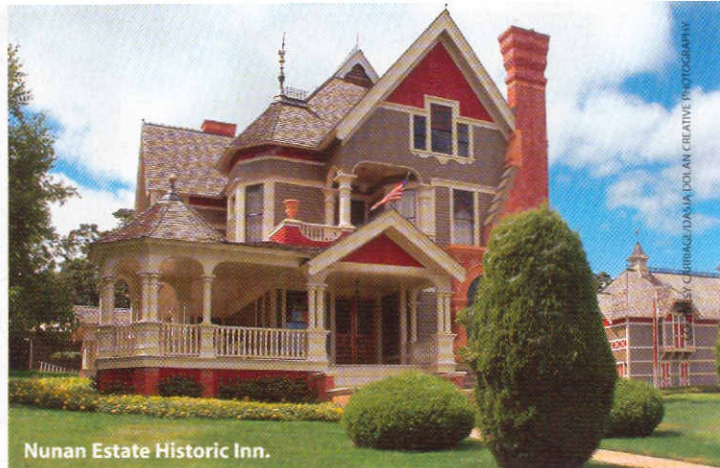
After teasing our palates with a few small starters including sesame seared scallops and potato gnocchi, chef Keller creates a delicious dish of wild Chetco River king salmon with corn pancakes, grilled Japanese eggplant and chanterelle ragout. I still find room for dessert, an ice cream and sorbet sampler that satisfies my sweet cravings. Thoroughly sated, I'm glad it's just a short walk to the estate's historic Victorian mansion where our comfy bed awaits.

## Day 2 Food, Farm, and Fun Tour

The next morning we set off on a road trip along the winding roads of the Rogue Valley in search of the region's more fascinating farms, artisan foods, and gourmet products.

We head first towards Phoenix, traveling about ten miles southeast to visit **Rising Sun Farms**, where we sample an assortment of their award-winning cheese tortas. A torta is a layered, often elaborate cake or dessert, but in this case contains creamy cheese, herbs, fruits, and other fillings that range from sweet to savory, such as marionberry, curry, and pesto-dried tomato combinations.

Next we drive north toward several food-related attractions including the Rogue Creamery and Lillie Belle Farms, both in Central Point, and the historic **Butte Creek Mill** in Eagle Point. One of the last surviving water-powered gristmills



Nunan Estate Historic Inn.

in the U.S., Butte Creek's retail store sells everything from spices and baking mixes, to stone-ground flours and other culinary treats. As I scour the shelves for the perfect pancake mix, I catch a whiff of newly crushed grains. The milling stones, which weigh 1,400 pounds each, never actually touch one another as the miller grinds the grain, so what's left is the true essence and flavor of the blended grain, bran, and germ.

Winding our way back, we visit **Rogue Creamery**. Their Rogue River Blue, wrapped in brandy-soaked Syrah and Zinfandel grape leaves, was named top blue cheese in the world at the 2003 World Cheese Awards. Their retail store also offers a picnic-worthy selection of local meats, sweets, and other artisan food products.

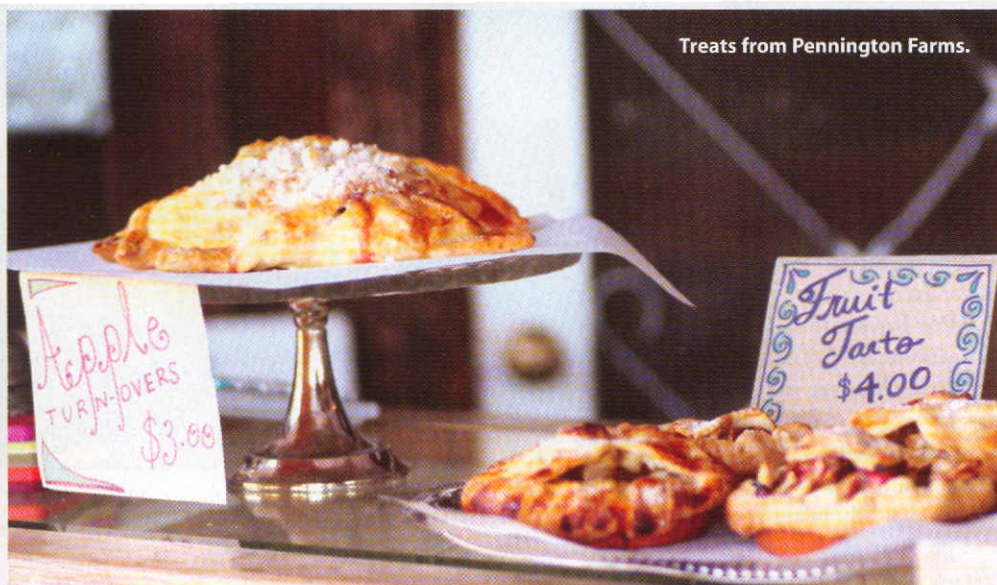
If you're serious about sweets, be sure to save room for **Lillie Belle's** handmade artisan chocolates. Master-chocolatier Jeff Shepherd creates more than 65 kinds of extraordinary truffles, bonbons, and confections. Best-sellers include a truffle made with Rogue Creamery's smoky blue cheese and roasted almonds, and the marzipan fig, a clever concoction of rum-and-spice-poached black mission figs wrapped in almond paste, dipped in dark chocolate, and rolled in almonds.

