



(this page, top to bottom) The SpierHead Winery vineyard; tasters at Township 7 Winery; grape harvesting at SpierHead; (opposite page) writer Jennifer Cockrall-King "Arthurizing" a sword at Camelot Vineyards Estate Winery; the new, view-quaffing showcase building at Poplar Grove Winery.

# The Vineyard Path

A whistle-wetting tour of the Okanagan's newest wineries

by **Jennifer Cockrall-King**

WITH DESERT-HOT SUMMERS AND DRAMATIC Mediterranean-esque geography, B.C.'s Okanagan Valley was running before it could walk as a grape-growing region. It took a decade or so of award-winning winemaking for the other elements of wine tourism – first-rate restaurants and luxe accommodations – to fill in the gaps, but the Okanagan now has the full package, rivalling oenophile destinations such as Napa and Sonoma.

While there's nothing wrong with sticking to familiar names, adventurous vino-enthusiasts know that if the paint is still drying on that tasting room sign, chances are you'll have a one-on-one tasting with the enthusiastic owner. And when you return home with bottles that are nearly impossible to get outside of the Okanagan, you'll have bragging rights for coming across the next big wine before the masses.

## LEG ONE: Kelowna to Naramata (77 km)

Start with the East Kelowna Wine Trail, a loop of five wineries so new that most locals don't even know about it. The View Winery and Vineyard

(250-860-0742; [theviewwinery.com](http://theviewwinery.com)) is apple orchard land that has been in the Turton/Ward family for five generations and is now partially planted with vines. Pinotage fans take note: The View is one of the few Okanagan producers of this South African red varietal.

Two minutes along Spiers Road from The View is SpierHead Winery (250-763-7777; [spierheadwinery.com](http://spierheadwinery.com)), which opened in 2010. SpierHead's silky Merlot and its Bordeaux-blend Vanguard alone are worth the visit.

Next, head north along Spiers Road, make a quick right turn on Hart Road and a left on McCulloch Road, then a right on Pooley Road, to find yourself at The Vibrant Vine Vineyards. Tastings at The Vibrant

Vine take place in a charming yellow cabin with a quirky rock-and-roll vibe inside (778-478-1977; [tastevibrantvines.com](http://tastevibrantvines.com)). Vineyard manager and winemaker Tony Lewis is a former rock drummer and his brother, Phil Lewis, designs the winery's psychedelic artwork and labels.

Go from psychedelic to Medieval English in a mere 1.5 km, driving east on Pooley Road. Take your first left at Reid Road, and another left onto East Kelowna Road, where you'll find

**JAUNT** Kelowna to Naramata and back, with stops at newly opened wineries.

**DISTANCE** Approx. 160 km

**DURATION** 3 days

**PRIME TIME** Summer or fall. Okanagan wineries switch to winter hours shortly after the Fall Okanagan Wine Festival, September 30 to October 9 this year, so call ahead.



Camelot Vineyards Estate Winery (250-862-8873; [camelotvineyards.ca](http://camelotvineyards.ca)). Acclaimed Canadian winemaker Ann Sperling helped Camelot owners Denise Brass and Robert Young develop their well-rounded wine list.

Heading back through Kelowna, take Hwy. 97 south out of town and through the towns of Peachland and Summerland, along a dramatic, lake-hugging drive lined with rabbitbush, sage and bunchgrass. Continue south into Penticton, where the highway becomes Eckhardt Avenue. From the east end of Eckhardt, follow the signs to the Naramata Bench, an internationally renowned, 16-kilometre garland of 24 wineries spread out between bench-like clay cliffs that dominate the southeast shore of Okanagan Lake. Roughly half of the Naramata Bench's wineries are technically within Penticton city limits, while the other half are in the community of Naramata.

Penticton's Township 7 Vineyards and Winery (250-770-1743; [township7.com](http://township7.com)) is one of the first wineries at the south end of the Naramata Bench wine route. Try the 7 Blanc, an homage to the superb grape-growing conditions of the Naramata Bench.

