

FINGER LAKES

Travel
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On the Finger Lakes Wine Trails with Quality Wine Tours

When does a single request launch a new business?

When you're Jim Havalack and one of your regular customers asks you to take him on a winery tour instead of to the airport. That day in 1997 was the day [Quality Wine Tours](#) was born.

Jim's is an interesting story. He admits that when he started the tours, he knew little about the wine trails or wine, and simply chauffeured clients to the wineries. By '98, he recognized that there was demand for customized tours and drivers who had rich knowledge of the region, so he set out to learn all he could about what was becoming one of the region's popular tourism attractions.



"The first year, I started with a wine tour every Saturday driving people to Finger Lakes wineries. By the next year, I started training our wine tour operators to be Driver Guides instead of just chauffeurs. Now when someone interviews with us and only wants to be a driver, I know it's not a good fit. Our Driver Guides have to be enthusiastic about wines and know them. My barometer of their success is the letters I get from happy customers."



Each of his Driver Guides goes along on three or more wine tours on *each* of the four trails before he or she is allowed to take a tour out, and they all receive the UnCork New York wine book and regular updates from the New York Wines & Grape Foundation, plus any other interesting information Jim finds. They know the wines, the trails, the wineries, the roads, the restaurants and the favorite attractions along the way so that each driver can customize a tour to his or her clients' specific tastes.

"We want to recommend the best. Our service doesn't stop once our clients get out of the car," Jim said, explaining his philosophy that they think of the places they take clientele as an extension of the Quality Wine Tour brand.

In addition to stand-alone tours, Quality Wine Tours also offers packages in collaboration with some of the region's great lodging facilities such as [The Fox and the Grapes B&B](#) in Lodi, [John Morris Manor B&B](#) in Seneca Falls, [The Inn on the Lake](#) in Canandaigua, [Mirbeau Inn & Spa](#) in Skaneateles, [Inn at the Finger Lakes](#) in Auburn, [Merritt Hill Manor](#) in Penn Yan and [RIT Inn and Conference Center](#) in Rochester.

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“We’ve partnered with many of our B&Bs and hotels for as many as five or six years. We work to build those relationships and they’re important to us. My son works for Disney, and we follow the Disney model,” Jim said, explaining how important customer service is within his company in their approach to individual clients as well as package partners.

Quality Wine Tours’ high season is the summer months, Columbus Day Weekend, and special events on the Finger Lakes Wine Trails such as the [Keuka Holidays](#), the [Mardi Gras](#) and the [Deck the Halls](#) Weekends, but they operate 364 days a year...every day but Christmas. Jim points out that some wineries are even open Thanksgiving and New Year’s Day. For those looking for something different to do on a holiday...or any day, for that matter... a winery tour will provide a fascinating and memorable experience.

Five-hour wine tours for two start at \$275 plus tax and gratuity and include a Driver-Guide in a Luxury sedan to 6-7 wineries of your choice on the Seneca Lake, Keuka Lake or Cayuga Wine Trail. Longer tours, tours for larger groups and packages are also available. To reserve your customized wine tour, call (585) 455-8294 and tell Jim the [Finger Lakes Travel Maven](#) sent you!

Photo of Jim Havalack by Velynda, courtesy of Quality Wine Tours; Photos of group and Shaunn next to Van by Jim Havalack.



~ Finger Lakes Travel Maven ~
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