

north shore news

A30 | TRAVEL

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OSOYOOS WINERIES

Cruising through a lush Okanagan landscape

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A few years ago I went on a mountain bike expedition. I 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 bruised ego but luckily only a few cuts and bruises.

So, when I was recently invited to take part in a cycle tour of Osoyoos wineries, I thought to myself: "Am I nuts? Will I once again embarrass myself?" However, the allure of the Okanagan was just too strong.

So here we are, six of us on a cool June day 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. Everything about Richard Cooper, owner of Heatstroke Cycle, easygoing demeanour – stubble, shorts, shades and bright orange runners – somehow reassured me.

At first glance, the bike looks like any traditional bicycle. In fact, I had to ask Cooper where the electric motor was – it is attached to the back frame. Don't get me wrong though, there is some exercise involved. The bike isn't like a motorcycle: it does not move on its own so you still have to pedal to get it going. The controls have an additional gear lever on the handle bars so when you're feeling the strain, you just click it on to give you some extra gusto to climb some of the hills.

Hardcore cyclists are probably thinking "where's the pride one feels when pushing the body beyond its limits while straining and sweating up 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 but frankly it was just too much fun letting the bike take over the hard work.

Framed by lush vineyards, desert mountains and Lake



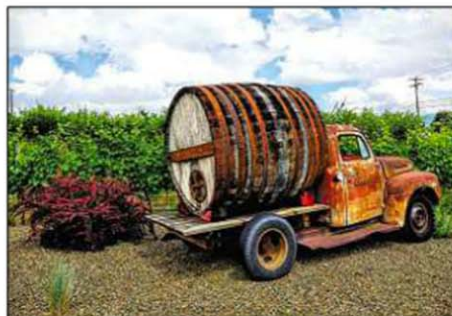
Pedego E-bikes do all the hard work cycling through the vineyards. PHOTOS SUPPLIED YVETTE CARDOZO

Osoyoos' blue waters, we head out for few hours cruising past vineyards, farms and countryside. Our first stop of the day was to Hester Creek Winery. We ride past a patchwork of endless vineyards, orchards and gnarly trees and park our bikes. Here, like at the other wineries we visited that day – Cassini Cellars, Rustico Farm & Cellars, then lunch at Road 13 Vineyards before finishing off at Church & State Wines – we tasted and swirled wine after wine.

FARM TO FORK

Because of its deep commitment to the farm-to-table movement, the Thompson Okanagan has attracted some of the world's top chefs.

One such chef is chef/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



Cassini Cellars is halfway between Oliver and Osoyoos, B.C.

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. Hence Backyard Farm – nestled on his heritage orchard property and surrounded by a vineyard – where the pioneering chef lives with

his family, grows some organic produce, and offers lunch or dinner for up to 20 people.

Van Hooydonk is part of a movement in the Okanagan, who are passionate about local cuisine and wine and he wants to share it with everyone.

Another must-see is Covert Farms Family Estate.

With a lush foreground of mountains and a myriad of organic ground crops, we all hop aboard a vintage 1952 red Mercury truck to pick our own organically grown strawberries that will become part of our salad.

As we return from our tour of the farm, we are handed a glass of Covert Farms Family Estate organic wine (I went for the Amicitia 2011, a fabulous dinner wine), and platters of charcuteries. Imagine fields that spread towards the horizon and savouring food that was harvested hours before it lands on your plate. Authentic farm-to-table living has taken root in the Okanagan Valley.

Whether it's an orchard dinner under the stars, an al fresco vineyard dinner or a day tour, there are many ways to explore farm to fork.

IF YOU GO:

1) Tourism Osoyoos (destinationosoyoos.com)

Where to Stay:

Watermark Beach Resort
15 Park Pl., Osoyoos, B.C.
V0H 1V0
Reservations: 1-855-213-0582
(watermarkbeachresort.com)

I love this property, the boardwalk is right outside your door, the in-room coffee is some of the best I've had in a resort, or for that matter, hotel. The executive chef Adair Scott creates some magic in the kitchen at the resort's 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.

What to do:
Heatstroke Cycle
Reservations: 250-689-5977
Email: info@heatstrokecycle.com.
Website: heatstrokecycle.com.