

FOOD & WINE

ROAST
CHICKEN WITH
CHILE-BASIL
VINAIGRETTE
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LIFE-CHANGING CHICKEN

29 RECIPES TO
SHAKE UP
YOUR SPRING
COOKING

TRAVEL

WINE FLIGHT

Ancient Soil, New Roots Canada's stunning Okanagan Valley is emerging as a diverse and exciting wine destination.

By Joanne Sasvari

The Okanagan Valley is home to a landscape of rolling hills, rocky bluffs, and lakes. This is the view overlooking the Painted Rock Estate Winery and Skaha Lake.



ONLY 155 SCENIC MILES stretch from the northern edge of British Columbia's Okanagan Valley to its southern limit at the U.S. border, but that short distance encompasses a world of wine. The north, with its cool, forested hills and racy Rieslings, evokes Alsace or the Mosel; the south comprises Canada's only desert, where intense summer heat produces powerful Bordeaux-style reds and lush Rhône-style whites. "The fact that from north to south there are so many pockets with so much potential for certain grape varieties—I don't think there are very many wine regions like us in the world," says Emily Walker, wine director at the lakeside Naramata Inn, a recently restored heritage property that has become a central hub for the region's food and wine lovers.

This sun-soaked valley follows a series of pristine lakes and steep bluffs carved out by retreating glaciers. "The Okanagan has the most diverse and complex soil system of any region in the world," says Anthony von Mandl, the proprietor of Mission Hill Family Estate, established in 1981, as well as several other Okanagan wineries, including CheckMate and CedarCreek. "It's the only region that was formed by volcanic activity and then overrun by not one, but two glacial ages."

The soils here are ancient. Winemaking, however, is not. The first vines were planted in the 1860s by missionaries thirsty for sacramental wine. By the 1970s, only a handful of wineries were

WINES TO TRY NOW

You can travel to the Okanagan without leaving your dinner table. Here are a couple of the region's wines that you can buy in the U.S.

—MELANIE HANSCHKE

2015 PAINTED ROCK SYRAH (\$42)

With its savory Northern Rhône-ish qualities and cool-climate elegance, this Syrah is a strong ambassador for the region. Vibrant raspberry aromas are tempered by a little spice and char and a velvety finish.

2018 QUAILS' GATE PINOT NOIR (\$30)

Not many wines make it out of the Okanagan Valley to the States, so lucky for us that those of family-owned Quails' Gate do. This Pinot is nicely balanced: it's lightly earthy with a nice lick of dark cherries and a touch of toasty oak.



OPPOSITE: The striking dining room at Home Block, CedarCreek Estate Winery's restaurant
THIS PAGE: The sandy vineyards of NK Mip Cellars, Canada's first Indigenous-owned winery

THIS PAGE: Mission Hill Family Estate's lakeside loggia, Terrace Restaurant
 OPPOSITE, FROM TOP: The charming Naramata Inn, Osoyoos Desert Centre's iconic boardwalk

operating, including the Burgundian Blue Mountain and the Germanic Gray Monk. Until the 1990s, the region was best known for peach orchards and beach culture. Then in 1994, at the International Wine & Spirit Competition in London, Mission Hill won the award for Best Chardonnay Worldwide, and suddenly the world began to take notice.

Now, the valley has 185 wineries and nearly 9,000 acres planted with vines, growing more than 60 grape varieties ranging from Auxerrois to Zinfandel. Indeed, "variety" is the watchword here—variety of soil, grapes, climate, and even winemakers, who've emigrated in large numbers from all over the world, including France, Germany, Portugal, Australia, and India. Randy Toor and his brothers were among several families who applied their Punjabi farming traditions to vineyards in the valley and then, once they tasted the wine made from the grapes they had grown, opened their own wineries. "I fell in love with it," says Toor, whose Desert Hills Estate Winery has a cult following for its cherry-bright Gamay Noir.

Desert Hills is just one of nearly 50 wineries between the desert city of Osoyoos and the funky little western town of Oliver, which is surrounded by nearly half of British Columbia's vines, earning it the nickname the "Wine Capital of Canada." Several have notable restaurants; among them is Miradoro at Tinhorn Creek Vineyards, where guests can sip elegant Chardonnay while watching the afternoon sun fall on the Black Sage Bench across the valley, ripening the powerful reds that go into the Bordeaux blends at Burrowing Owl and Black Hills Estate Winery.

