

BACKSWING

The Okanagan's only island green resides at Kelowna's Black Mountain — the 372-yard No. 5 hole.

A-OK in Okanagan

COURTESY OF BLACK MOUNTAIN

WES GILBERTSON
Calgary Sun

It's ripe for the picking.

With a long-standing reputation as the fruit capital of Canada, it's easy to forget Kelowna — the centrepiece of B.C.'s Okanagan region — has been growing great golf courses, too.

In fact, birdie-hunters at The Harvest Golf Club are actually encouraged to pick an apple, apricot, nectarine or peach as they try to keep their lucky Titleist out of the crops at the one-of-a-kind layout.

"It's as representative of the Okanagan as it could be," said Gilles Dufort, the GM at The Harvest. "It's part of the ambience. Golfers, they can grab a piece of fruit off the vine, off the tree, and just carry on and

enjoy their round of golf, which makes this very synonymous with the Okanagan overall and just adds to the experience.

"Often, people won't remember a specific hole on a golf course, but they'll remember what kind of apple they picked on the seventh hole and how big and delicious it was."

While The Harvest is the only championship-level layout carved out of the orchards, the golf menu in other parts of Kelowna is just as appetizing.

In fact, the sun-soaked city — located only an hour from Calgary through the air and about seven hours away by car — is home to about a dozen courses for golfers of all abilities to sink their teeth into.

Through golfkelowna.com, visitors can now book a sin-



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gle time or an entire trip. With 15 courses to choose from, the hardest part will be determining where to tee it up.

The Harvest, Gallagher's Canyon and the Bear and Quail courses at Okanagan Golf Club have long been favourite hangouts because of their challenging layouts and impressive views.

The recent additions of Tower Ranch — a Thomas McBroom-designed track that will remind you of his award-winning work at Tobiano — and Black Mountain have only made it more difficult for golfers to find time to visit all the gems in the area.

And just north of Kelowna along the highway to Vernon, Predator Ridge has earned a reputation as one of the top 36-hole facilities anywhere in the Great White North.

For beginners and bargain-seekers, there are several family-friendly setups, too.

"I think a lot of people in the golf world would liken our area — the Okanagan Valley — to the Palm Springs of Canada," said Peter Hopley, the GM at Gallagher's Canyon, site

of a championship layout and a nine-hole executive-length course. "From a golfer's perspective, there's a lot of selection now. When I grew up in this valley, there was one course in Penticton, two in Kelowna and two in Vernon. Now, we've got 25 golf courses from Penticton to Vernon, so there's a good selection."

Golf isn't the only attraction, either. Ask a handful of out-of-towners what makes Kelowna an ideal destination, and you might get a different answer from every one of them.

With its sunny summers, the Okanagan boasts one of Canada's most inviting climates.

The number of wineries in the region has now hit triple digits, including 16 that are only a wedge-shot from Kelow-

KELOWNA COURSES

Black Mountain

Saluted as one of Canada's best new courses last summer, the staff is dressed in wacky attire and puts an emphasis on fun.

Gallagher's Canyon

Challenging setup has several signature holes, but views from the sixth green might be the best of any course in this area.

Okanagan Golf Club

Home to a pair of top-notch layouts. The Bear sounds more fierce, but the Quail is actually a tougher test.

Sunset Ranch

The towering pine trees will provide shade on a sunny day, although they also make some fairways look skinny.

The Harvest

Carved out of a picturesque piece of orchard property, you'll post a sweet score if you're accurate with your approach shots.

Tower Ranch

With sweeping elevation changes and wild greens, this Thomas McBroom design is a rollercoaster ride.

na's lakefront downtown area.

And Lake Okanagan, which stretches about 110 km between Vernon and Penticton, is a popular playground for swimmers, wakeboarders, sailboaters and other water sports enthusiasts.

"I think you've got the best of all worlds here," said Bruce Verme, head pro at Sunset Ranch Golf & Country Club. "You've got world-class golf. You've got world-class accommodations. The wine industry is fantastic here, and there's nothing wrong with a golf game in the morning and a wine tour in the afternoon. And when summer hits, we've got Okanagan Lake, which is just a great spot."

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