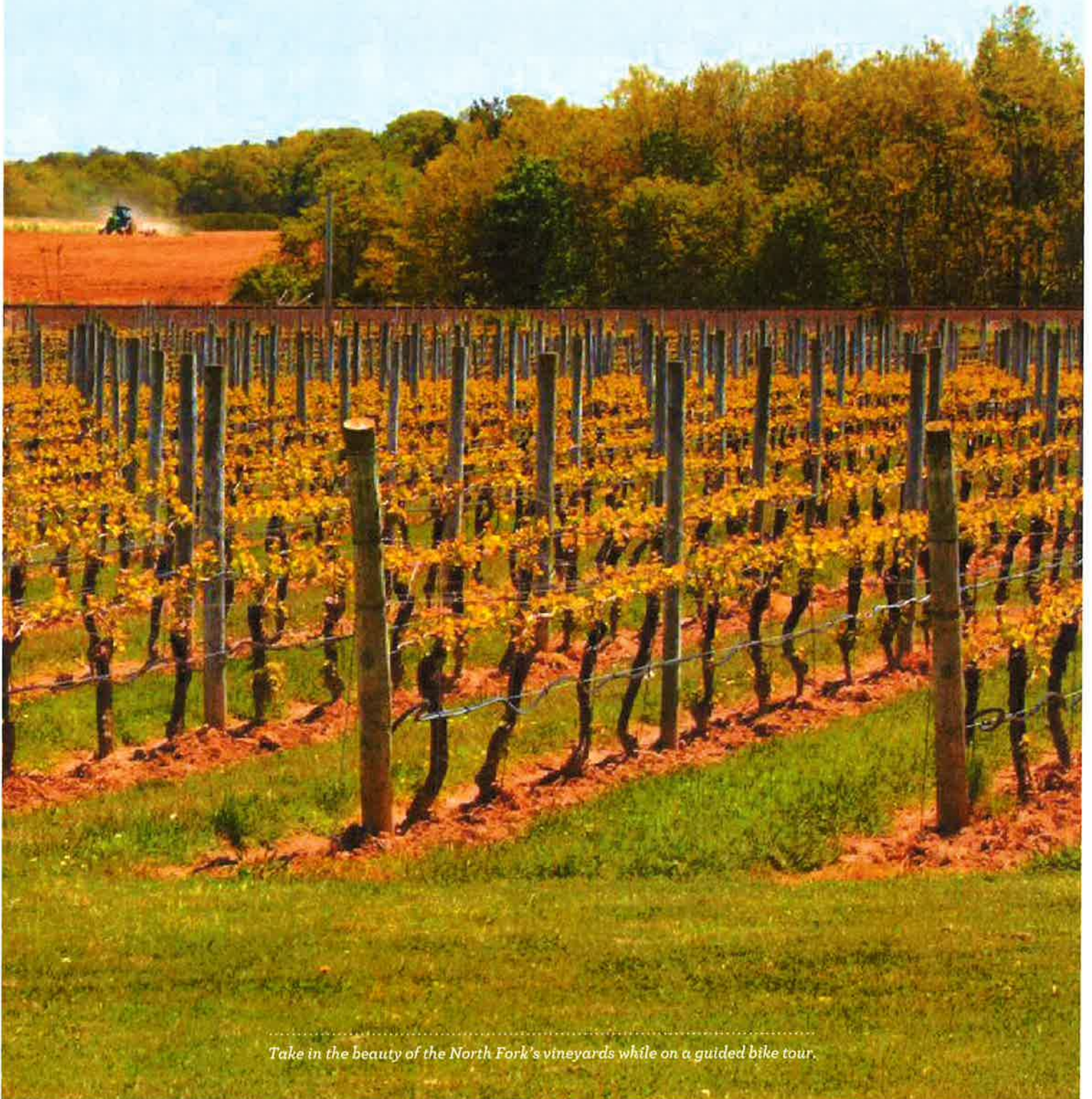


PEDAL & POUR

Cycling Through Long Island's Wine Country

by Andrew G. Rosen



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Take in the beauty of the North Fork's vineyards while on a guided bike tour.



Eight different wines, 12 miles of cycling and enough rural beauty to satisfy anyone's eco-appetite; with countless acres of sprawling farmland, I contend that the beauty of Long Island's North Fork is best experienced on a bicycle.

Sitting approximately 13 miles northeast of where the Long Island Expressway ends (or is it begins?), I met up with my 30-or-so cycling buddies for a five-hour guided tour operated by Mattituck-based Vintage Bicycle Tours. (Tip: I purchased my tour through a popular online discount site for more than 50 percent off!)

After a quick bike fitting (yes, size does matter, if you want to enjoy the ride) and a safety briefing, we were off and pedaling through wine country. Wearing reflective vests, tour guides bookend the parade of cyclists, available to answer any questions or help with any equipment difficulties along the way. There is even a "support" vehicle tagging along in the distance should a participant decide they can no longer continue. But this is a relatively easy bike ride, even

for a beginner, and during my tour, with participants between the ages of 21 and 70, no one seemed to have an issue.

The trek begins along Mattituck's Main Road, which as the name suggests is quite busy. However, within minutes we ducked down a bucolic side road and were skirting along Great Peconic Bay, the body of water that divides the East End into the North and South Fork. The congestion and mall shopping that often defines our island quickly fades from consciousness, enveloping you in sweet serenity.

Working our way into the hamlet of Laurel, we came upon our first stop, Laurel Lake Vineyards. We dismounted and sat at a reserved section of picnic tables where a buffet of wraps, salads and drinks awaited. After filling my belly with a delicious Santa Fe chicken wrap and some fresh mozzarella and pasta salad, I footed myself to the top of the vineyard's two-story deck.

