

Travel with NICHE to... Kelowna CANADA

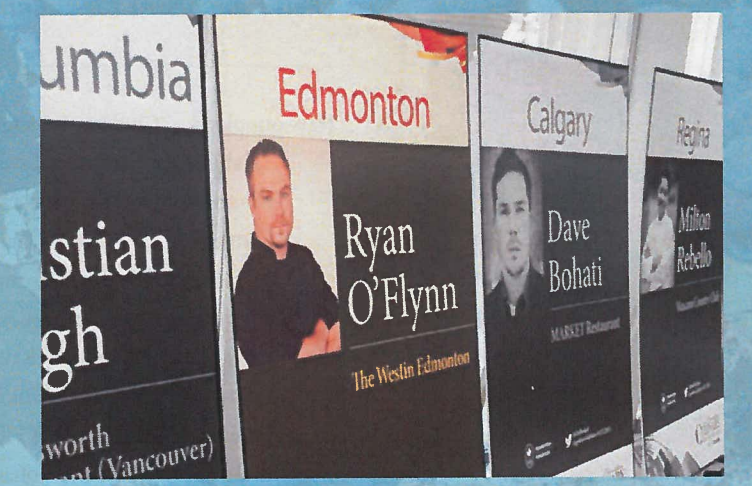
*From BC Food Scene to
Canadian Culinary Greatness*

by Tracey Drake | The Travelling Editor | travellingeditor.ca

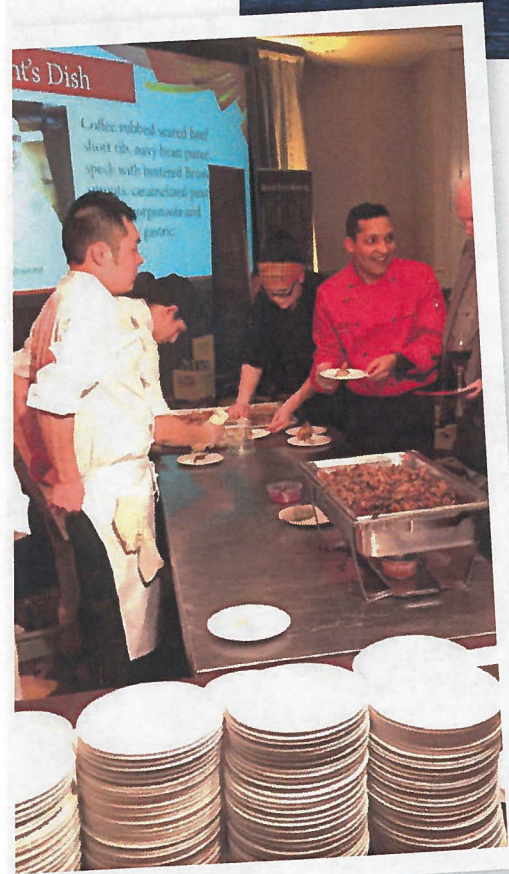
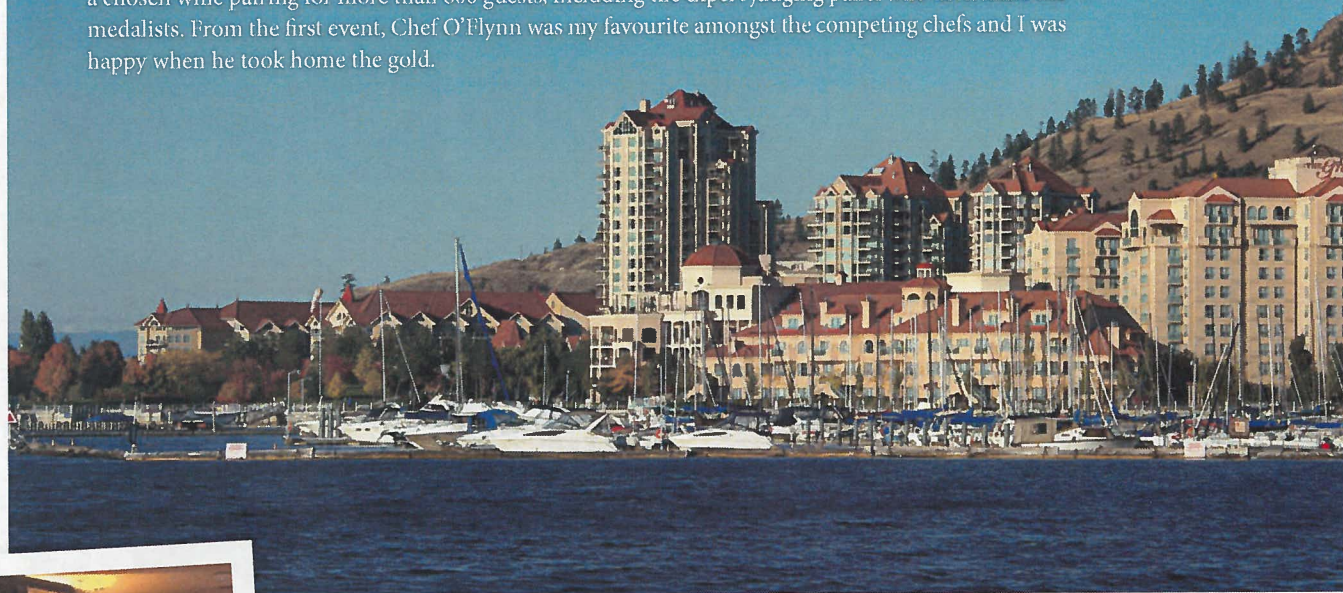


