



# A PERFECT DAY In the North Fork Valley

Special to Palisade Vine/Nicholas Hanson

BY ERIN MCINTYRE • PALISADE FRUIT & VINE

This valley masters the art of being so close and yet so far away.

Getting to Hotchkiss and Paonia isn't hard – it's about 90 miles away from the Grand Valley if you head south and east via U.S. Highway 50, and not much longer to get to Aspen if you just head over McClure Pass on Colorado Highway 133.

But once you're there, nestled in the North Fork Valley, it's a world away from everywhere else.

This lush cradle of everything you would want to eat and drink is an oasis from the everyday bustle. It's the kind of place people come to relax and enjoy life — to eat good food, imbibe a little and breathe the fresh mountain air. It's unpretentious, fresh and still a little bit wild around the edges.

The perfect day here is about getting out, interacting with the locals and soaking it all in. Here are just a few ideas for having an incredible time in this high-altitude paradise.

## EAT

**DELICIOUS ORCHARDS**, the home of Big B's Juices & Hard Cider, is the place to get lunch and a drink for all ages. There's hard cider for the adults and juice for the kids, and a laid-back environment perfect for enjoying a break in your adventuresome day. There's even a couple of rope swings outside to play on while you're waiting for your lunch order from the café inside.



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**TOP OF PAGE: Hikers enjoy the spectacular views of on the Three Lakes Hike, just up Kebler Pass from Paonia. ABOVE: Adrienne Allison of Avondale, Pennsylvania, enjoys wine while visiting her friend, Robyn Johnson of Paonia, and her daughter, Wren, at Terror Creek Winery. The winery has some of the oldest grape vines in the valley, and still uses them to create their signature Gewurztraminer wine.**

A placard advertising fresh, homemade pies beckons visitors to pull off the highway at Delicious Orchards, just a mile west of Paonia. After pulling into the parking lot, hungry bellies start to rumble as the savory scent of pulled pork and other delectable roasted meats wafts from the kitchen.

Diners can wash it all down

with a frosty, crisp hard cider fresh from the tap, made from the fruit grown in the 13-acre organic orchards surrounding the property. The owners live on the property in the geodesic dome and graciously share their little piece of heaven with visitors.

The company launched its series of ciders for distribution

**DELICIOUS ORCHARDS**  
(and Big B's ciders tasting room and café)  
39126 Highway 133,  
Hotchkiss



this year and has released its cans of Harvest Apple semi-sweet, Orchard Original dry, Cherry Daze and Lazy Daze organic hard lemonade. Bottles of its Chester Hoppencot, Pear Supply, Bourbon Barrel Pommeau and Grizzly Brand Hard Cider are also available.

But if you visit the tasting room, chances are you'll get to try something new or a small-batch cider you can only get here.

Visitors can also camp at Delicious Orchards for \$10, pick their own fruit in season, and enjoy the occasional concert.

Sit outside under the elm trees in the shade, on the patio, or inside the historic cafe. THE LIVING FARM CAFÉ's menu is seasonal and uses local ingredients, meaning you may see something different on the menu from time to time, depending on what is ripe. The restaurant serves organic foods grown on the Gillespie family farm as well as other places around the valley, meaning your food didn't come far and fits the idea of farm-to-table eating that locavores subscribe to.

The drink menu includes a cocktail menu centered on local wines and spirits, including the Marble distillery's gingercello, basil simple syrup in the ginger cooler and Alfred Eames Sangre del Sol in the wine cooler.

Try the hand-made gnocchi primavera, served in a beurre blanc mushroom sauce with seasonal vegetables and homemade bread on the side with the restaurant's house-whipped butter. Or if you're more adventurous, give the goat egg rolls or the BBQ bison ribs a whirl.

THE LIVING FARM CAFÉ  
120 Grand Ave.,  
Paonia  
[TheLivingFarmCafe.com](http://TheLivingFarmCafe.com)

### DRINK

TERROR CREEK WINERY has some of the oldest grape vines in the valley, which were part of an agricultural experiment called the Four Corners Project in the 1970s.

Visitors can taste those years of experience in the Gewurztraminer wine produced today, which uses the grapes



Delicious Orchards employee Lil McClure-Harterter pours cider in the Big B's Cider tasting room. The company expanded its offerings of hard cider this year and now offers several varieties in cans and bottles, as well as on tap.

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still thriving on those vines, the roots of the industry in this valley.

