

Virtually everything on the menu is no more than a few heavenly bites, but belt buckles still get loosened a notch or two thanks to the richness of the meal. Even exquisite desserts are followed by fruit, ice cream, chocolate, and candies. The staff's timing is perfect, so one's appetite and spirits never flag until, sadly, it is time to leave after having experienced a spectacle made of nine edible one-act wonders.

**WHERE:** 60 miles north of San Francisco; 6640 Washington St. Tel 707-944-2380; thomaskeller.com/tfl. **COST:** 9-course tasting menu \$310. **HOW:** reservations taken starting 2 months to the calendar day. **BEST TIME:** If you're in town, drop by in the morning and leave your name in case of cancellations; it sometimes works—especially on rainy days.



*In the 1920s, the restaurant's building was used as a French steam laundry, hence the name.*

### *Much Ado About Ashland*

## OREGON SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL

Ashland, Oregon

“Gentles, perchance you wonder at this show; but wonder on, till truth make all things plain,” wrote William Shakespeare about the magic of theater—abundantly on display each year at the Oregon Shakespeare

Festival (OSF), the largest and longest-running celebration of the Bard in America. Today, upwards of 400,000 theater lovers come to Ashland each year to attend performances at the festival's three venues, including the outdoor Elizabethan Theatre, which seats 1,200 and is fashioned after a 17th-century English theater. The Tony Award-winning festival, which has staged performances in Ashland since the 1930s, is home to the biggest rotating repertory theater in the country. The festival's success unquestionably derives from the excellence of its productions, but is aided too by the charm of Ashland, a small, colorful city 15 miles north of the California border that has become the cultural—and gastronomic—center of southern Oregon.

While the festival repertory here is rooted in Shakespeare, it also features revivals and contemporary theater from around the world. In addition to 11 plays presented annually, from mid-February through October, there are also backstage tours, lectures and discussions led by actors and scholars, and alfresco concerts of Renaissance music and dance.

Ashland's main streets buzz with well-heeled shoppers and youthful bohemians. From the town's central plaza, lovely Lithia Park winds up along Ashland Creek; park trails meander for miles past swans, picnickers, and declaiming thespians, and there are day trips galore in the mountainous region of southern Oregon, from visits to nearby vineyards to skiing at Mount Ashland in the white months.

Of Ashland's dozens of historic B&Bs and small inns, the Peerless Hotel is a favorite. Built in 1900 as a railroad workers' boardinghouse, the beautifully updated Peerless now offers tastefully appointed rooms with luxurious comforts. These take a backseat to the eponymous restaurant next door, one of the best in town. An inventive cuisine fashioned from the bounty of local farms and ranches is paired with an award-winning wine list heavy with Oregon's finest.

**WHERE:** 285 miles south of Portland. Tel 541-482-4331; [osfashland.org](http://osfashland.org). **Cost:** tickets from \$30. **When:** Feb–Oct. **PEERLESS HOTEL & RESTAURANT:** Tel 541-488-1082

(hotel), 541-488-6067 (restaurant); [peerless-hotel.com](http://peerless-hotel.com). **Cost:** from \$92 (off-peak), from \$174 (peak); dinner \$45. **BEST TIMES:**



*The grand Elizabethan Theatre presents Shakespeare in a venue reminiscent of London's original Globe Theatre—but here, the "groundlings" sit in comfort.*

May–Oct for weather; July 4th for live music, a food and crafts fair, an old-fashioned parade, and fireworks.

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*An Enclave of History and Art at the Columbia's Mouth*

## ASTORIA

Oregon

**F**rom its perch above the mouth of the Columbia River, Astoria has seen more history flow by than any other city in the Pacific Northwest. Established in 1811, Astoria is the oldest U.S. settlement in the American West, and offers

two centuries' worth of frontier and maritime history. It also boasts the kind of scruffy charm that draws in painters and writers, and this onetime center of seafaring now serves as an artists retreat.

The Lewis and Clark expedition (see p. 643) literally put Astoria on the map. The mouth of the Columbia was the western terminus of the Corps of Discovery's journey, and they built Fort Clatsop—their encampment for the tough winter of 1805–06—just south of the future city. At the National Park Service's fort replica, living history interpreters lead tours through the stockaded encampment, demonstrating such frontier skills as leather tanning and flintlock marksmanship.

Astoria itself was born just five years later when American fur traders working for John Jacob Astor established Fort Astoria in his name, on a rocky ledge above the Columbia. With its auspicious position at the mouth of the West's largest river, Astoria grew wealthy through trade and fishing. Sea captains built magnificent trophy homes overlooking the river. Many of these flamboyant Victorian mansions, which cling to the steep hillsides behind downtown, have been painstakingly restored and afford incredible views of the high-arching Astoria Bridge. At over 4 miles, it is North America's longest continuous truss bridge, connecting Astoria to Washington State. To glimpse the period's grandeur, tour