As you travel north, brawny reds give way to delicate, cool-climate whites, and sleepy small towns to booming midsize cities alongside 84-mile-long Okanagan Lake. Kelowna, the valley's urban center, is a boisterous sprawl of shopping malls, lakefront vacation homes, and celebrated wineries.

But north or south, it's the climate that makes the Okanagan so appealing for both grapes and people. Located in the rain shadow of the Coast Mountains, the valley has a short but intense growing season, with hot, dry days; cool nights; and loads of sunshine. "The vines have to snap into action in spring. And it's a sharp decline at the other end of the season," says Christine Coletta, proprietor of Okanagan Crush Pad. The result is ripe

fruit balanced with mouthwatering acidity. "There's a purity, a freshness, and a vibrancy to our wines," Coletta says. "They are vital and full of energy."

That lively acidity is especially apparent in zesty bubbles like Coletta's The Bub, as well as in other wines up and down the valley, such as the grippy Rieslings from Synchronesh Wines and Tantalus Vineyards, which spark with citrus zest and punchy tropical fruit flavors.

Twenty-five years ago, visitors traveled to the Okanagan for the boating, the golfing, and the sunshine along the lakes' many beaches. Today, they also come for wine and food that can be savored only in these 155 miles of narrow valley, with its ancient soils, shimmering lakes, and youthful exuberance. As von Mandl says, "It's a very precious region."





WHERE TO EAT AND TASTE

Conveniently, many of the Okanagan Valley's best restaurants are located at its best wineries. Here are just a few where you can stroll straight from the tasting bar to dinner.

BLOCK ONE AT 50TH PARALLEL ESTATE

In Lake Country, self-styled "glamour farmers" Curtis Krouzel and Sheri-Lee Turner-Krouzel have created a dramatic engineering marvel of a winery known for elegant cool-climate Pinot Noir and wood-fired regional cuisine. (50thparallel.com)

HOME BLOCK AT CEDARCREEK ESTATE WINERY

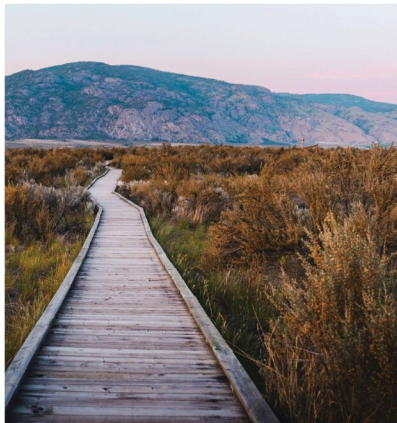
At this rustic-modern restaurant in Kelowna, chef Neil Taylor's Mediterranean-inspired cuisine pairs brightly with the terroir-driven, low-intervention wines of InterVin's 2019 Canadian Winery of the Year. (cedarcreek.bc.ca)

MASALA BISTRO AT KISMET ESTATE WINERY

The grape-growing Dhaliwal family produces powerful, fruit-driven reds that pair beautifully with the fragrant spices of South Asian cuisine at their Oliver winery-restaurant. (kismetestatewinery.com)

THE BEAR, THE FISH, THE ROOT & THE BERRY AT SPIRIT RIDGE RESORT

Indigenous ingredients and traditions are on the menu, along with winemaker Justin Hall's bold, award-winning Bordeaux-style reds from Nk'Mip Cellars, Canada's first Indigenous-owned and -operated winery. (bearfishrootberry.com; nkmpcellars.com)



WHERE TO STAY

NARAMATA INN

This 12-room heritage boutique inn is the valley's most charming property, with an exceptional restaurant that features celebrated chef Ned Bell's hyper-local cuisine. (Rooms from \$118. naramatainn.com)

ELDORADO RESORT

The location on Kelowna's lakefront couldn't be handier. This rambling resort comprises new and vintage sections, as well as a marina and private beach. (Rooms from \$110. eldoradoresort.ca)

PENTICTON LAKESIDE RESORT

The west wing of this Okanagan stalwart was designed by the late Nick Bevanda and is a refuge from the masses, with a wine experience center off the lobby. (Rooms from \$117. pentictonlakesideresort.com)