

# Happy Valley

Nikki Bayley gets a taste of the burgeoning wine scene in British Columbia's Okanagan Valley

**B**ritish Columbia's wineries are big business. Each year, they welcome more than a million visitors, generating \$600 million in tourism and tourism-related employment.

The Okanagan Valley is one of the world's most exciting emerging wine regions, with a backdrop of pristine lakes and sandy beaches surrounded by soft sloping mountains. Add to that dry and hot summers, a riot of spring blossoms, mild winters with powder snow on the mountains, and dazzling autumn leaf colours and the Okanagan makes an attractive year-round destination.

With some 2,400 hectares of vines planted, the Okanagan is Canada's second-largest wine-producing region. From Lake Country in the north to Osoyoos in the south covering an incredible range of microclimates and soil types, the Okanagan excels at an intoxicating range of grape varieties: cool-climate

pinot noir and chardonnay, crisp riesling, juicy fruit-forward syrah and full-bodied cabernet sauvignon.

The Okanagan also produces exceptional sparkling wines, ice wines and late-harvest dessert wines. Many wineries offer accommodation, restaurants or a picnic area where guests can open a bottle of wine to enjoy overlooking the vines. Tasting fees are usually waived with a purchase.

## LAKE COUNTRY AND KELOWNA

As the largest city in the Okanagan, Kelowna offers plenty of shopping and cultural attractions alongside laidback lake and beach-based fun. A 40-minute drive north takes you to Lake Country for relaxed golfing and spa-ing.

**Stay:** Sparkling Hill, a decadent Swarovski crystal-studded spa resort with jaw-dropping lake views.

Delta Hotel Grand Okanagan Resort is a downtown hotel with bags of style, excellent facilities and the delicious Oak & Cru restaurant.

**Sip:** 50th Parallel, an ultra-modern winery with the excellent Block One restaurant, or Gray Monk, the place to enjoy a sparkling odyssey white brut overlooking the vines at the Vineyard Restaurant. You'll pop a cork over the traditional-method bubbles at Summerhill Pyramid Winery, a wonderfully eccentric winery and restaurant with a scale model of the Great Pyramid of Giza. Last but not least, Tantalus Vineyards is the benchmark for riesling in the area.

## WEST KELOWNA AND SUMMERLAND

On the west side of Lake Okanagan, West Kelowna boasts several big-name wineries and strip malls aplenty. Quaint Summerland offers up small-town attractions such as Summerland Sweets for locally made fruit jams. →





**Canadian Affair's** BC Winelands Circle Holiday takes in four wine regions, including four nights in the Okanagan. Prices start at £1,606 in May, including Air Transat flights from Gatwick, 11 nights' accommodation, car hire, ferry and three guided tours. [canadianaffair.com](http://canadianaffair.com)

**Premier Holidays** has a three-night self-drive tour of Okanagan's Lakeshore Wine Route. Prices start at £369, including car hire, two nights' accommodation in Kelowna and one in Penticton. [trade.premierholidays.co.uk](http://trade.premierholidays.co.uk)

**Prestige Holidays** offers a 10-day Peaks and Grapes self-drive itinerary featuring Historic Hat Creek, Banff Upper Hot Springs, an Ice Explorer ride on Athabasca Glacier and West Side Story Tour. Prices start at £1,725, including accommodation, Air Canada flights to Vancouver and car hire. [prestigecanada.co.uk](http://prestigecanada.co.uk)

➔ **Stay:** Summerland Resort Hotel is an all-suite lakeside resort with excellent self-catering facilities, cosy fireplaces and a family-friendly swimming pool. **Sip:** Quail's Gate for high-end winery accommodation, the terrific Old Vines restaurant and some of the best rosé in the valley. Fans of rare wines will enjoy the Legacy Collection at lavish winery Mission Hill, where the restaurant boasts Instagrammable art and sculptures. Those who want to learn more can book the hour-long sparkling-wine tour at Fitzpatrick Family Vineyards to become an instant bubble expert, or sip Fitz Reserve blanc de blanc at the bistro overlooking the lake and vines. For a real treat, try the unoaked single-vineyard chardonnay at Indigenous World Wines, owned and run by the Westbank First Nation, with illuminated teepees on its grounds.

▶ **NARAMATA AND OKANAGAN FALLS**

The city of Penticton is at the end of Lake Okanagan, and the mostly

boutique wineries of the Naramata Bench are clustered along its east side. Okanagan Falls is just 15 minutes away at the end of Skaha Lake with low-key beachside fun and the famous Tickleberry's ice cream parlour.

**Stay:** Suggest Penticton Lakeside Resort, a reliable waterfront hotel with facilities including a private beach.

**Sip:** Great Estates Okanagan Wine Experience Centre brings eight winery brands under one roof to showcase the terroir of the South Okanagan through wine tasting, and food and wine-paired experiences. The Vanilla Pod restaurant at Poplar Grove winery is one of the best in the region, where guests can enjoy its signature legacy red blend overlooking the mountains, lake and vines. Liquidity, meanwhile, is renowned for art installations, excellent pinot gris and sustainable 'locavore' dining in the bistro; while the Meyer Family Vineyards stand out for the superb pinot noir and chardonnay.

