

A Trip To Colorado Wine Country Town Of Palisade Shows Off For The Media

by Laura Lieff

The town of Palisade rolled out the red carpet for a media extravaganza that brought editors and writers from around the region, including Utah, New Mexico and Colorado. In a town with a population of only 3,400 that is known for its art, alcohol and agriculture, it has more to offer than meets the eye.

As part of the Grand Valley, Palisade offers a beautiful setting with the Colorado River emerging from DeBeque Canyon while the Book Cliffs and Grand Mesa provide towering backdrops. The Grand Mesa stands at over 10,500 feet, is known as the

world's largest "flat top mountain," and has more than 300 lakes on top.

Established in 1904, Palisade's early days found the town rapidly growing. It boasted an array of stores including banks, blacksmiths, jewelry and clothing stores, a bakery, drugstores and a movie theater, among many others.

According to Mayor Dave Walker, Palisade has grown in the last seven years. Before Walker arrived eight years ago, Palisade was more of a rest stop than a town.

"When I moved here I was frustrated with how there was nothing to do and nowhere to stay," said Walker. "So I eventual-



Local History: Plum Creek Winery only uses grapes grown in Colorado and holds Colorado winery license No. 10, the oldest license of all of the state's wineries now in existence.



Wine Country: Known as the Wine Capital of Colorado, Palisade is home to 18 wineries that offer beautiful views for guests to enjoy while tasting local libations.

ly got on city council to make some changes and then became the mayor. Now we have several restaurants, bars, art galleries and endless things for people to do when they come and visit."

Walker also opened a bed and breakfast called *Palisade Wine Valley Inn*.

Located about 15 minutes east of Grand Junction, Palisade is a place that is easy to get to and easy to get around. There are also special events happening almost every weekend during their high season which starts in April and runs through October. Events include the *Bluegrass & Roots Music Festival*, June 11-13; the world-renowned *Palisade Peach Festival*, Aug. 19-22; and the *Colorado Mountain Winefest*, Sept. 16-19. The bed and breakfasts and hotels are booked months in advance.

"Palisade has more alcohol production per capita than anywhere else in Colorado," Walker pointed out. "Between the brew-



Destination Location: Mayor Dave Walker has helped turn Palisade into a destination by making sure the town has fun events going on and many restaurants, bars and art galleries for visitors to experience.



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ery, the distillery and the vineyards we definitely have a wide range of libations."

Winos Welcome

Palisade has 18 tasting rooms and wine tasting is free at most places. They are also open 12 months out of the year. According to the locals, Palisade's "Million Dollar Breeze" keeps the growing season going two weeks longer than the rest of the Grand Valley while significantly reducing frost conditions and providing a temperate climate.

Three wineries we visited were Plum Creek Cellars, Carlson Vineyards and Mesa Park Vineyards. Each winery is very different from the others but they all offer something memorable. Plum Creek looks similar to a Napa Valley winery with a lot of square footage and a beautiful layout. Carlson's tasting room has large windows allowing you to view the vineyards while sipping wine. Mesa Park has a more intimate feel, as if you are in a friend's wine cellar rather than a tasting room. Plum Creek gives a tour about how their wine is made while offering chocolates to enjoy with the wine. Carlson offers sweet, fruit-flavored wines that feature names like *Tyrannosaurus Red* and *Laughing Cat*. Mesa Park specializes in red wines which can be enjoyed in their barn-turned-tasting room with owners Chuck and Patty Price.

"There are close to 100 wineries in the state of Colorado but Palisade's climate has proven to be great for growing grapes," said Plum Creek winemaker Jenne Baldwin-Eaton. "The altitude poses some challenges including a lot of direct sunlight, hail and cold temperatures but we have adjusted to Colorado weather."

All the wine at Plum Creek, Carlson and Mesa Park is made from 100 percent Colorado grown grapes which, according to our winery hosts, is a specific and important certification.