It's mid-afternoon as we arrive back in Jacksonville, leaving us with just enough time for a leisurely walk at the historic Peter Britt Gardens on First Street in search of the Britt Sequoia. Planted in 1862, the 205-foot-tall tree is certainly an easy find.

After an hour of exploring the Britt Gardens, we once again find our appetites and walk down the street to enjoy an early evening dinner at **Gogi's**. With its intimate atmosphere and attention to detail, the restaurant provides a relaxing respite to wind down the day. Owned and operated by brothers Gabriel and Jonoah Murphy, the restaurant sources much of the produce for its seasonal fare from the brothers' ►

**Opposite: (Top, L-R) Jacksonville's quaint shop fronts. Lillie Belle's artisan chocolates. (Bottom, L-R) Breakfast at the Carriage House. Riverside lodging at the Applegate River Lodge.**





COURTESY PENNINGTON FARMS/BRUNY IROSSNACHT PHOTO

one-acre farm in the Applegate Valley. It is also a popular venue for local winemaker dinners.

The Caprese salad is outstanding, a beautiful presentation of perfectly ripened heirloom tomatoes, fresh basil, pesto, and a touch of balsamic vinegar, as is pan-seared Pacific salmon served with a truffled fennel-orange salad, lemon-dill rice pilaf, and balsamic beurre blanc.

Our after-dinner walk is short as the **Peter Britt Music Festival** is located just a stone's throw across the street. Now in its 48th year, the series of outdoor concerts features an eclectic lineup of music including rock, folk, country, pop, jazz, and classical. Each year from summer to early fall the festival brings in 60,000-70,000 music lovers to experience a concert in the woods as world-class entertainers perform in a naturally formed amphitheater. The acoustics are incredible and so is the energy of the crowd as the band Creedence Clearwater Revisited has everyone dancing and moving to legendary hits "Susie Q," "Down on the Corner," and "Proud Mary."

After the performance we head back to the **Jacksonville Inn**, an elegant bed and breakfast built in 1861. If you look closely, you can still see specks of gold in the mortar of the sandstone walls in their lounge and dining area. We stop in at the lounge to enjoy the afterglow of the starlit evening with their signature dessert, the light yet indulgently satisfying hazelnut meringue with fresh raspberries.

After dessert we walk to our luxurious cottage (the inn features four) and toast the evening with a bottle of late-harvest Riesling from the inn's extensive selection of more than 2,000 wines from their wine and gift shop. Ah, sweet slumber never felt so good!

## Day 3 Applegate Appellations

After a delicious breakfast at The Jacksonville Inn, we take one last stroll through town, pack up the car, and set our compass toward wine country.

Southern Oregon's sun-drenched vineyards savor a climate similar to that of Bordeaux, France. Within this area lies the Applegate Valley, an enclave with the highest concentration of wineries in Southern Oregon and arguably one of the most beautiful landscapes in the country. Jacksonville serves as the gateway to this emerging wine country, with numerous boutique wineries open for tasting nearby.

