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One of the best views on the Westside Wine Trail can be found from your dinner table at the restaurant at Quail's Gate Winery.

# Sipping in the Okanagan

New wine trails around Kelowna offer a window into the heart of B.C. wine

Story & photo by Jackson Hayes

It would not be egregious to confuse the winding roads and rolling countryside of Kelowna, B.C. with the fertile green hillsides that surround Florence, Italy. This realization hit me as I stood peering out the front door of Spier-Head Winery, perched on a valley wall in East Kelowna. Rows of young vines absorbed the spring sun to the left while, to the right, the property rolled and tumbled down orchard-filled hills into glistening Okanagan Lake, many miles distant.

"It's a pretty good spot," owner Brian Sprout said, pouring a 2010 Riesling.

Pretty indeed.

Once known as a sleepy retirement town, Kelowna, a city of roughly 115,000 straddling the lake at the base of the Okanagan Valley

between Vernon and Penticton in British Columbia's rugged interior, has been growing up fast. It's now home to a thriving and emergent community of young professionals and outdoor enthusiasts.

Popular for its warm, arid climate and laid-back West Coast lifestyle and a mere four-hour flight from Toronto, it's also transforming into a top-tier vacation option for Ontarians heading west for a little rest and relaxation.

Capitalizing on the growth is a booming wine industry. New this summer for oenophiles is the official mapping of five wine trails, weaving through the region and celebrating both the big scale and boutique, eclectic and elegant.

Each route – Westside Wine Trail, Downtown Heritage, Lakeshore Wine Route, East Kelowna Wine Trail and Lake Country's Scenic Sip – has one to six stops with a total of

20 featured wineries.

The goal of the routes is to help visitors not only explore the liquid offerings of this fertile valley, but also the stories and personalities behind the wineries, the families, the grape varieties, the tastes and traditions.

Ontario wine lovers may be familiar with names like Quail's Gate, Mission Hill and Summerhill, but many of the stops along the routes are places like SpierHead where the yield is disproportionate to the winemakers' passion.

Case in point is Okanagan's "sexy wine," produced at The View Winery and Vineyard. Set in a rustic 1922 fruit-packaging house, the property has been in Jennifer Turton-Molgat's family for five generations and produces roughly 1,500 cases annually, under the guidance of winemaker Bernhard Schirmeister.

With Turton-Molgat dashing off, Connie Parker offered up the wines and the story be-

hind the red stiletto heels adorning the windows and one shoved in an empty bottle on the wine labels. After a night of dancing Turton-Molgat's husband playfully removed her red heels, placing one down the neck of an empty bottle. The image spoke to her and she used that carefree moment to create a personality for her boutique winery.

The View's Distraction rose took gold at the Okanagan Spring Wine Fest this year. Parker says that rose, like the Okanagan small-yield wineries, is gaining increasing respect in the wine communities.

Navigating the imbibing tour requires transportation of the four-wheeled variety since the wineries are spread out across the valley, although adventurous cyclists might attempt some pour-and-peddle fun at tightly clustered stops along the Lake Country Scenic Sip and the Westside Wine Trail.

You'll be sold on Okanagan's offerings after the first sip.

## GETTING THERE:

There are daily flights between Kelowna and Toronto by both WestJet and Air Canada. With a four-hour flight and a golf course literally across the street from the airport, southern Ontario golfers can have a few holes under their belts at a Jack Nicklaus-designed course in the B.C. interior less than five hours after take-off.

## PLACES TO STAY:

Kelowna has a number of accommodation types from which to choose. Those looking for a high-end option, might put the Sparkling Hill Resort and Wellness Hotel in nearby Vernon at the top of the list. There are also scads of more budget-friendly options, one of the nicest being the Manteo Resort Waterfront Hotel in Kelowna. *For more information, check manteo.com.*

## ROMANTIC TWIST:

Of all the views that will steal your breath in Kelowna, one of the finest is from the water itself. The Lake Lounge on Okanagan is a 75-foot houseboat piloted by owner Captain Mike Reddecliff that will take parties of up to 90 people out for a sail.

Catering services are provided by local restaurant Cabana Grille. The slow meander takes guests across the lake, from The Sails at the foot of Bernard Avenue. Amenities include a gas fireplace, an upstairs bar, hot tub and dance floor. *Visit thelakelounge.com.*