

## 72 hours in the Okanagan Valley

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British Columbia's Okanagan Valley has come a long way in the past 20 years.

In the late 1980s, the region knew it had to get serious if it planned to compete at all on a global level. So it took the bold move of paying grape growers to pull out their inferior hybrid grapes and planting classic European varieties such as Merlot, Riesling, Pinot Noir and Cabernet Franc.

The turnaround is nothing short of stunning.

As recently as 15 years ago, the B.C. wine industry was languishing with fewer than 60 wineries. Today, it is thriving with more than 300.

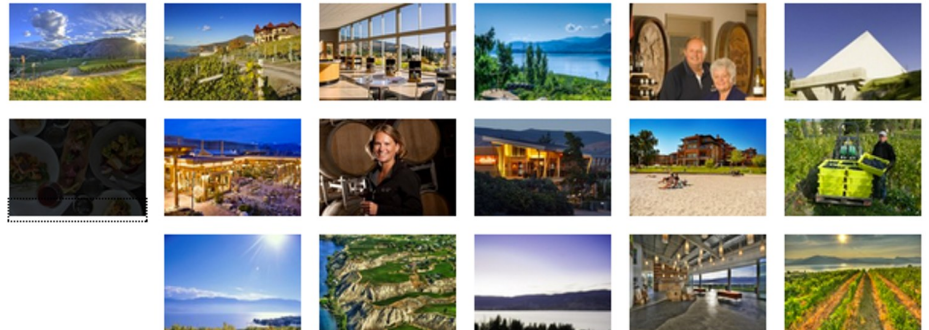
The majority of these wineries reside in the warm Interior, the Okanagan Valley. It starts at the U.S. border near the town of Osoyoos and stretches 100 miles north, following the course of rivers and lakes, all surrounded by beautiful hillsides, rich agricultural history and consistently blue skies.

That a wine industry thrives here is remarkable. This region is on the edge of viticultural viability. It's a short growing season that features a blast of sunshine that barely lasts longer than 100 days. A cool spring or an early autumn frost can be difficult, even devastating.

Yet these conditions deliver more than just gray hairs to those who grow grapes and make wine here. The natural acidity that remains when the grapes perfectly ripen is a joy to behold, a perfect pairing for the fresh regional ingredients that go into the superb cuisine found throughout the province.



Salmon, charcuterie, scallops are among the Miradoro's tapas menu items.  
CHRISTOPHER POUGET — Photo courtesy of The Miradoro at Tinhorn Creek





For the better part of a century, the Okanagan Valley — particularly the communities along the shorelines of Okanagan Lake — has been the sunshine-filled playground to residents of the Lower Mainland and Vancouver Island to the west. Thus, the region has long known how to treat visitors. Thus, when the wine industry became established, the infrastructure for tourism already was well established.

The Okanagan Valley is easy to get to. From the Tri-City region, it is a four-hour drive to the border and another two hours north to Kelowna. From Seattle, Kelowna is a five-hour drive or easy one-hour flight from Sea-Tac.

U.S. travelers to British Columbia will need either a passport or an enhanced driver's license to enter Canada (and return to the United States).

If you plan to bring wine back to Washington, it isn't a huge deal. If you spend at least 48 hours in British Columbia, you may bring back 1.5 liters (two bottles) of wine duty-free. After that, the cost per liter is a mere 23 cents — regardless of the retail price, even if it's expensive ice wine. That comes out to \$2.07 per case. Conversely, Canadians bringing Washington wines back north pay a much heavier price: 150 percent of the price paid.

With so many wineries and restaurants to delve into, a three-day visit to the Okanagan Valley will serve merely as an appetizer for future exploration. For this brief guide, we have broken the region into three areas: from the U.S. border to Okanagan Falls (a 40-minute drive); the Penticton and Naramata Bench area (20 minutes north of Okanagan Falls); and from Summerland to Salmon Arm (a three-hour drive) with a focus on Kelowna, a city with a population of about 110,000 residents.

While we cannot do complete justice to the entire 100-mile length of the Okanagan Valley, we hope this serves as a starting point for your own visits to the stunning region of the Pacific Northwest.

## **BORDER TO OKANAGAN FALLS**

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This region of the Okanagan Valley is the warmest and most fertile. Its annual heat equals that of California's Napa Valley, though in a much more compact time period. The majority of the Okanagan Valley's vineyards are in this stretch, with some of the most important residing on an area known as the Black Sage Bench just southeast of the town of Oliver.

While many of the wineries can be found along Highway 97, many others are just moments from the main highways. Some of the best are along Black Sage Road.

### **Wineries to visit**

Many wineries are well worth visiting. Start with Nk'Mip Cellars near the border town of Osoyoos. It is the first aboriginal-owned winery in North America.

Heading north along Highway 97 are such wineries as Tinhorn Creek Vineyards and Gehring Brothers Estate Winery, the latter of which is the "king of the Platitudes," as winemaker Walter Gehring has won 47 Platinum medals — more than any other Northwest winery — in Wine Press Northwest's annual best-of-the-best competition.

Across the valley from Gehring and Tinhorn is Burrowing Owl Estate Winery, one of the most intriguing properties in the Pacific Northwest, thanks to a combination of vineyards, tasting room, restaurant and luxury lodging along the Black Sage Bench.

Heading north again on Highway 97, take a right onto the Corkscrew Trail just south of Okanagan Falls and visit such wineries as Wild Goose Vineyards, a past Wine Press Northwest Pacific Northwest Winery of the Year.

To the north side of Okanagan Falls on the east side of Skaha Lake features Blasted Church Vineyards, a fun-loving winery perched above the lake in a beautiful setting, and Pentâge Winery — a former Wine Press Northwest B.C. Winery of the Year that now offers tours of its remarkable 5,000-square-foot granite cellar.

## Food

One of the best features in the Okanagan Valley is the prevalence of wineries with on-site restaurants. For more than a decade, the Okanagan has led the Pacific Northwest in this category, and it has helped to push forward the development of high-quality regional cuisine. In Osoyoos, enjoy a great meal at Dulce Social House.

Heading north toward Oliver, at Tinhorn Creek, Miradoro is one of the finest restaurant experiences in the valley. At neighboring Hester Creek Winery, Terrafina is a highly rated dining experience. Across the river at Burrowing Owl, delicious meals can be found at Sonora Room.

And in Okanagan Falls, Liquidity winery's bistro and Wild Goose's Smoke & Oak Bistro are excellent choices for great meals.



The Miradoro at Tinhorn Creek, one of the area's finest restaurants, and Tinhorn Creek winery offer spectacular views of the valley. **CHRISTOPHER POUGET** — Photo courtesy of The Miradoro at Tinhorn Creek

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**TINHORN CREEK VINEYARDS**  
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