We head out west of Jacksonville along Highway 238, the relaxing drive taking us along bucolic back roads that carve their way through an agrarian landscape of green pastures, rolling hills, heirloom orchards, and vineyards glistening with wine grapes.

Our first stop is **Pennington Farms**,

a 90-acre sustainable, herbicide-free berry farm and bakery located in the heart of this valley. The family farm produces a variety of jams, baked goods, and other products featuring their fresh berries and old-time baking traditions. Their fresh-baked scones and turnovers are quite popular—so much so that they often sell out by noon.

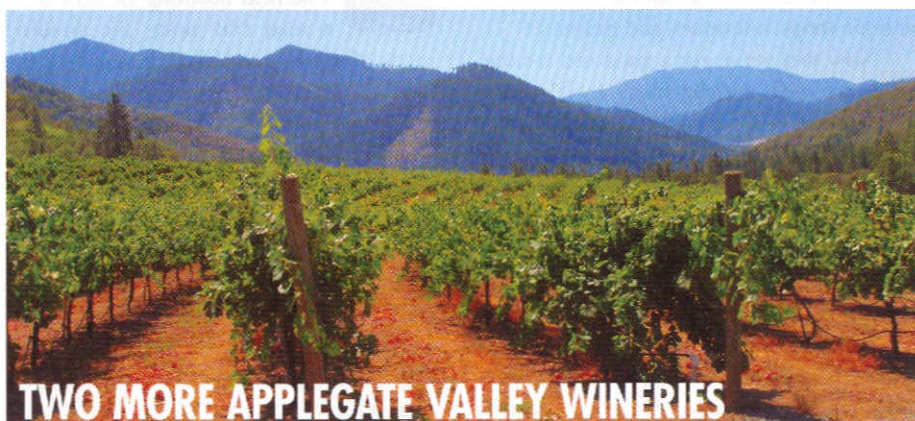
We arrive at 11am to the intoxicating scent of blackberry turnovers coming out of the oven. We're in luck and snatch up some from this last batch of the day. We also pick up several jams and fruit vinegars, plus box lunches to enjoy during wine tasting.

One of the most beautiful spots to enjoy a picnic lunch is at **Schmidt Family Vineyards**. Owners Cal and Judy Schmidt have put in a lot of sweat equity, transforming the grounds into an ornamental oasis of beautiful gardens, picnic grounds, and outdoor aviaries abuzz with various species of finches and tangerine doves since opening their tasting room in 2006. We

Find the wineries, restaurants, hotels, and other businesses listed in this article by visiting us online at [nwpalate.com](http://nwpalate.com) for a complete list of addresses, phone numbers, and websites.

sample the Pinot Gris, a smooth and sensuous wine with hints of tropical fruit, candied orange peel, and French vanilla. I'm especially taken with the Gewürztraminer's mélange of white peach, lemon, ginger, and vanilla flavors.

Next we arrive at **Wooldridge Creek Vineyard & Winery**, which produces



HICKWEHREHLE PHOTO

## TWO MORE APPLATE VALLEY WINERIES

**Valley View Winery** impressed us with its beautiful wine tasting room and outstanding Viognier and Tempranillo wines bearing the Anna Maria label, which is reserved for its finest wines and best vintages. Established in 1972 by the Wisnovsky family, and one of Southern Oregon's oldest modern-era wineries, Valley View is located about nine miles west of Jacksonville.

**Cowhorn Vineyard & Garden** is coveted for its Demeter Biodynamic<sup>®</sup>-certified Rhône-style wines. The up-and-coming estate winery is winning wide acclaim for its first releases, including masterful Viognier, Syrah, and Grenache wines. The gardens planted with orchards for apples, chestnuts, hazelnuts, pears, and persimmons are also something to behold.



handcrafted varietal wines and unique blends using sustainable viticulture practices. They are leading the charge on another very green activity by kegging their wine for restaurants. One of their varietals that hit a pleasing high note is Oso de Oro, a Chardonnay-based wine fortified with brandy that ultimately develops intriguing characteristics of butterscotch and orange.

