

westcoast families

The Local Guide for Active Urban Families

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Emily Ohler

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Explore our Backyard

The Splendid South Okanagan

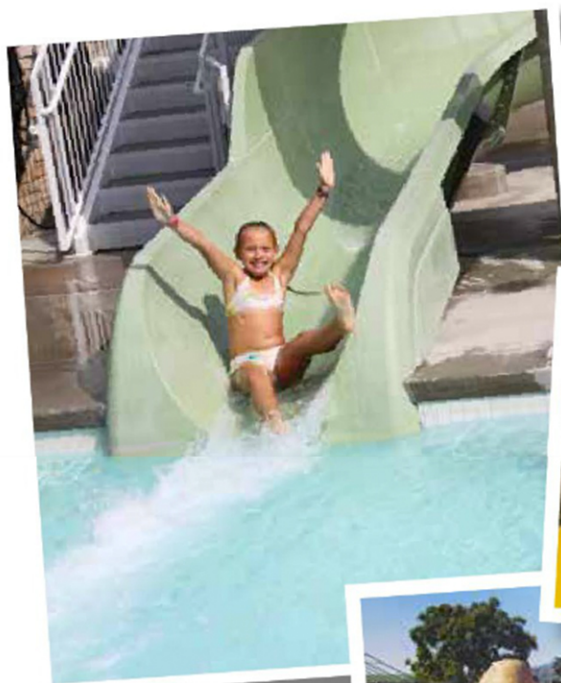
by Jodi Iverson

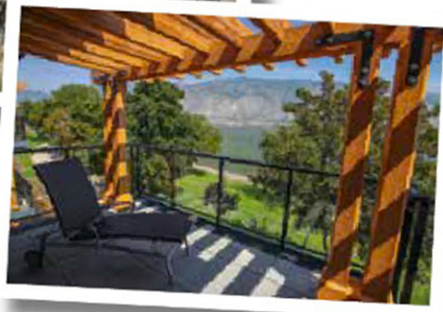
Living in BC, we are fortunate to have some pretty remarkable terrain to explore, including the breathtaking southern Okanagan Valley. A scenic five-hour drive from Vancouver, Osoyoos and Oliver are the two southern most towns in the Okanagan Valley. Canada's only desert, the southern Okanagan is actually a continuation of the Sonoran desert, reaching all the way from Mexico! Fruit and lakes (okay, wine) may be what come to mind when you consider the Okanagan, but there is a rich heritage and unique landscape perfect for your family to explore.

Choosing accommodation in the Southern Okanagan is a breeze, with a lakeshore full of options. Just be sure to book early, as summer fills up fast! We wisely chose the beautiful Watermark Beach Resort, located directly on the beach of Osoyoos Lake, and within walking distance to all amenities. Watermark offers a variety of rooms to suit your family's needs, a full service spa, salt water pool with waterslide, and a wine and tapas bar complete with kids menu and charming outdoor kitchen.

We booked a beachfront townhouse, which felt like home. Boasting two spacious bedrooms, a fully equipped kitchen and my vacation essential, the washer and dryer, our room was clean and comfortable. We were pleased to find the familiar Telus TV remote with movies for when we needed a break from the sun. Our private patio was perfectly appointed for morning coffee while watching the kids play on well-manicured green space between our suite and the beach.

Osoyoos boasts over 2000 hours of sunlight annually and Canada's warmest lake, making it the perfect setting to enjoy water activities. Watermark conveniently has a marina located a short walk down the beach, offering private slips for guests who bring their own boat. While we didn't bring our own boat, we chose to enjoy a morning on the water with Wakepilot, a local company offering private wakeboarding lessons. Perfect for the whole family! Our dear daughter, who was nine at the time, was a big fan of our personable coach, Travis, and had no trouble learning the ropes! I was a little reluctant at first, having tried (and failed) previously, but Wakepilot's coaching (via helmet speaker) had me up in no time. Highly recommended!





Wanting to learn more about the local history, we ventured across the lake to the Nk'Mip Desert Cultural Centre. Built sustainably on the side of a mountain, the centre blends beautifully into the landscape. Our family was enchanted by the interactive experience, including guided tours, hands on displays, galleries, and exhibits immersing us in the Okanagan people's rich culture. Outside of the centre are two kilometres of hiking trails, perfect for exploring the desert! If you are lucky, you might even see a coyote, scorpion, or rattlesnake, all of whom call the desert home.

Driving north out of Osoyoos, you will come across what is arguably the best stretch of wineries in Canada. Take Black Sage Road as an alternative to the highway and enjoy the scenic rolling desert hills. We took time to stop and view wildlife at the turtle crossing and photo opportunities at Haynes Ranch historical site. The wineries in the region are remarkably kid-friendly, with sprawling grounds to run on and even some treats and sparkling cider! Our top picks: Black Hills, Church & State and Stoneboat.

On the north end of Oliver, situated at the foot of the beautiful and storied McIntyre Bluff, lays Covert Farms, a family owned organic farm, vineyard, and winery. We enjoyed a guided tour exploring the farm in a vintage 1952 Mercury Truck. Depending on the time of year, you will see a variety of farm animals, crops, and amazing views. We enjoyed learning about bio-dynamic and permaculture farming methods directly from the farmer. After the tour, we enjoyed a charcuterie plate and glass of wine in the wine lounge, a renovated farmhouse turned charming gift and wine shop. While we relaxed, our daughter...okay, mostly my husband, bounced on the giant bouncy pillow, which was as amazing as it sounds!

When planning your next BC summer adventure, seriously consider the southern Okanagan Valley. With ample sun, history and unique terrain waiting to be explored, there are no limits to your family adventure! ●

Resources

- www.watermarkbeachresort.com
- www.wakepilot.com
- www.covertfarms.ca
- www.nkmipdesert.com

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