Don't be deceived, on the North Fork, a two-story view makes you feel like you are on top of the world. After all, this is farm country, and the



Clockwise from top of opposite page: The vineyards at Martha Clara, a lunch spread at Laurel Lake Vineyards, a wall of award-winning wines at Martha Clara Vineyards, taking a break from cycling back on the road.

vineyard view is picturesque.

All this joy and excitement and I haven't even had any wine yet!

"Swirl, smell, sip and spit," our tour guide recommended. There was a collective secret wink amongst the group that said "yeah, right," yet an absolute understanding that overindulgence was not an option. Not just for safety reasons, but in order to avoid the embarrassment of being unable to complete the tour.

I am no sommelier, but I can tell you the best pairing was the warm sun and blue sky with the cold sauvignon blanc. Bursting with grapefruit and lime, it was refreshing and alive. After a few more tastings we hopped back on our bicycles.

We headed north towards the Long Island Sound, riding a couple of miles alongside Half Hollow Nursery, which features more than 600 acres of plant life and

**"SWIRL, SMELL,
SIP AND SPIT,"
OUR GUIDE
RECOMMENDED.**

is home to the highest wind turbine on Long Island, standing at an imposing 156 feet.

The tempo on the North Fork is such a departure from the rest of New York that the

irony of speeding through it on a bike can't be lost. The flat, smooth asphalt helps create a biker's paradise.

The next stop was Martha Clara, the family-friendly vineyard owned by the Entenmann Family (yes, the cake people), which like many vineyards here was once a potato farm. Located on Sound Avenue in Riverhead, this stop on our tour included an extra-virgin olive oil and vinegar sampling. The crusty bread came just as we were about to embark on another four-wine tasting. Perfect timing.

The pastoral surroundings of the North Fork make it feel almost criminal to step indoors, but Martha's expansive indoor barn-style



Animal life on the North Fork.

tasting room beckoned. With a vaulted ceiling and adjacent gift shop selling every conceivable wine accessory ever made (who knew a corkscrew could look like that?), it's worth the trip.

Helmet back on, we were

off again, this time pedaling along Sound Avenue, one of the main arteries running through the North Fork. In single file we made our way to Harbes Family Farm back in Mattituck, offering hand-picked veggies and my favorite farm stand treat, sugar-dusted apple cider donuts. While bikers did not partake in the farm's Barnyard Adventure, this kid-friendly venue offers up an array of animals, activities and games, sure to please family members of all ages. And the free samples of farm-grown strawberries and fresh whipped cream were delightful.

The charm and beauty of the North Fork can't be overstated. The purity of the

air and unencumbered views make it a must-visit—especially by bike. And when traffic backs up during the peak summer and autumn season, be sure to wave as you coast by on two wheels. That's part of the beauty of biking. ■

In This Story

Vintage Bicycle Tours
vintagebicycletours.com

Laurel Lake Vineyards
llwines.com

Martha Clara Vineyards
marthaclaravineyards.com

Harbes Family Farm
harbesfamilyfarm.com

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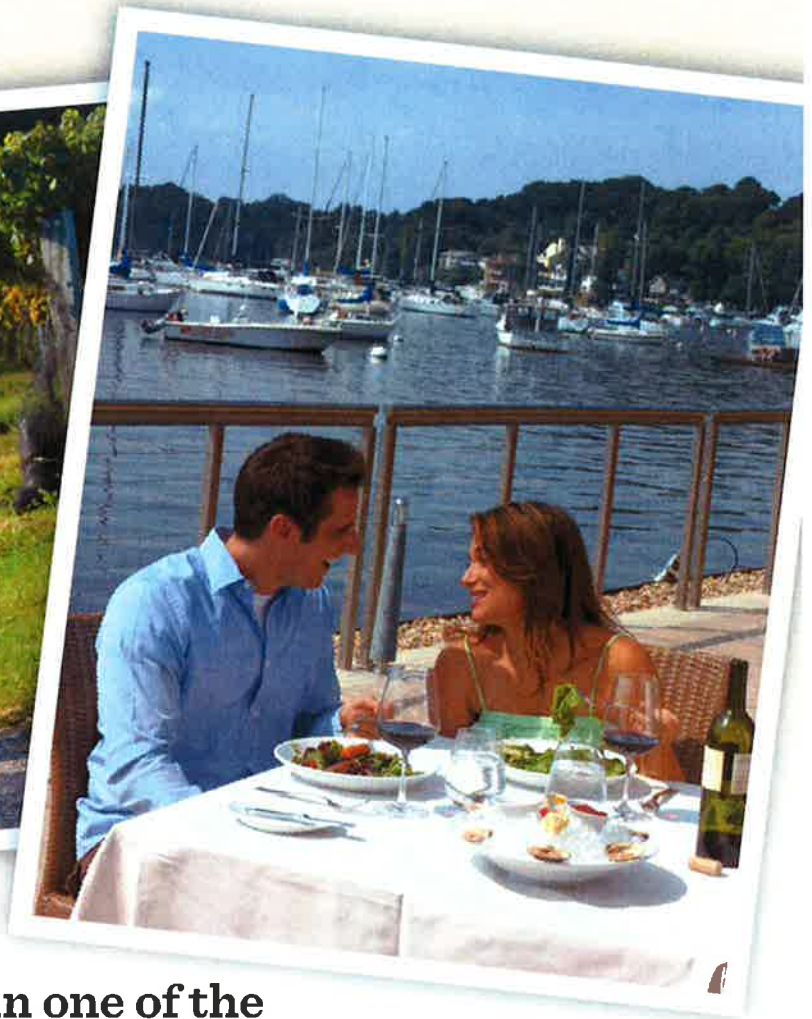
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