

A TASTE OF THE EMPIRE STATE

New York Meeting Guide

By Becky Ferrara and Katherine Lady Brown
Small Market Meetings

New York ranks fourth among states in terms of number of wineries. The Long Island area, pictured, has seen an explosion of wineries in the past 25 years.

Courtesy: Long Island Wine Council

A NEW YORK STATE OF WINE

By **Bucky Ferraro**

"Wine cheers the sad, revives the old, inspires the young, makes weariness forget his toil."
— Lord Byron

With all these attributes, it's no wonder New York's wineries and vineyards are popular with groups, who find a glass of Riesling or a carafe of chardonnay makes meetings more fun.

Finger Lakes

The largest of the Empire State's nine wine-growing regions is the Finger Lakes, an upscale landscape of rolling hills and pristine blue lakes punctuated by some 100 wineries. Known for its Riesling, the Finger Lakes is also the second-largest wine-producing area, after Napa Valley, in the United States.

"Most of our wineries offer year-round wine tastings, and some offer tours of the vineyards and production facilities," said Danielle Roman, director of sales and marketing, Steuben County Conference and Visitors Bureau, Corning. "Although they can bring wines to the group, I always encourage meeting planners to include a visit to a



Courtesy Steuben Co. CVB

There are more than 100 wineries in the Finger Lakes region and most welcome visitors for tastings. Among them is Bully Hill Vineyards, above, on Keuka Lake, with its own restaurant.

winery for the full experience."

One exclusive experience is a wine tasting at Heron Hill Winery in Hammondsport, where groups gather in a vaulted, cobblestone-floored tasting room that was recently named one of the world's most spectacular tasting

rooms by Travel + Leisure. The winery has event space for 250 and a conference room for 15.

"We overlook Keuka Lake, and the tasting room offers gorgeous views for up to 50 guests at a reception or event, which are primarily held after hours,"

said Kitty Oliver, marketing and public relations director.

This destination winery draws 50,000 visitors each year to on-site concerts, the Finger Lakes Riesling Festival and other special events. Heron Hills also has tasting rooms on Seneca and Canandaigua lakes.

The Finger Lakes' Riesling and chardonnay wine industry began in 1960 when European immigrant Dr. Konstantin Frank was the first to successfully plant *Vitis vinifera* grapevines from Europe. He founded Dr. Konstantin Frank Vinifera Wine Cellars, north of Hammondsport, the state's most award-winning winery for more than 40 years.

Groups visit the winery to taste both red and white varietals, including the celebrated Rieslings served at a recent state luncheon for German Chancellor Angela Merkel.

Another Finger Lakes claim to fame is the circa-1860 Pleasant Valley Wine Co., which claims to be the nation's oldest bonded winery. Eight historic buildings, as well as sherry and champagne caves, can be toured; there's also a visitors center museum with exhibits depicting how wine has been made since the 1800s.

Each year, thousands pour into the area for the annual Finger Lakes Wine Festival, held each July at Watkins Glen International Racetrack.

"The county's 1,600 hotel rooms are filled with festivalgoers who get a wristband and a glass in order to sample the wares of more than 90 wineries," said Roman. "There's no worry about driving, as scheduled pick-up and drop-off service can be arranged."

In addition to music, local foods and glassblowing demonstrations by the nearby Corning Museum of Glass, the festival features cooking classes by the New York Wine and Culinary Center in Canandaigua.

"We showcase the state's food and wine industry, and our hands-on kitchen is popular for team-building activities," said Tanya Hasseler, event sales manager for the center. "Groups can help create local-ingredient dishes with a chef instructor or watch culinary demonstrations that include a wine instructor."

The center's event venues include the new Sands Gallery, for meetings up to 80 and receptions for up to 120, as well as a garden tent for up to 70 and an educational theater for sales meetings of up to 50. The center is part of the 41-mile Canandaigua Wine Trail, one of three Finger Lakes wine trails.

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Long Island

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a variety of venues.

Although its first grapevines were planted only 40 years ago, today Long Island is home to 60 vineyards and 30 wineries growing red and white wines nurtured by the maritime climate.

Most of the picturesque venues are along the North Fork of the island's East End. These include one of Long Island's largest vineyards for group events: the 200-acre Martha Clara Vineyards in Riverhead.

"We draw local groups as well as those from the city, as we are only one and one-half hours from Manhattan," said Molly O'Connor, location and event manager. "We have a beautiful vista on the North Shore but are just 15 minutes from the Long Island Expressway."

In addition to the setting, Martha Clara Vineyards offers meeting groups a chance to taste award-winning wines such as its 2010 Riesling, which recently won the Governors Cup for the best wine in New York state. It also has a corporate events package for four-hour private events that includes the venue plus a wine tasting.

"We can hold tented events for up to 2,000 in the chardonnay fields, and receptions for 200 can be held in Gallery One building," O'Connor said. "The Tasting Room Pavilion can hold 140 for events after business hours, and we also have a Culinary Education Center that can accommodate groups of 50."

New York's 271 wineries are spread from Long Island on the east to Lake Erie on the west. The state grows 35 varieties of grapes.

When they aren't enjoying a wine-filled event, groups can stay at Riverhead area hotels, among them the 50-room Inn and Spa at East Wind in Wading River, which has a 2,000-square-foot ballroom and a 10,000-square-foot spa.

The area's newest hotel is the 100-room Hyatt Place East End, which is adjacent to the renamed and expanded

Long Island Aquarium and Exhibition Center and its new 5,300-square-foot Sea Star Ballroom.

Other Long Island locations with meeting space are Duck Walk Vineyards, which can accommodate 40 at its original Water Mill location, and 400 at Duck Walk North, in Southold on the North Fork.

"The 55-acre Wolfper Estate Vineyard in Sagaponack is an elegant setting for events in a Tuscan-style villa," said Joan LaRosa, director of sales, Long Island CVB, Hauppauge. "There is space for 20, as well as a glass-roofed outdoor terrace overlooking the vineyards. Private winery and vineyard tours are also available."

Hobnobbing with royalty is a given at the Castello di Borghese, a winery and vineyard in Cutchogue owned by an Italian prince.

The facility has event and meeting space for 75 in its gallery, as well as a number of team-building options for up to 50 that include a tasting of Castello di Borghese Riesling and Cabernet Franc wines, and a talk by a wine instructor.

Groups can also add a guided tour of the vineyard, the winery and the production facility, as well as a gourmet dinner in which courses are paired with different wines.

"Throughout the Long Island wineries, groups can hold private wine dinners or have wine tastings, as well as clambakes or rours," said LaRosa. "They can hop a ride from their hotels to the vineyards on the North Fork Trolley, or take a wine tour that features three or four vineyards as well as lunch."

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Courtesy Wolfper Estate Vineyard

A covered terrace overlooks the vineyards at Wolfper Estate Vineyard in Sagaponack.



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