

CALGARY HERALD

WINTER IN WINE COUNTRY

The Okanagan's charms extend to all seasons

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FOR THE CALGARY HERALD

Fog drifts slowly down the hills and across the lake, muting the yellow and red of the trees. Maybe the snow is gently falling.

The traffic is calm, and people say hi and smile as you walk down the street. There's a chill in the air — you'll want a jacket — but the air is pleasant, clean and crisp.

It's the perfect day to stop in at a few wineries. Visit favourite bookstores and coffee shops. Maybe go antique hunting for a while.

Welcome to winter in the Okanagan Valley.

Tourists flock to British Columbia's most famous wine valley every summer, but most desert it in winter.

That's great news for those of us looking for a bargain: off-season rates at hotels, easy-to-find tables at local bistros and coffee shops, plenty of parking and still, those beautiful lake vistas.

Here, in no particular order, are 10 cool things to see and do during winter in wine country.

1. ATTEND WINTER IN WINE COUNTRY. Yes, there's actually a festival by that name, Nov. 29 and 30. At least 27 wineries around Oliver and Osoyoos will feature Christmas carols, tastings, holiday lights and food pairings. Meander from winery to winery, or hire a driver (so you can taste safely.) Landsea Okanagan Tours and Charters (landseakanagan.com) even offers a family tour during Winter in Wine Country. The four-hour Rudolph Route family tour stops at five wineries for tree decorating, carnival games, bon fires, lights and of course, great wine. Go to oliverosoyoos.com for more.

2. LEARN SOMETHING NEW. Okanagan College offers an array of long- and short-term classes. Some Wine & Food Studies classes are as short as two hours. Recent two-hour Sunday afternoon offerings include cheesemaking with Poplar Grove Cheese's Louise Pearson and sausage and sauerkraut-making with Covert Farms chef Derek Uhlemann. For details, go to or call 250-492-4305.

3. VISIT A WINERY (AND MAYBE EAT THERE, TOO.) Not every winery in the valley stays open all winter, but many will open by request. Just call to make an appointment when you're in



A number of Okanagan vineyards have haute cuisine restaurants. For the Calgary Herald



Tinhorn Creek Vineyards, located near Oliver, is celebrating its 20th year.

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The wine cellar at Tinhorn Creek. You can shop the tasting room too.

town. And show up.

Located near Oliver, Tinhorn Creek Vineyards (tinhorn.com) celebrates its 20th anniversary this year; stop in and savour the success. Shop at the tasting room and then eat at Miradoro, the award-winning on-site restaurant.

Also near Oliver, Terrafina at Hester Creek winery offers Mediterranean-inspired cuisine that goes perfectly with the wines. You can also stay at the winery; go to hestercreek.com to book. The bistro at Liquidity Wines (liquiditywines.com) near Okanagan Falls will close a while in early 2015, but is currently open part-time. Check out the gorgeous original art by the likes of Martha Sturdy and Brent Comber.

4. GO SKIING. Named as "best small destination ski resort" by Ski Canada magazine, Apex Mountain Resort (apexresort.com) is 33 km from Penticton; in addition to downhill skiing, you can go tubing, skating or cross-country skiing, too. And Big White Ski Resort (bigwhite.com) is a short drive from the Kelowna airport. More than just downhill skiing, Big White offers sleigh rides, cross-country skiing, skating, snowshoe trails, even dogsled tours.

5. CHECK OUT THE ANTIQUE SHOPS. The valley has many to choose from, but the stores in Okanagan Falls have everything:

jewelry, books, furniture, dishes, you name it.

6. VISIT A BREWERY. Cannery Brewing Company (cannerybrewing.com) in Penticton has great beer on tap and to take home. Don't forget to buy the beer mustard and, yes, beer soap, too. And in Kelowna, Tree Brewing Company's Beer Institute (tree-beer.com) is launching a cask advent calendar — 24 casks in 24 days — starting on Nov. 27.

7. SPEND AN AFTERNOON IN A BOOKSTORE. In Penticton, The Bookshop (bookspenticton.com) is one of Canada's largest used bookstores; you'll find 5,000 square feet (465 square metres) of books, all organized by genre. Then stop at Hooked on Books (hooked-on-books.ca) for new titles by both local and international authors for the entire family.

8. STOP IN AT A DISTILLERY. Urban Distilleries (urbandistilleries.ca) is in Kelowna, and Okanagan Spirits Craft Distilleries (okanaganspirits.com) is in both Kelowna and Vernon. In Penticton, you can visit Maple Leaf Spirits (mapleleafspirits.ca) and in Naramata, there's Legends Distilling (legendsdistilling.com).

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Gavin Crawford/Calgary Herald

The big white snowy hills of Big White ski resort are just a short trip from the Kelowna airport. Après-ski, take a dogsled ride or skate.

OKANAGAN: Ice fishing and hot cocoa

FROM E1

9. GO FISHING. Ice fishing, that is. The valley often gets cold enough mid-December through to mid-March. If you want to fish with someone who knows all the secrets, call Rodney Hennig at Rodney's Reel Outdoors (kelownafishing.com) for full-day trips with hot chocolate, hot pie and smokies, too.

10. RELAX. Go for a walk along a lake. Listen to the ducks and geese. Watch for deer. Maybe rent an electric bike at Heat Stroke Cycle and Sport (heatstrokecycle.com) in Osoyoos if the weather is good. Or simply sit back and look at the views. You are, after all, on vacation.

IF YOU GO

■ WestJet (westjet.com) now

offers year-round direct flights every day from Calgary to Penticton, in addition to its Calgary-Kelowna flights. Air Canada (aircanada.com) offers similar options.

■ Budget and National car rentals are available at the Penticton airport, and there are several other car rental companies that operate from the Kelowna airport.

WHERE TO STAY

Watermark Hotel in Osoyoos is offering monthly deals Nov. 1 to April 30. Get a one-bedroom suite for \$999 per month or a two-bedroom suite for \$1,200 per month. That includes underground heated parking, and access to the fitness centre. An on-site spa and wine bar offer additional services.



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Electric bikes are available for rent in Osoyoos.