Earlier this year, I received an invite from Tourism Kelowna to attend the Gold Medal Plates Canadian Culinary Championship. I love to cover foodie events that have a travel component, and jumped at the chance to witness the culinary brilliance of up-and-coming chefs from across Canada. As luck would have it, this foodie focused trip turned into an eye opening experience for me, and a discovery of the City of Kelowna and what it has to offer those who often travel for the love of gastronomy.

Gold Medal Plates is touted as being the ultimate celebration of Canadian excellence in cuisine, wine, the arts and athletic achievement. The Canadian Culinary Championship takes place in Kelowna, BC and is a series of grueling cooking tests, designed to showcase brilliance in Canada's culinary industry.

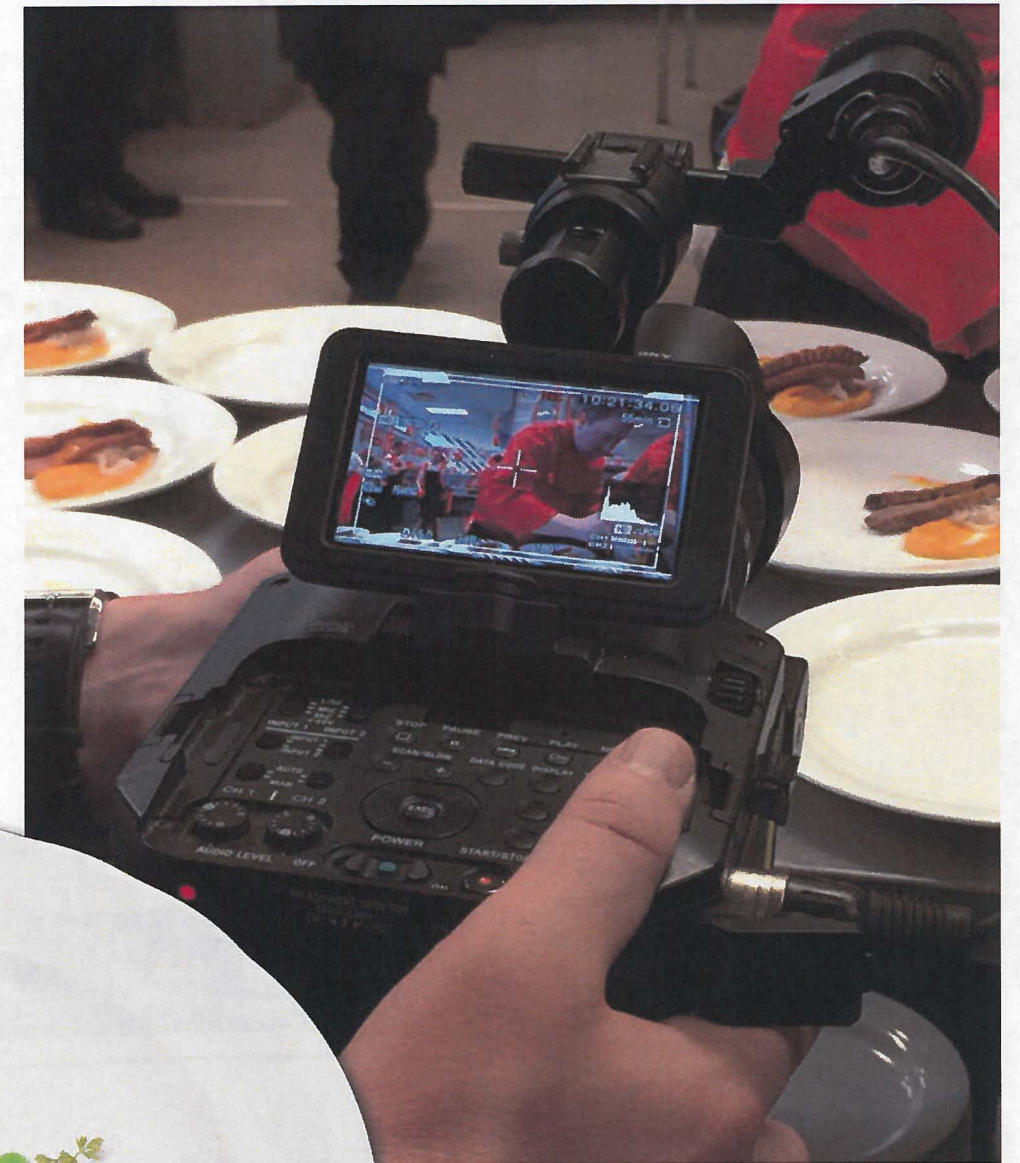
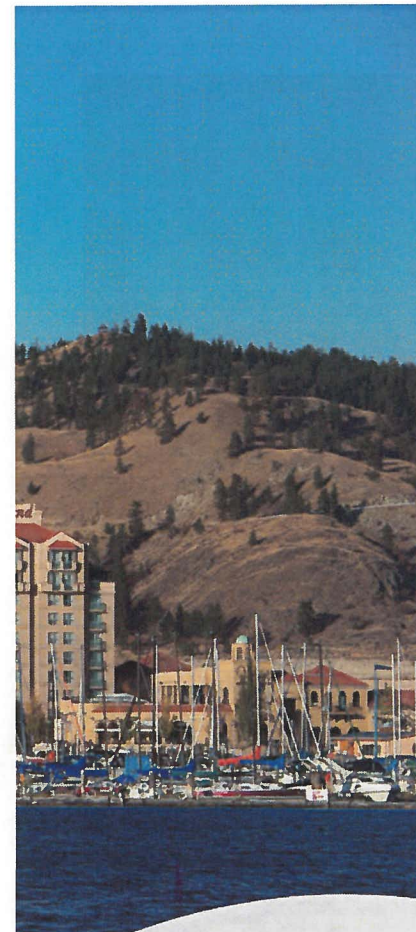


