



Photo by Chris Mason Stearns

PENTICTON & Wine Country

Time to Breathe

The sign at the Vancouver airport departure terminal says "Domestic". And the fact that the flight takes less than an hour means it must be true. But once you step off the plane and breathe the sage-scented air, you are transported to another world.

Penticton's semi arid desert climate provides more than 2000 hours of sunshine each year, perfect for nurturing orchards, vineyards and people.

Ideally situated between Okanagan and Skaha lakes, with every imaginable recreational activity available, this city truly is a playground for people of all ages.

After checking into our spacious room with its jaw-dropping view, at the Lakeside Resort and Casino, we were whisked away by our gracious host Kelly Reid of Penticton and Wine Country Tourism. First stop, Tequila Sunrise cocktails at Casa Grande, a five room Bed and Breakfast across the street from the SS Sicamous on Okanagan Lake. Innkeeper Elise Tonata gave us a tour of the lovely Mexican-inspired inn with 20-foot ceilings, 16-foot fireplace, heated tile floors, spectacular views and unique collection of art.

Next it was off to dinner in Crete – Theos Greek Restaurant actually – an amazing recreation of a village in Crete complete with courtyards of giant flowering plants, secluded balconies, authentic stucco walls and stone, tile and wood floors.



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Since 1976 this 300-seat gem of a restaurant has been serving classic Greek favourites made from scratch with the freshest ingredients.

Nikos Theodosakis (son of the restaurant's founders) is passionate about food. A genie award winning filmmaker, Nikos is also the founding director of the InStill Life project, an educational pilot program that champions sustainabil-

ity and global citizenship through student funded micro loans to food producers in developing countries. Visit www.oliveus.ca to find out more about this amazing project.

Penticton is undergoing a gastronomic renaissance that is very exciting. Drawn by the world-class wines and plentiful produce, inspired chefs are creating some knockout menus in restaurants throughout the region. From fine dining in prestigious wineries, resorts and restaurants to casual fare offered at brewpubs, family-friendly restaurants and take-out establishments, there are plenty of choices.

With close to 100 exceptional wineries surrounding the city of Penticton, it's hard to know where to begin. Fortunately, the Wine Country Visitor Centre is there to help.

The first VQA retail wine store established in B.C. more than ten years ago, the Wine Centre provides a broad selection of more than 400 VQA wines, wine accessories, wine magazines and books, cookbooks and local delectables. Daily complimentary wine tastings are offered as well as local maps and winery information. It's the perfect place to plan your self-guided wine tasting adventures. Or you can opt for a worry-free guided bus tour, which we did.

Top Cat Tours offers a five-hour Naramata Road Wine Tour for \$80 that includes lunch and select tastings. Our amiable and knowledgeable tour guide had a passion for geocaching that had us hiking up Munson Mountain enroute to the wineries. It was well worth the diversion for the panoramic view of the lake and the city. Visit www.geocache.com to find out more about this worldwide high tech treasure hunting game.

The wine sampling included a wide array of award-winning wines from Elephant Island, Lang, Stonehill and Hillside Estate where we stopped for a delightful al fresco lunch before heading back to the Wine Centre.

The last day of our whirlwind tour began with the festive atmosphere of the Penticton Farmers market.

Every Saturday morning starting in May until the end of October, two downtown blocks are transformed into a lively and colourful collection of local vendors and artisans.

After an unusual (but yummy) breakfast of Bison dog and the best cupcake ever, it was off to Summerland for a train ride. The Kettle Valley Steam Railway chugs along the only preserved section of KVR railway track left in existence. The scenic 90-minute ride through lush agricultural land stops at the Trout Creek Trestle Bridge, 73 metres above the canyon floor.

Two and a half days is not enough to take it all in. With so much more to see and do we will definitely be back for another visit.

To plan your trip to Penticton and Wine Country visit www.TourismPenticton.com



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Photo by Jason Dziver