▶ **OLIVER AND OSOYOOS**

Temperatures soar into the 40s at

the height of summer, so join locals cooling off in Osoyoos lake, feasting on just-picked fruit in Oliver and exploring the bluffs and arid desert scenery.

**Stay:** Watermark Beach Resort was made for relaxing, with well-appointed suites and direct access to the beach.

**Sip:** Burrowing Owl Estate Winery is a luxury, adult-only winery with an exceptional restaurant, Sonora Room, which adds to the sophisticated delight of its silky Meritage blend. At Tinhorn Creek, clients will need to book ahead if they want to see one of the summertime concerts in the amphitheatre, but if they miss out, there's still the chance to feast on pizza and merlot at the Miradoro restaurant. Boasting some of the oldest vines in Canada, Road 13 does a great line in sparkling chenin blanc, though clients will want to leave some room in their luggage for a few bottles of the Lost Inhibitions range from Church and State. Its tongue-in-cheek labels include 'You'd Better Delete That' and 'I'd Shave My Legs for You'.



Okanagan Valley

PICTURES: SHAWN TALBOT PHOTOGRAPHY/BRITISH COLUMBIA WINE INSTITUTE; KARI MEDIG

“**ASK THE EXPERT**”

**Laura Kittmer,** media relations manager, British Columbia Wine Institute

“In the past 30 years, British Columbia's wine industry has grown from just 17 wineries to more than 275, which offer visitors a plethora of experiences, including tastings, wine pairings, culinary classes and dining. They attract wine experts, winemakers and chefs from all over the world.”

# Year-round OKANAGAN VALLEY

It's not just wine that brings visitors to the Okanagan Valley, with attractions for all ages to enjoy throughout the year

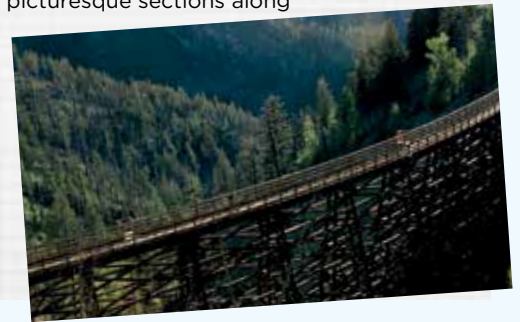
## EXPLORE INDIGENOUS TOURISM

British Columbia offers a rich variety of indigenous tourism experiences. At the indigenous-owned Nk'Mip Desert Cultural Centre in Osoyoos, visitors can take a walk through the cacti and sage brush, before enjoying award-winning wines at Canada's only First Nations-owned winery, Nk'Mip Cellars. A Swiws Spirit Tour with an indigenous guide offers visitors the chance to make an experiential journey into the culture and history of the land and its people. [nkmipdesert.com](http://nkmipdesert.com)



## PEDAL THE KETTLE VALLEY RAILWAY

The longest rail-trail network in British Columbia has nearly 400 miles of connected trails that wind through mountains, lakes and forests on decommissioned rail tracks. Cycle one of the most picturesque sections along the wooden trestles from Myra Canyon to Penticton on a guided tour with Hoodoo Adventures. [hoodooadventures.ca](http://hoodooadventures.ca)



## ALL ABOARD THE STEAM TRAIN

Get a taste of what the Kettle Valley Railway would have been in its heyday on a steam train. The 10-mile loop through orchards and vineyards offers stunning views over the lake on a restored 1912 locomotive. Themed trips such as the sommelier-hosted wine express and the Great Train Robbery adventure add variety. [kettlevalleyrail.org](http://kettlevalleyrail.org)



## HIT THE SLOPES

Big White and Silver Star ski resorts are just a 45-minute drive from Kelowna, offering ski-in, ski-out accommodation. In the south near Oliver, Mount Baldy and Apex offer great prices for expert and newbie winter sports fans alike. [ca.ski.com/okanagan](http://ca.ski.com/okanagan)



## LAKE LIFE

Thanks to its chain of lakes (the largest, Okanagan Lake, is 68 miles long), water sports and beach fun are a big part of the Valley experience. Clients can rent boats at the Downtown Marina and go 'flyboarding' with a jetpack with Hydrofly Kelowna. Or join the locals floating the Penticton Channel between Okanagan and Skaha Lakes on a 'floatie', drinking beer and soaking up the sunshine. [kelownadowntownmarina.com](http://kelownadowntownmarina.com)



## HEAD FOR THE TRAILS

The Okanagan Valley takes in an extraordinary breadth of geographical features, from extinct volcanoes, waterfalls and alpine meadows to sloping mountains, Canada's only semi-arid desert and, of course, those glacier-formed lakes. It's a hiker's dream to explore and each region offers up trails suitable for newbies, experts and mountain bikers. [tourismkelowna.com/do/hiking](http://tourismkelowna.com/do/hiking)



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