Each of the 11 finalists is already a regional champion, and many are well known in the culinary world. It is a marvel to behold; chefs and their teams skillfully (albeit frantically) executing, and packed rooms of onlookers watching with palpable excitement. The competition consists of three rounds: a wine matching contest where the chef must create a dish that perfectly pairs with an unnamed wine, a black box challenge for which the chef must create an elegant dish using six of the ten mystery box ingredients, and finally the grand finale where each chef prepares their signature dish with a chosen wine pairing for more than 600 guests, including the expert judging panel who determine the medalists. From the first event, Chef O'Flynn was my favourite amongst the competing chefs and I was happy when he took home the gold.



2015 was a stellar year for Canada's Gold Metal Plates, with talented chefs from across the country including (from East to West coasts):

- Newfoundland - Chef Mark McCrowe, Aqua Kitchen & Bar (PEOPLES CHOICE)
- Halifax - Chef Renee Lavallee, The Canteen
- Montreal - Chef Antonio Park, Park Restaurant (SILVER MEDALIST)
- Ottawa - Chef Patrick Garland, Absinthe Café
- Toronto - Chef John Horne, Canoe
- Winnipeg - Chef Luc Jean, Jane's
- Regina - Chef Milton Rebello, Wascana Golf & Country Club
- Saskatoon - Chef Chris Hill, Delta Bessborough Hotel
- Edmonton - **Chef Ryan O'Flynn, Westin Edmonton (GOLD MEDALIST)**
- Calgary - Chef Dave Bohati, Market
- Vancouver - Chef Kristian Eligh, Hawksworth (BRONZE MEDALIST)



MY FAVOURITE BITES:

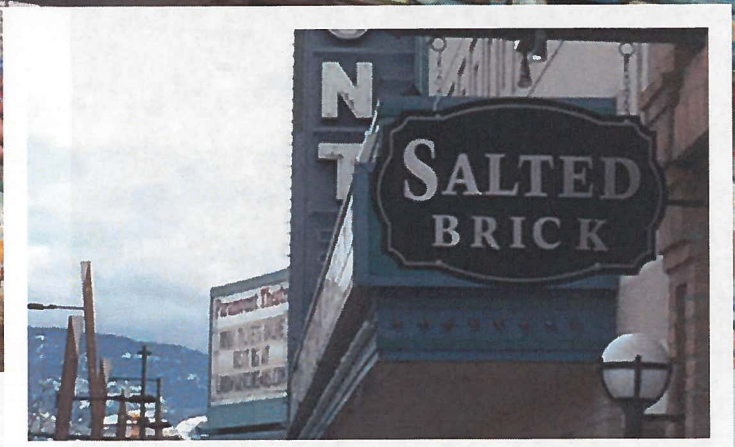
- CHEF RYAN O'FLYNN (EDMONTON)
Served the most incredible River Sturgeon Terrine that was expertly smoked with pine, layered with the most delectable foie gras and served with apple puree and morels.
- CHEF KRISTIAN ELIGH (VANCOUVER)
Served an innovative dish that included a lace dome of crisped bread atop a creamy bed of nouveau sablefish and lobster chowder.