Turn right out of Township 7's parking lot onto McMillan Avenue, which curves left and becomes Naramata Road. Continue north along Naramata Road to the community of Naramata, drinking in rolling views of vineyards, orchards and lake as you go.

**Good eats and sleeps:** Soak up the ambiance at Cobblestone Wine Bar and Restaurant, at Naramata Heritage Inn & Spa, for a local food and wine experience par excellence. Then splurge on a room for the night (250-496-6808; [naramatainn.com](http://naramatainn.com)).

## LEG TWO: Naramata to Summerland (30 km)

After a morning stroll around tiny-but-vibrant Naramata village, head back to Naramata Road via Robinson Avenue. Go south on Naramata Road, taking your first right on Lower Debeck Road to Serendipity Winery

(250-496-5299; [serendipitywinery.com](http://serendipitywinery.com)). This little winery won awards for its Viognier, its Pinot Noir and its Bordeaux blend this spring, before it even swung open its tasting room doors in June 2011.

Continue south on Naramata Road and turn right at Aikens Loop. Follow the signs to Elephant Island Orchard Wines (250-496-5522; [elephantislandwine.com](http://elephantislandwine.com)). By all means, sample the exquisite fruit wines here, but this is also home to Unconventional Wisdom, a boutique label launched in spring 2011 by Elephant Island winemakers Del and Miranda Halladay. Unconventional Wisdom's limited



production means that these wines aren't available for tasting, but purchase only.

Continue south to Penticton along Naramata Road, until you reach McMillan Avenue again. Go west and keep right at the curve,

just past Township 7, to get on Munson Avenue, which turns into Middle Bench Road. Poplar Grove Winery (250-493-9463; [poplargo.com](http://poplargo.com)) has been on the Bench for years, producing some of the region's best reds and Pinot Gris. Now the winery has a new 9,500-square-foot showcase building, opened in June 2011, with a stunning view of lake, vines and rolling hills.

Wind your way back west through Penticton and, returning to Hwy. 97, head north toward Summerland.

**Good eats:** With waterfront views, an extensive Okanagan wine list, local craft beers and seasonal dishes inspired by the Okanagan's culinary bounty, Local Lounge & Grille on

Lakeshore Drive South in Summerland is the place to unwind after a day of touring (250-494-8855; [thelocalgroup.ca](http://thelocalgroup.ca)).

**Good sleeps:** Summerland Waterfront Resort & Spa is, conveniently, right next door to Local Lounge & Grille (250-494-8180; [summerlandresorthotel.com](http://summerlandresorthotel.com)). Views, beach access and a private patio – what more could you want?



## LEG THREE: Summerland to Kelowna (50 km)

The drive back to Kelowna is your chance to focus on the lake views and cliffside curves of Hwy. 97. Also check out some pioneering wineries you may have skipped on the way down, such as Mission Hill Family Estate Winery (250-768-7611; [missionhillwinery.com](http://missionhillwinery.com)), Quails' Gate (250-769-2501; [quailsgate.com](http://quailsgate.com)) and Summerhill Pyramid Winery (250-764-8000; [summerhill.bc.ca](http://summerhill.bc.ca)). And be sure to pick up some apples or pears, or even a home-baked pie, as you meander back to Kelowna, because hunting and gathering in Okanagan wine country should always include a stop or two at a roadside fruit stand. ☒

## None for the Road

AMA's policy on drinking and driving is simple: if you're driving, don't drink. So if you're planning a wine-tasting road trip, go with a group and alternate drivers each day. That way everyone has a chance to imbibe.

### AMA MEMBERS SAVE MORE



**Before you go:** Take driving out of the equation and tour the Naramata Bench on a VIP wine tour. Enjoy two nights at the Summerland Waterfront Resort, with a \$75 credit for the day spa. From \$324 per person. 1-866-667-4777; [AMATravel.ca](http://AMATravel.ca)

**While you're there:** Fuel up at Husky or Mohawk in Kelowna, Summerland, Penticton or Osoyoos and earn CAA Dollars on fuel and in-store purchases, and purchases at Husky House Restaurants.

