

urban senior

Cycling through Okanagan

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Wine tasting and electric bike a perfect combination for a relaxing day



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A few years ago I went on a mountain bike expedition and at the time fancied myself a pretty decent rider. However, within minutes I hit a rock and took a nose dive off my bike. I walked away with a damaged ego, but luckily only a few cuts and bruises.

So, when I was recently invited to take part in a cycling tour of Okanagan wineries, my first thought was, "What am I, nuts?" And, wondered if I would once again embarrass myself. However, the allure of the Okanagan was just too strong.

So there we were, six of us on a cool June morning ready to spend a leisurely day discovering some of the region's wineries. Except this time instead of using my own power to pedal from winery to winery, I'm on a Pedego E-bike. And, thankfully, everything in Richard Cooper's, owner of Heatsroke Cycle, easygoing demeanour — stubble, shorts, shades and bright orange runners — somehow reassured me.

At first glance, the Pedego looked like any traditional bicycle. In fact, I had to ask Cooper where the electric motor was — it's attached to the back frame. Don't get me wrong though, there is some exercise involved. The bike isn't like a motorcycle, it doesn't move on its own, so you still have to pedal to get it going. The controls are attached to the handle bars so when you're feeling the strain, you just click on the power to get some extra gusto for climbing hills.

Right about now, hard-core cyclists are probably thinking, "Where's the pride one feels when pushing their body beyond its limits while straining and sweating up those steep valleys?" Yes, that does vanish with the push of a button, yet you can always opt to cycle so you can get as little or as much exercise as you want. I did — that is unless the incline was too steep, and

frankly it was just too much fun letting the bike take over the hard work. One of the biggest benefits of cycling is watching the Okanagan's majestic beauty unfold beyond a set of handlebars.

Framed by lush vineyards, desert mountains and the blue waters of Osoyoos Lake, we headed out for few hours to enjoy panoramic views and fabulous Okanagan wines as we passed vineyards, farms and the gorgeous countryside.

...the allure of the Okanagan was just too strong.

Our first destination of the day was Hester Creek Winery where we cruised past a patchwork of endless vineyards, orchards and gnarly trees to park our bikes. Here, like at the other wineries we visited that day — Cassini Cellars and Rustico Farm & Cellars — we tasted, we spat and we swirled wine after wine. Our day also included lunch at Road 13 Vineyards before finishing off at Church & State Wines.

FARM TO TABLE MOVEMENT FLOURISHING

Because of its deep commitment to the farm-to-table movement, the Thompson Okanagan has attracted some of the top chefs from across the province and afar.

One such chef is proprietor Chris Van Hooydonk of Backyard Farm Chef's Table. At 37, he has already amassed two decades of experience in some of the province's high-end restaurants, his most recent stint as executive chef at Burrowing Owl Estate Winery.

Not only is he a dedicated champion of local purveyors, he is passionate about the land. So was born Backyard Farm — nestled on his heritage orchard property and surrounded by a vineyard — where the pioneering chef lives with his family, grows organic produce and offers lunch or dinner for up to 20 people.

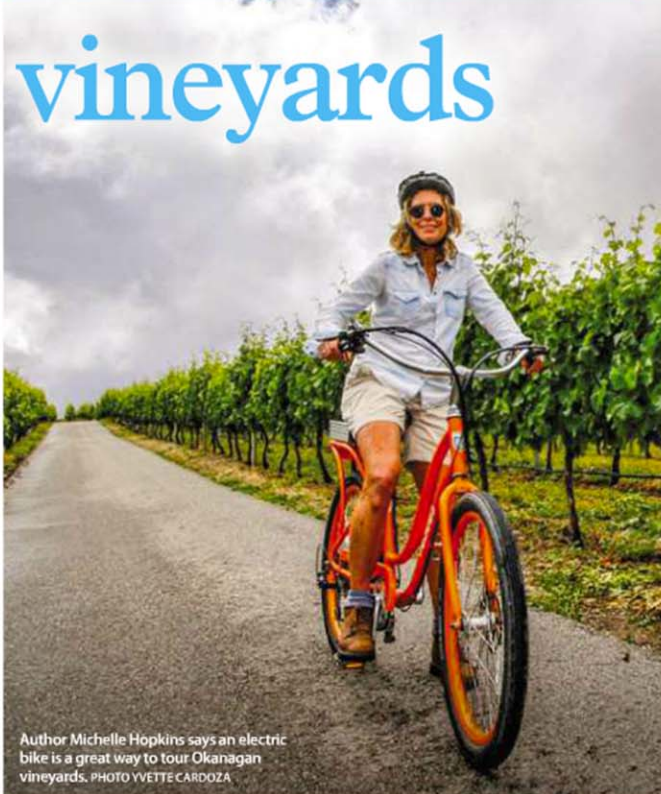
Van Hooydonk is part of a movement in the Okanagan, a vanguard



Not only does Osoyoos offer some of the best wines available from B.C., the gorgeous views make it a must-see destination.
PHOTO: YVETTE CARDOZA

urban senior

vineyards



Author Michelle Hopkins says an electric bike is a great way to tour Okanagan vineyards. PHOTO YVETTE CARDOZA

who is passionate about local cuisine and wine and he wants to share that love with everyone. Between toasting his perfectly executed dishes with some wonderful local wines, I again drank in the vista of rolling hills dotted with rows of vineyards.

Another must-see is Covert Farms Family Estate. With a lush foreground of mountains and myriad of organic ground crops, we all hopped aboard a vintage 1952 red Mercury truck to pick our own organically grown strawberries that later became part of our salad.

As we returned from our tour of the farm, we were handed a glass of Covert Farms Family Estate organic wine (I went for the Amicitia 2011) and enjoyed platters of charcuteries. What a way to dine! Imagine savouring fruits and vegetables harvested just hours before while enjoying views of fields spreading towards the horizon. Authentic farm-to-table living has taken root in the Okanagan Valley.

WHERE TO STAY: WATERMARK BEACH RESORT

I love this property, the boardwalk is right outside your door and the in-room coffee is some of the best I've had in a resort or hotel. Executive chef Adair Scott creates magic in the kitchen at The Restaurant at Watermark. Scott prepared a fabulous five-course menu using locally sourced ingredients. As the sun set over the mountains that surround the Osoyoos lakeside, we enjoyed each course which was perfectly paired with local wines.

TIP: Watermark has introduced an outdoor gentle flow yoga class. Imagine doing a Zen pose beside the glistening waters of Osoyoos Lake. watermarkbeachresort.com

WHAT TO DO

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