With the championship over and the good china put away, I swapped slingbacks for sneakers and hit the streets in search of Kelowna's true culinary heartbeat. Beyond the expert chefs that had taken over the city, there was a thriving local food culture in this community and it made my travel adventures here all the more rewarding and memorable.

Kelowna is the gateway to the Okanagan, and is a city surrounded by mountains, lakes, orchards and vineyards. Although we all know the wine scene has received a lot of press in recent years, the food culture has been largely overlooked, and I am not sure why. For a city that sits right on Okanagan Lake, and sports a beach on its main street, this is a traveller's wonderland that offers an abundance of British Columbian bliss and beauty.

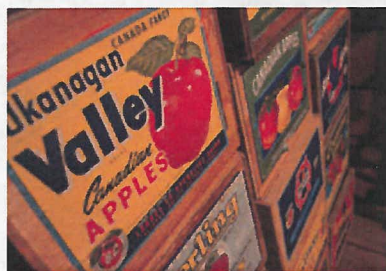
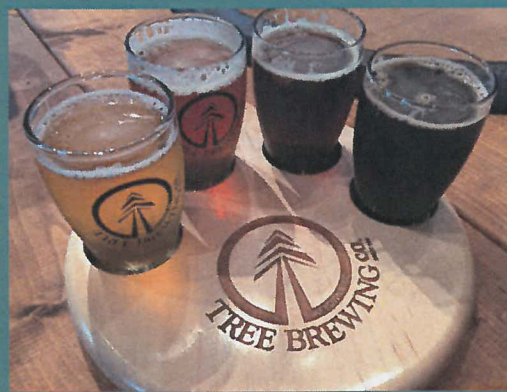


Wandering through the quaint streets and peeking inside charming shops in the downtown core, Kelowna felt more like a friendly small town than the largest city in the Okanagan Valley. The waterfront is rambling and leisurely and the lake that hugs the city is sparkling and bright. I cannot tell you how many unique little eateries, food shops, specialty boutiques and restaurants I came across in my street travels. They seemed to be everywhere, and on every corner. My favourite was The Salted Brick on Bernard Avenue. Inside, the décor is rustic and modest, with wooden bench seating and an open kitchen. Chef/Owner Jason Leizart was our host and served up an impressive charcuterie board with handcrafted local cheeses and house cured meats.



HERE ARE A FEW MORE OF MY
'MUST DO' RECOMMENDATIONS
FOR KELOWNA

- You will want to stay at the Delta Grand Okanagan Resort. It is a stunning modern hotel — the largest in Kelowna — located on Okanagan Lake. There is a business centre, pools and hot tub, plus in-hotel dining and a casino on site. The parkland location is really beautiful and the guest villa we stayed in was truly over the top — amazing!
- Make sure you try the blood sausage from Illichmann's on Gordon Drive. This fourth generation German delicatessen is doing amazing things with meats and sausages, and their selection of gourmet food products would be impressive in a large urban city, never mind nestled in the Okanagan Valley.
- Stop by Codfathers Seafood Market on Gordon Drive and say hello to owners Jon and Anne-Marie Crofts, two of the most passionate and knowledgeable fishmongers I have ever met. Almost every chef competing at Gold Medal Plates had seafood products from Codfathers, and for good reason. The freshness, unique selection and supreme quality are second to none.
- Take a tour of The Beer Institute on Richter Street, owned and operated by Tree Brewing. The facility is beautifully West Coast inspired in design, with a rustic tasting room, charming Hop Garden and bustling eatery. The 'beer factory' is a revelation in forward thinking brewing techniques. With a craft brewery on site, don't you dare leave without trying the flight of four Tree Beers.



Kelowna is a vacation city worthy of year round travel. In the summer months, orchard fruit picking and wine tasting will be on the top of the 'do to' list. In winter, skiing (Big White is not far away) and outdoor adventure awaits. The great thing about culinary travel to Kelowna is that excellence will be waiting for you, no matter what time of year you visit.

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Did you know that Gold Medal Plates originated in 2003

and works each year to raise funds for Canada's Olympic athletes?
To date, more than \$9.5 Million has been raised to support
Canadian Olympians. If you are looking for a destination travel
experience that combines food, wine, and a give-back component,

THIS IS IT!