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# HITTING THE NORTH FORK WINE TRAIL

WITH QUALITY ON THE RISE AND WINE TOURISM FLOURISHING, IT'S A GREAT TIME TO PLAN YOUR VISIT

BY KRISTEN BIELER

**M**aking wine in Long Island is not for the faint of heart. “We are in the hurricane path, we battle a lot of humidity and huge vintage variation—and then we never know what sort of weather October will bring,” explains Gabriella Macari, general manager of Macari Vineyards, whose family planted vineyards here 27 years ago. “It’s taken a lot of trial and error to get where we are today. And we are still a relatively new wine region; we are still experimenting.”

Though not an obvious place to cultivate vines, the unique potential of this temperamental, maritime strip of land continues to lure newcomers who have joined pioneering vintners such as the Macaris. Since the first vineyards were established here in the 1970s, the industry has grown to more than 50 wineries, with all but three located on the North Fork wine trail: a narrow 23-mile stretch from Riverhead to Greenport.

As wine quality has improved, so have the wine tourism offerings, with a dynamic range of tasting flights, tours, live music and dining options. Unlike the polish and grandeur of Napa Valley, the North Fork’s scene is a bit more relaxed, with abundant food trucks, historic barns repurposed as tasting rooms and Adirondack chairs facing bucolic landscapes. There’s also a community of welcoming vintners eager to entertain and educate. Here are some of our North Fork wine country favorites to add to your list.

## Bedell Cellars ▼

**Cutchogue** | [bedellcellars.com](http://bedellcellars.com) | Founded in 1980, Bedell helped put Long Island on the American wine map, with consistently well-made wines that set new benchmarks for the region. A pioneer in sustainable farming and native-yeast fermentation on the North Fork, Bedell is owned by the Lynne family



Siblings Gabriella and Joseph of the family-run Macari Vineyards.

today and the tasting room features their contemporary art collection.

**Drink:** Initially, Bedell’s Merlots drew the most acclaim, but their fresh and juicy Cabernet Franc is the real standout. And don’t miss the increasingly well-made whites: Try the supertasty Pinot Gris, Viognier and Albariño.

**Visit:** Enjoying a glass, bottle or tasting flight with vineyard views is a lovely way to spend an afternoon. On Sunday afternoons, you’ll find live music and fresh-shucked local oysters. Check out sister winery, Corey Creek, where small-batch wines—and the house rosé—are available on tap, and “Twilight Thursdays” feature local food trucks and live music.

## Lieb Cellars

**Cutchogue** | [liebcellars.com](http://liebcellars.com) | Thirty years ago, Mark Lieb took a chance on 14 acres of mistakenly planted Pinot Blanc (the former owner put it up for sale when he learned the vines weren’t the Chardonnay he thought he planted). It was a wise bet: Today that plot is the largest contiguous area of Pinot Blanc in the U.S., and its 35-year-old vines yield elegant, mineral-edged, citrusy wines, both still and sparkling. Winemaker Russell Hearn has been here since the beginning, and aims for a bright and lively style, à la Alto Adige.

**Drink:** Still and sparkling Pinot Blanc is the house signature. This summer, tasting room visitors can order the 30th anniversary edition Pinot Blanc, plus a Merlot vertical of four vintages dating back to 2008. At sister winery, Bridge Lane, the canned wine is a perfect addition to any beach picnic.

**Visit:** Lieb’s guided private tasting of five wines—paired with cheese—is an informative deep dive. For a more laid-back experience, bring your own picnic to Bridge Lane’s shaded lawn, complete with shuffleboard courts and Adirondack chairs. The “Sunday Scaries” features live music, doughnuts from North Fork Doughnut Company, buckets of Bridge Lane cans and mimosas.

## Macari Vineyards ▲

**Mattituck** | [macariwines.com](http://macariwines.com) | Dedicated to elevating quality, Macari is run by Joe Macari Jr., who founded this Mattituck winery with his father in 1995. The family is one of the largest landowners on the North Fork, with more than 500 acres of farmland, 160 of which are under vine. A driving force in



Bedell Cellars’ flights can be paired with cheese and charcuterie.