

# Central & Eastern Washington



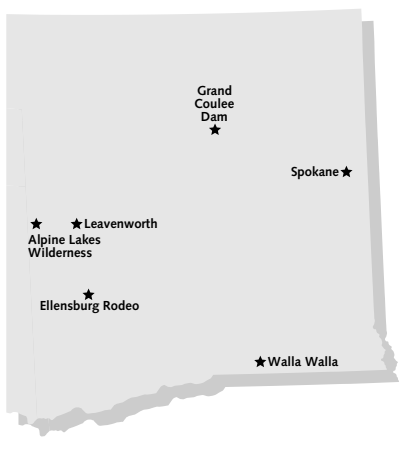
Nestled in the rain shadow of the Cascade Mountains and cut off from the coast by the crenellated crags of Mts Baker, Rainier, Adams and St Helen's, central and eastern Washington is a different world to the rain embattled urban centers further west. Here, amid the sun-baked hills and big blue skies of Yakima, Richland, Okanogan and Walla Walla you'll find privately run wineries, abundant apple orchards, colorful Native American Reservations and a strong and vibrant Hispanic community.

If western Washington is dominated by its smoldering volcanoes and vast evergreen forests, the east's geographic identity is intrinsically linked to its rivers. The state's longest waterway, the mighty Columbia River, has transformed both the landscape and the economy in this once-parched rural region with a series of gargantuan dams and ambitious irrigation projects that have converted barren valleys and scrubby steppe into a veritable Garden of Eden. As a result, eastern Washington now churns out over half of the country's apple crop and produces some of the nation's youngest, fruitiest and most promising new wines.

Despite scant transportation links, a less-developed tourist infrastructure and a reputation for being something of a bucolic backwater, the east offers a refreshing antidote to travelers who've had their fill of West Coast adrenaline adventures or grown tired of the urban cool of Seattle. Understated Spokane boasts a rich and eclectic architectural heritage, diminutive Ellensburg holds a nationally renowned Labor Day rodeo, while up-and-coming Walla Walla is a new and emerging wine destination where subtle syrahs and fruity cabernet sauvignons vie with California's well-established Napa Valley for international recognition.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Washing down Bratwurst with German beer in Bavarian **Leavenworth** (opposite)
- Stealing a serendipitous moment in the **Alpine Lakes Wilderness** (p196)
- Catching cowboy fever at the **Ellensburg Rodeo** (p200)
- Pulling on your sports shoes for a companionable **Bloomsday run** (p207) in Spokane
- Admiring the after-dark laser show at the **Grand Coulee Dam** (p209)
- Supping a syrah in a **Walla Walla** (p214) tasting room



## Geography & Climate

Cocooned between the Cascades and the Rockies, central and eastern Washington lies on top of the vast Columbia River plateau created millions of years ago when one of the largest flood ballasts in recorded history covered much of the Pacific Northwest. Caught in the rain shadow of the Cascade Mountains, the land is notably drier here, with the boreal forests of the Okanogan National Forest folding gradually into the dry, barren steppe more common in the Tri-Cities region. While eastern winters can be frigid, the summers in the Columbia and Yakima River valleys are notably hotter than Olympia or Seattle, with temperatures in excess of 100°F not uncommon.

## Getting There & Away

Spokane is the east's biggest transportation hub with regular air links to Seattle, Portland, Denver and Salt Lake City. The daily *Empire Builder* train connects the city to Chicago in the east and Seattle and Portland in the west. There's a thrice-daily Greyhound bus service to Seattle and a daily connection to Boise in Idaho.

## Getting Around

Getting around central and eastern Washington presents one of the state's biggest transportation challenges – unless, of course, you have a car. Despite having slashed a number of its routes in recent years (including the link to Walla Walla), Greyhound buses still run a service between Pasco and Spokane, and Pasco and Seattle via Yakima. There's also a daily service between Seattle and Wenatchee.

# CENTRAL WASHINGTON

Caught in the foothills of the grandiose Cascade Mountains, central Washington is a geographic crossroads where dramatic alpine peaks fold imperceptibly into a barren steppe-like desert broken only by the Nile-like presence of the Columbia River and its irrigating manmade dams.

Wenatchee and Leavenworth are the most interesting urban centers here and both are popular stopping off points on the scenic Cascade Loop. They also make good bases for a plethora of exciting outdoor adventures nearby.

## Leavenworth

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Dust off your lederhosen, brush up on your German drinking songs, and get ready to swap your burgers for bratwurst and your T-bone steak for Weiner schnitzel. Welcome to Leavenworth, Washington's very own themed Bavarian 'village,' a former lumber town that went Teutonic back in the 1960s in order to stop an economic rot of catastrophic proportions from putting it permanently out of business. Rather amazingly, the ploy worked. Leavenworth's reincarnation as a quintessential *Romantische Strasse* village has transformed a once dull Cascadian pit stop into a thriving and surprisingly authentic tourist haven. The settlement's picturesque alpine setting on the eastern edge of the craggy North Cascade Mountains certainly helps; as does the fact that well over a quarter of the current population is effectively German. But, surreal as the concept may sound, Leavenworth is no Disneyland theme park. Nor is it by any means a Bavarian monopoly. If the beer and sausages get too much, simply lace up your hiking boots, fill your rucksack with a day or two of supplies and head off into an untamed and adventure-filled wilderness.

## ORIENTATION & INFORMATION

Front St, Leavenworth's main drag, runs parallel to US 2, one block south. Icicle Rd, on the west side of town, traces Icicle Creek south to an assortment of recreational possibilities bordering the Alpine Lakes Wilderness.

If you're not immediately sold on the town's rather unusual German makeover, head to the **Leavenworth Chamber of Commerce & Visitor Center** (☎ 509-548-5807; www.leavenworth.org; 940 US 2; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Thu, 8am-6pm Fri & Sat, 10am-4pm Sun), where they'll soon convince you otherwise. The **Leavenworth Ranger Station** (☎ 509-548-6977; 600 Sherbourne; ☎ 7:30am-4:30pm daily Jun 15-October 15, 7:45am-4:30pm Mon-Fri rest of year) is off US 2 at the east end of town, and provides information on recreational opportunities and issues various types of permits.

## SIGHTS

Leavenworth's small Bavarian hub is centered on Front St where gabled alpine houses nestle cozily in the shadow of the craggy Tyrolean peaks of the North Cascade Mountains. A leisurely stroll through this diminutive, if