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FALLING FOR **WINE COUNTRY**

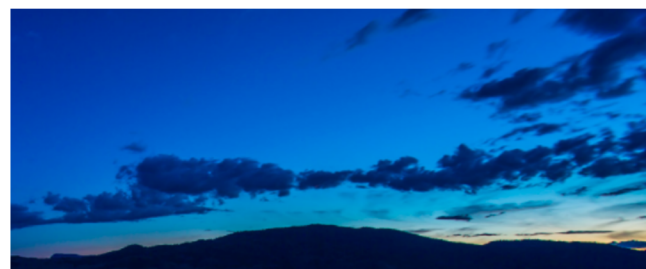
WITH ACRES OF ROLLING VINEYARDS, WILD HORSES ROAMING ON DESERT HILLS AND FAMILY-RUN WINERIES, OLIVER OSOYOOS IS THE PERFECT DESTINATION FOR A WINE-TASTING WEEKEND.

WORDS | LISE BOULLARD

FOR ME, OSOYOOS CONJURES MEMORIES of childhood camping trips with my mother, father and brother where we would spend our days swimming in the freshwater lake, horseback riding along desert paths and playing rounds of mini golf. And while a recent trip proved that parts (including the mini golf course) of the area haven't changed a bit, a visit to Oliver Osoyoos' quaint wineries and a stay at a sun-drenched hilltop resort demonstrated that the region is all grown up—and is the ideal spot for a weekend sipping local wines while soaking in those last rays of summer.

SLEEP | A short drive up Anarchist Mountain past acres of vineyards brings you to the adobe-style **Spirit Ridge at Nk'Mip Resort**. Overlooking Osoyoos Lake, North America's only Aboriginal owned and ➤

ABOVE THE VILLAS AT
HESTER CREEK. **TOP
RIGHT** SPIRIT RIDGE
RESORT BY NIGHT.
BOTTOM RIGHT HES-
TER CREEK VINEYARD
VIEWS.





operated winery and resort is a celebration of the Osoyoos Indian Band's cultural and natural beauty—and staying there offers a soul-soothing experience. While the resort itself, with its terracotta coloured exterior, fragrant purple robed locust trees and desert sage hills evokes the Arizona desert, the acres of lush vineyards made me feel as if I was in Tuscany. With two sparkling pools, a nine-hole golf course, spa, suites equipped with barbecues, fully stocked kitchens, full-size fridges (for chilling all of the Okanagan wines you purchase) and a cultural centre on site, Spirit Ridge provides a peaceful-yet-stimulating home base for a family, corporate or friend weekend away. spiritrIDGE.ca

DINE | Steps away from the Spirit Ridge Resort lobby is the entrance to **Nk'Mip Cellars** tasting room, along with one of the most romantic places you will surely ever dine: the Nk'Mip Cellars patio. A short walk through the tasting room, featuring high ceilings, a mosaic floor and church-like stained glass windows brought our group to the threshold of a small patio and garden where I literally gasped at the beauty of the long table set with hundreds of sparkling wine glasses, backed by a grassy area overlooking acres of vineyards and Osoyoos Lake. A few steps further and we were greeted by Chef Orlin Godfrey, who offered us a glass of Nk'Mip's refreshing pinot blanc along with fresh shucked oysters dressed with his homemade peach vinegar and pickled red onion mignonette. The long table dinner that followed, featuring traditional bannock, burrata and local



WHETHER YOU OPT TO EXPLORE THE REGION BY ORGANIZED TOUR IN A VAN, OR HIRE HORSES, OR ELECTRIC BIKES TO BRING YOU FROM STOP TO STOP, THE EXPERIENCE RIVALS ANYTHING YOU COULD DO IN EUROPE'S WINE REGIONS.

asparagus served with Nk'Mip's 2016 Riesling-led patio favourite "Dreamcatcher" and tender braised beef short ribs, was equally magical. Experience it for yourself: long table dinners are open to the public on weekends, while regular lunch is served daily on the patio until October 9. nkmpicellars.com/About-Us

Another unforgettable dining experience took place at **Tinhorn Creek's Miradoro** restaurant. The evening after running 18 kilometres at the ninth annual Half Corked Marathon, which, as the name suggests, includes stops for wine tastings (often by costume-clad participants) our group dined on a light-yet-filling Mediterranean meal with Asian influences while taking in panoramic vistas from the restaurant's dining room. Chef Jeff Van Geest's seared Ahi tuna and spiralized zucchini starter, followed by a succulent grilled pork chop, lentil and cabbage ragu main course satisfied our post-race protein needs, and were excellent paired with Tinhorn's Oldfield Series 2 Bench Red 2012. The rich Plum Tiramisu and open-air performance by The Boom Booms as part of Tinhorn's Summer Concert Series (which runs until September 9), were a perfect ending to a perfectly exhilarating day. tinhorn.com

limestone-enriched soil, the sunny slopes are known for producing "fruit-forward" wines that are rich in mineral complexity. Each year, its myriad quaint, and often family-run, wineries open their doors to visitors to come in and enjoy their wines. Many are open late into the fall; some year-round.

Whether you opt to explore the region by organized tour in a van, or hire horses, or electric bikes to bring you from stop to stop, the experience rivals anything you could do in Europe's wine regions. On our trip we opted for electric bikes from **Heatstroke Cycle** and a van from **Top Cat** tours to bring us to some of Oliver Osoyoos Wine Association's 39 member wineries including **Hester Creek** (the fruity patio-perfect trebbiano sells out every year), **Platinum Bench Estate Winery & Artisan Bread Company** (the Soppresseta bread washed down with a glass of pinot noir was pure joy), **Montakam Estate Winery and Bartier Bros**. Post-tour we stopped for lunch at the Tuscan-inspired **Terrafina** restaurant at **Hester Creek Estate Winery**. Note: Hester Creek's ultra-romantic hilltop villas can be booked year-round, are surprisingly well priced, and are the stuff of dreams. heatstrokecycle.com, topcattours.com

SIP | Spanning 40 kilometres in the Southern Okanagan Valley (the northernmost tip of the Sonora Desert), the Oliver Osoyoos region is one of the warmest and driest areas in Western Canada and produces 60 per cent of B.C.'s wine grapes. With fertile, quartz-, granite- and

GETTING THERE | An Air Canada propeller plane will drop you off at the Penticton Airport from Vancouver in under 50 minutes from which a 45-minute drive will bring you to Osoyoos. Or, take in the beauty of the late summer light in the four-and-a-half-hour drive along Highway 3. ■