You have to want to visit Terror Creek Winery and work a little bit to get here. It's not the kind of place you just stumble upon, since it's on top of a mesa at 6,417 feet.

It's the highest-altitude winery in the world that grows its own grapes, makes its own wine and sells it to customers. So, yeah, navigating that windy road up the mesa should be expected.

Don't worry, the view is worth it. And so is the conversation from the owners, John and Joan Mathewson, who lived around the world for years and decided to settle here and open a vineyard in retirement. Like many other wineries in the West Elks American Viticultural Area, visitors will find the winemakers themselves serving in the tasting rooms or that the winery is run by a family. The Mathewsons operate one of about a dozen wineries in the area, which is one of only two official wine-producing regions in Colorado.

If you come to taste their wines, expect breathtaking views of Mount Lamborn, interesting stories and expertly crafted wines in the Alsatian tradition, which produces a dry, crisp type of wine.

The winery borrows its name from the stream delivering the water to its vineyards, which brings crystal-clear snowmelt off Grand

Mesa to the vines. That water, plus the intense high-altitude sun and warm days with cool nights, helps create the unique flavors visitors taste in the wine. The other factor adding to the terroir is the geological character of the area. The volcanic rocks stacked along the roadsides is a hint at what lies beneath the soil surface and provides minerals to the growing grapes, resulting in a distinctive taste in the fruit that creates a signature wine that tastes different than wines produced in other regions.

The selection includes a unique wine developed by Joan, called Chalet, which has a mix of Pinot Noir and Gamay Noir grapes creating its signature flavor and a jewel-toned mulberry colored wine.

While you can purchase bottles of Terror Creek's wine to take with you, the best place to enjoy it is on their grassy lawn, in the shade of their apricot trees and lilac bushes overlooking the valley, drinking it all in.

## STAY

The delicious cornucopia of **AGAPE FARM & RETREAT**'s property is a microcosm of what the North Fork Valley has to offer. Wandering among the garden, you'll find currant bushes, gooseberries, every herb you can think of and fruit trees so laden with their bounty that their limbs bow down to the ground. Verdant rows of

pinot gris grapes line the property and a three-acre pine forest provides a quiet space for guests to relax and think about life.

Owners Nancy Rodriguez and her son, Nicholas Hanson, have transformed the property from an 1892 farmhouse with neglected grape vines to a welcoming bed and breakfast.

After a restful sleep to the soundtrack of crickets, guests wake to the smells of a homemade breakfast, served on the patio with a view of Mt. Lamborn. Chances are, they'll savor every bite of the baked oatmeal with caramelized coconut topping, whipped cream and berries picked from the garden, or a savory shakshuka with farm-fresh eggs poached in tomato sauce with fresh veggies. Nancy and Nicholas trade off as chef in the kitchen, and lucky guests will experience both of their repertoires if they stay for a few meals.

"What can I feed you?" is a question guests hear from Nancy as she bustles about in the kitchen. She slices into a crusty loaf made by the artisan baker down the road and toasts it, topping it with local chokecherry jam.

"Try these!" she says, handing guests a handful of Goji berries, picked from the planter in front of the porch.

"Do you think these are ripe?" she asks, offering some gooseberries plucked from the bush.

Guests will notice that being at Agape Farm & Retreat is all about the sharing and the enjoying of life, from the stargazing on the deck of the yurt to Nancy's colorful stories of traveling the world.

## GO

There are too many hikes and adventures to list here, so we'll just mention one that's pretty spectacular and accessible.

The **THREE LAKES TRAIL** has it all — wildflower meadows, alpine lakes, waterfalls, and views like no other. With only about 500 feet in elevation gain and about 3 miles round-trip, it's much less strenuous than some other remote hikes.

To get there, travel east on Highway 133 through Somerset for 16 miles, which turns into Kebler Pass Road (also called Gunnison County Road 12). Follow that for about 14 miles until you reach Forest Road 706. Turn onto that and continue to the Lost Lake Campground, where you will find the trail head. 🍷

**Owner Nancy Rodriguez tends her garden at Agape Farm & Retreat.**

**TERROR CREEK WINERY**  
17445 Garvin Mesa Road  
[terrorcreekwinery.com](http://terrorcreekwinery.com)

**AGAPE FARM  
& RETREAT**  
12123 Slate Point Road,  
Paonia  
[agapefarmandretreat.com](http://agapefarmandretreat.com)



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