

THE BUFFALO NEWS

One-Tank Trip/Finger Lakes Wine Festival, Watkins Glen
Uncorking a festival of fine vintage

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Wine lovers will be able to taste samples from more than 70 wineries during the Finger Lakes Wine Festival in Watkins Glen.



WATKINS GLEN - Calling all wine connoisseurs and weekend wine tasters.

There will be more than 450 types of wine poured during the annual Finger Lakes Wine Festival, taking place Friday through next Sunday at Watkins Glen International Racetrack.

More than 70 wineries, including those from Western New York, will participate. Other vineyards represented will be from the Keuka, Seneca, Cayuga, Canandaigua and Long Island regions. The unique collaboration of New York state wineries is expected to attract more than 15,000 people just 149 miles from Buffalo.

"I still run into people every day who do not know there are wineries in Western New York," says Gary Hoover, one of the co-owners of the Niagara Landing Wine Cellars in Cambria. "We see see lots of people coming from Western New York (to the festival), more so than from the Finger Lakes."

And festivalgoers will have much more than wine to enjoy. Visitors can shop for arts and crafts such as pottery and handmade jewelry and gourmet foods including olive oil, specialty cheeses and garlic. Three wine seminars are scheduled, including the popular "Wine and Chocolate" seminar.

Chef Paul Mach whose Emmy-nominated cooking show "You're the Chef" appears on PBS, will be doing three of the many food demonstrations.

Live jazz and blues will be performed and meals from more than 10 upscale restaurants will be available in the food court. Elmira's Hill Top Inn Restaurant will feature a chicken speidies sandwich - a marinated, grilled and diced chicken creation that originated in Binghamton. "This isn't county fair-type food," says Wendy Sutterby, Finger Lakes Wine Festival director.

For a unique experience, visitors can ride the famous Watkin's Glen International race course the way race car drivers do with a Pace car ride around the track, driven at road speed by a professional driver.

A traditional crowd pleaser is watching glassblowers from the Corning Museum of Glass as they gather, shape, blow and transform molten glass into wine-inspired pieces. The works are raffled off at the festival.

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With so much going on, how can festival attendees best approach the festival?

"It can be a bit overwhelming, especially to a less frequent taster because there are so many wineries," says Jason Merritt, whose family owns the Merritt Estate Winery in Forestville.

He suggests visitors carefully examine the festival guidebook and pick out some wineries by name or locale, then decide what types of wine they prefer to try. "Less frequent drinkers like sweeter wines, but more experienced drinkers tend to like dry wines," he says. The guide is invaluable, he observes, because it lists profiles of all participating wineries, a recipe using one of their wines and the bottles they will be pouring at the festival.

To help visitors cool off, Merritt Winery will be serving "sangria slushes" which he describes as a mix of lemon-lime soda and Merritt's sangria put through a crushed slush machine.

Merritt predicts he will go through 300 to 400 gallons of slush mixture at this year's event. The concoction began as a frozen wine cooler his mother made in the 1980s.

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