Distillery, Brewery And Saloon

In addition to wineries, Palisade offers its own brewing company and distillery. The *Peach Street Distillers* opened in 2005 and manufactures handcrafted spirits made with local produce.

According to Rory, Bill, and Dave, the three guys who run the distillery, Palisade was chosen as their location because it is where the finest fruits in Colorado are grown. Because Palisade resides at 4,700 feet in elevation, is in a desert climate and receives intense sunlight, the fruit that ripens in these conditions has a special concentration of sugars.

"In other words, our brandies are made with the finest fruit available to us, used at the peak of ripeness and freshness," noted Rory. "Our Colorado Bourbon and our Goat Vodkas are made with sweet corn from the nearby town of Olathe."

Rory was happy to host a tasting of the pear brandy that is \$95 per bottle and has a pear grown inside of it. Apparently they



Art Hub: Owner of Twisted Brick Studios, Diana Fritzler, gives a tour of her gallery which features an assortment of fine art, sculpture and jewelry.

put a jar over a branch and the pear grows inside the bottle — it's something to see.

The *Palisade Brewing Company*, close to the distillery, specializes in handcrafted, micro-brewed beer with a selection of IPA, Red, Brown, Blonde and Pale Ales, among others. The brewery is a great place to have lunch and a beer and get a tour from Danny the brewer, who can answer any and all questions about how their beer is made.

To get the real local experience, spend some time at the *Palisade Livery Saloon*. A combination of an old western saloon and dive bar, the Livery is as authentic as the drinks are strong. Locals can be found drinking there at all times of the day and night and there is a good chance that the jukebox is playing a rock and roll song everyone knows.

For The Art Lovers

Although Palisade is proud of the fact that most of its alcohol is homemade, there is more to the town than just booze. Art is a huge part of what makes Palisade unique and the local galleries are a great showcase of what local artists can do.

The *Blue Pig Gallery* features 35 local artists and is the largest, privately-owned gallery in the region. The 5,000 square foot family-owned gallery opened in 2007 and offers all types of art. The gallery served as our meeting spot and owner Jane Wood not only welcomed the media group but also explained that "Palisade is art, alcohol and agriculture."

Another renowned gallery called *Twisted Brick Studios* is located just down the street and is home to eight artists offering an assortment of fine art, sculpture and jewelry. It was described by owner Diana Fritzler as a "hub within a hub for art."

Art events that take place in Palisade include *Pig Tails and Wine Trails*, the *Peach Blossom Art Show* and the *Palisade Art & Chocolate Walk*. Other galleries and studios located in Palisade include *Wedel Pottery*, *Kentz Sculpting* and *Parker Pottery*.

Orchards And Riverbend Park

Orchards are another aspect of what makes Palisade unique. There are nine orchards including *Palisade Produce* where the tour allows guests to learn what it takes to grow a perfect Palisade peach and *Z's Orchard* where sunflowers, cherries, raspberries and peaches, and much more, can be found.



B&B: Tom and Cathy Monroe make their guests feel at home at their luxurious bed and breakfast called DiVine Thyme. The large Victorian house offers many amenities and is within walking distance to all Palisade's activities.

Z's Orchard is a family business run by Carol Zadrozny and Richard Skaer with the help of their daughter Kendra and son-in-law Ken. In addition to growing fruits and vegetables they also ship peaches that can be found at various local farmers markets in places such as Glenwood Springs, Grand Junction and Breckenridge. They are looking forward to the upcoming 42nd annual peach festival.

Along with the rest of the natural features that make Palisade beautiful, *Riverbend Park* is a place to do everything from see wildlife to experience music festivals. The dominant feature of Riverbend Park is the Colorado River and about 150 resident and migratory species of birds are common to this part of Colorado. This is also a great place to hike, bike and enjoy picnics.



Inviting Winery: Owners Patty and Chuck Price make Mesa Park Vineyards an inviting place to taste their red wines which can be enjoyed in their barn-turned-tasting room.

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