

## urbansenior



Almost October and the weather in Osoyoos was still warm enough for yoga on the lawn of Watermark Beach Resort. PHOTO SANDRA THOMAS

## Top nine reasons snowbirds should flock to Osoyoos

*With a median age of 60, the town has a large and active baby boomer population*

Sandra Thomas  
stthomas@vancouver.com

### The drive

Our drive from Vancouver to Osoyoos through the Fraser Canyon, on the last Friday morning of September, was spectacular. A light rain followed us for much of our five-hour journey along Highway 3, but as we hit the fruit stands and vineyards of the Similkameen Valley and Keremeos the sun came out. As we entered Osoyoos mid-afternoon, the temperature soared to 23 °C.

### Wineries

The vineyards of the Oliver/Osoyoos region are as famous for their scenery as their award-winning wines. Surrounded by mountain ranges, rivers and lakes on all sides, a visit to an Osoyoos winery is as much about the ambience as it is the wine tastings, which take place seven days a week. Seriously, you can taste wine in Osoyoos at almost any time, which explains all of the festivals organized to celebrate the grape.

### Nk'Mip Desert Cultural Centre

The Nk'Mip [In-ka-meep] Cultural Centre, the Okanagan's newest family tourism destination, is a state-of-the-art interpretive attraction — and one place visitors can safely come face to face with a Western Rattlesnake. The centre was built on a 50-acre parcel of land surrounded by desert, which even at the end of September resembled a movie set complete with sage and antelope brush. Visitors can hear the legends of Sen'klip (Coyote) in two multi-sensory theaters and sign up for hiking/rappelling or fishing excursions. Spectacular metal sculptures by Virgil "Smoker" Marchand are scattered across the centre's landscape, including the one that greets visitors upon their arrival.

### Accommodation

If it's inexpensive winter accommodation snowbirds are looking for, they'll find it in Osoyoos. The weekend of our visit, the *Osoyoos Times* had almost two-dozen ads offering

everything from a waterfront one bedroom and den for \$850 a month to a three bedroom, three bathroom lake-view townhome for \$1,300, utilities included. The majority of local hotels and motels also deeply discount their rates during the off season.

### Watermark Beach Resort

This waterfront resort also offers very reasonable winter rates. The weekend we spent at the Watermark, just days from October, the weather was so gorgeous the resort's yoga classes were held on the lawn overlooking the lake. It was so warm, we were able to sit out and enjoy an al fresco dinner at Watermark's wine/tapas bar and patio until 10 p.m. without so much as a sweater. The patio offers a menu of sharing plates featuring local ingredients, served in sequence so we were able to enjoy each with a wine pairing and was why we were able to linger over dinner for three hours. I'd highly recommend the quinoa and roasted cauliflower



Chef Chris Van Hooydonk gives a tour of Backyard Farm, the inspiration for his Chef's Table dinners. PHOTO SANDRA THOMAS

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salad, wild Pacific sockeye salmon and house made charcuterie. The salad was so good, it transformed my quinoa-loathing partner into a believer.

### Sports

Considering the weather forecast for Osoyoos for the second week of October called for temperatures of 22 and 23 °C, it should come as no surprise golf is sometimes offered year-round. But even if golf's not your thing, there are many other ways to keep active while visiting Osoyoos in the winter, including hiking, cycling, fitness centres, indoor pools and drop-in pickle ball at the Sonora Community Centre.

### Elvis Fine Jewellery

Who knew? When jeweller Elvis Furmanek opened his Osoyoos shop years ago, he had no idea it would eventually become a shrine to the King of Rock and Roll. So while you can still purchase

a watch battery, you might also want to pick up an Elvis plate, poster, record, doll, you name it.

### Food

Until my first stay in Osoyoos last month, the only knowledge I had of the food scene of this Okanagan town was the drool-inspiring photos I'd seen posted by friends and bloggers I follow on social media. Now that I've had the opportunity to visit, my impression is that with all of that wine and bounty of locally-grown ingredients for inspiration, chefs are knocking it out of the ballpark with creative dishes designed specifically to pair with Osoyoos grapes.

### Chef Chris Van Hooydonk's Backyard Farm

During a tour of this storied farm prior to dinner, Van Hooydonk pointed out the trees supplying the plums and peaches that would make up part of our meal. Unlike

the small, well-groomed trees found at the commercial farms of the region, these heritage species show their age with beautifully gnarled trunks and branches. From logs set against the farm's kitchen, mushrooms sprouted, which again would be served during what's called the Chef's Table. What Van Hooydonk doesn't grow, he purchases from local farmers and producers who share his passion for food.

On this night a group of travel writers and I were treated to a salad of organic heirloom tomatoes, organic corn veloute, oven roasted wild boar loin and Earl Grey cheesecake. Enhancing each course was a wine pairing from Moon Curser Vineyards, an award-winning Osoyoos winery that garners its name from the days of the 1860s gold rushes, when miners would attempt to smuggle gold into the U.S. and the full moon would make it that much more difficult.

[twitter.com/stthomas10](https://twitter.com/stthomas10)