

# Drink in Kelowna

BY JENNY CUNNINGHAM

B.C.'s rising wine country mixes icy tastes and adventure—and it's an easy flight away.

The view from the Okanagan Lake marina

**FROM THE AIR**, Kelowna, British Columbia, looks like a city brushed by Monet. Its pastel downtown, clustered along the shores of Okanagan Lake, is surrounded by a patchwork quilt of farmland and the sun-steeped vineyards that have put the city on the map. The Okanagan Valley is wild new wine country, where experimental winemakers, local farmers, and unpretentious chefs have created something akin to a young Sonoma.

"You can't have great wine country without great food," says Raudz chef Rod Butters, who was one of the few chefs sourcing produce from Okanagan farmers when he started 12 years ago. Now, he says, you'd be hard-pressed to find a restaurant that doesn't.

At the valley gateway is Kelowna, a fast-growing city of about 120,000 that's even easier to access now that United Airlines offers nonstop flights from LAX.

It's well worth a trip for the wine; many Okanagan wineries don't produce enough to distribute in the United States. Plus, winter's freezing temps mean the region's famous ice wines are in production. Kelowna's intensely local food and rising wine scene also make it a convenient base for snow lovers who want city perks within reach.



United has 1 flight from LAX daily; Alaska Airlines, 3 dailies from Seattle. Kelowna is a 6-hour drive from Seattle and 4½ hours from Vancouver, B.C.

COUNTERCLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: THOMAS J. STORY (4), DAVID MCLVRIDE



## Do

Downtown's **Stuart Park** is just steps from the lake and City Hall, so a spin around brings panoramic views of sailboats bobbing in the marina and the snow-dusted hills of West Kelowna. There's even an outdoor skating rink, right next to the massive steel-framed bear sculpture that symbolizes the city (Kelowna means "grizzly bear" in local First Nations dialect). [kelowna.ca](http://kelowna.ca)



Snow biking is all the rage these days, and on a 90-minute tour with Ed Kruger of **Monashee Adventure Tours**, you can experience the thrill of speeding downhill on one of his hybrids. (He swaps the front wheel of a mountain bike for a ski, and adds a snow-traction wheel to the rear.) Tours are held at nearby Knox Mountain or Big White Ski Resort, an hour away. *From \$80 U.S.; [monasheeadventuretours.com](http://monasheeadventuretours.com)*



## Eat

At **Raudz**, you can get a table facing the open kitchen and watch as chef Rod Butters (above) and his team turn local potatoes and cheese curds into *poutine*, the French-Canadian specialty. Not to be outdone, bartender Gerry Jobe makes outstanding cocktails using local organic fruit purées. *\$\$\$ U.S.; 1560 Water St.; 250/868-8805.*

The city is home to a couple of distilleries, including **Urban Distilleries**. Tours usually include a visit with owner Mike Urban, then lead back to the tasting room for flights of spirits, like his single malt whiskey (near left), bottled with a piece of the cask inside. *Tour and tasting \$12 U.S.; 6-325 Bay Ave.; 778/478-0939.*



## Shop and stay

A former fruit-packing district, Kelowna's six-block cultural center includes the emerging Ellis Street, with new condos and plenty of boutiques, like clothing haven **Georgie Girl Vintage** (1331 Ellis St.; 250/860-0307) and the **Water Garden Boutique** (1353 Ellis St.; 250/712-9902), filled with jewelry and handbags.

The **Hotel Eldorado** is the quintessential lakeside retreat. The landmark building, dating back to the '20s, has a clubby, old-money feel (vintage radios and wing-back chairs) and its own marina and liquor store. Rooms with balconies overlooking the lake are particularly enchanting. *From \$109 U.S.; [eldoradokelowna.com](http://eldoradokelowna.com)*



## Sip

Winter brings ice wine, the intense, sweet dessert wine for which Canada is famous. The wine is labor-intensive—fruit can be harvested only when it's completely frozen (often in the middle of the night), and each grape yields just a single drop. Where to try it:

The catacomb-like wine caves, 12-story bell tower, and extensive art collection make **Mission Hill** (below) feel more like a monastery or museum than a winery. The two ice wines, classic Vidal and a sweet Riesling, are just as unique. *Tours from \$12 U.S.; [missionhillwinery.com](http://missionhillwinery.com)*



About 10 minutes south of the city, the organic **Summerhill Pyramid Winery** makes five ice wines from its biodynamic vineyard, including an award-winning Riesling. *Tours \$10 U.S.; [summerhill.bc.ca](http://summerhill.bc.ca)*

**Inniskillin's** ice wine is so renowned that wineglass maker Riedel crafted a special glass for it. The winery is 90 minutes away from town, but the wines and frosty vistas are worth the car time. *Tasting by donation; closed through Jan 13; [inniskillin.com](http://inniskillin.com)* ■