Our last stop is **Troon Vineyard**, another winery dedicated to an herbicide- and pesticide-free farming environment. More than 20 different varietals are now grown on the estate, ranging from little-known grapes such as Vermentino and Tannat, along with Syrah, Cabernet Franc, Viognier, and Tempranillo, to name a few. The vineyard offers tasting brunches, winemaker's dinners, and an award-winning lineup of Cabernet, Zinfandel, and dry Riesling. Oh, and did I mention the Insomnia Port? Made by winemaker Herb Quady, who makes sweet wines both at Troon and his own eponymous label, this Port is ultra-smooth with palate-pleasing notes of fig and spicy currant jam.

As the day winds down and our wine collection goes up, we arrive at the **Applegate River Lodge**. After an afternoon of tasting our way through wineries, the lodge offers a romantic reprieve in which to enjoy dinner and spend the night. Handcrafted from local and imported pine, the spacious lodge overlooks the Applegate River and historic Pioneer Bridge. Rick and I pull up chairs on the patio of the lodge's restaurant located next door and enjoy their famous grilled "Red Oak" chicken and top sirloin while toasting the day over a glass of Viognier.

**Day 4 Wet and Wild on the Rogue River**

A wine and culinary adventure worth its weight always needs to be topped off by outdoor fun to help burn off the added calories. A morning hike along the lodge's many trails is in order before heading off for an afternoon of whitewater rafting along Oregon's scenic Rogue River.

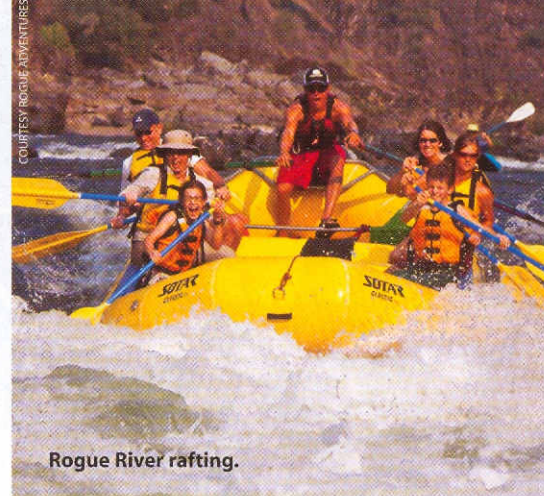
The half-day afternoon trip offered by **Rogue Wilderness Adventures** features a 13-mile whitewater run that includes a riverside picnic lunch. Our group sets out in inflatable kayaks and paddle rafts in what starts as a Tom Sawyer-style leisurely float along the river.

Soon we approach the series of Class II and Class III rapids, just bumpy enough for an afternoon of easy thrills and spills. After

propelling over the first rapid we quickly discover why our raft is equipped with several oddly shaped plastic guns—rapid streams of water shower down upon us. Water gun fights occur just about every time we encounter a rafter or boat, and on this hot afternoon, drenched and carefree is a good place to be. The only thing that would make this ending even better is if it were day one and we could do it all over again.



*Kris Wetherbee is a Southern Oregon-based writer, cookbook author, and gardener.*



Rogue River rafting.

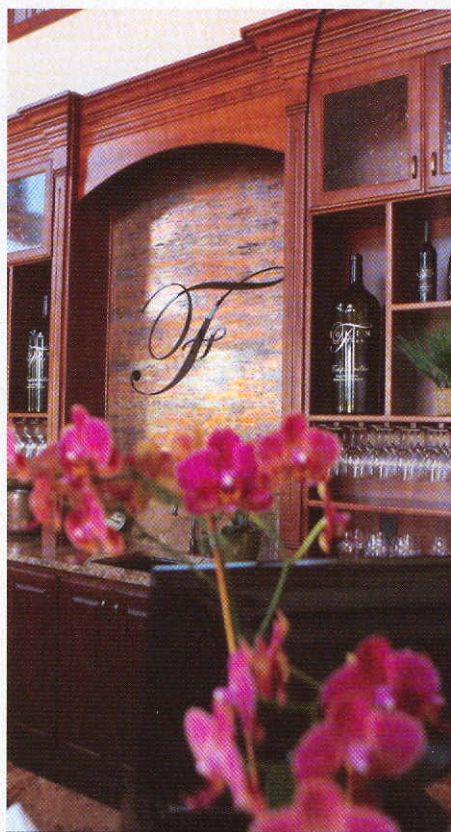
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