

WESTENDER

EVERYTHING VANCOUVER

FEAST YOUR WAY THROUGH THE SOUTH OKANAGAN

From roadside tacos to award-winning wine and dining, there's a range of experiences from the Similkameen to Summerland

Anya Levykh — Westender



Vanessa Vineyard overlooks the Similkameen Valley. — Contributed photo

The haze is still ingering over Vancouver, but in the south and central Okanagan the skies are (for the most part) their usual ridiculous bright blue. The distant fires have put a bit of a damper on the tourism scene, but this is due more to perception than reality. Summer isn't over yet, and hitting the road to the sunniest part of B.C. is never a bad idea. Here are a few places to check out as you wind your way through the southern valley.

What better way to start your trip than with wine, and lots of it? The **Similkameen** is a warm bowl of a valley in the south that is home to some of the best fruit and vegetable farms in the Okanagan. Within the last handful of years, it's also developed a reputation for its small-lot wineries. Places like **Little Farm Winery** (tastings by appointment only, littlefarmwinery.ca), run by Master of Wine Rhys Pender and his wife, Alishan Driediger, focuses on a few single varietals, like Chardonnay and Riesling, that best grow in the gusty, desert-like heat of Cawston.

Related

[Fraser Valley Farm Tour: Where to eat, stay and play](#)

[What's new to drink in the Okanagan: Five newer wineries to keep an eye for this summer](#)

Newcomer **Vanessa Vineyard** (vanessavineyard.com) also recently opened a tasting room. Growing grapes since 2006, the conversion from grower to vintner came in 2012. Favouring heavier varietals like Meritage, Merlot and Syrah, the rocky terrain at this hillside winery allows for better heat retention through the night, making for a better growing season. With almost a dozen wineries in the area, there is more than enough for a few days of tastings. Visit **Similkameen Independent Growers** (similkameenwine.com) for a full list.



Vanessa Vineyard's tasting room opened August 1, 2017. - Contributed photo

Looking for a place to stay? **Farmersdotter**

(farmersdotter.ca), a local grower of organic garlic, maker of artisan garlic sea salt and baker of pie and bread, now has guest cabins on its property. Do pick up some organic Russian Red garlic while you're there.

Moving along Highway 3 (also known as the Crowsnest Highway), you'll hit Osoyoos, home to more fruit farms, a few wineries and some swanky places to stay. **Walnut Beach Resort** (walnutbeachresort.com) sits right on Lake Osoyoos and offers apartment-style suites, lots of pool space for the kidlets, and a restaurant, **Pointe 49 Kitchen and Bar**, run by chef Natasha Schooten, that offers everything from Ocean Wise ceviche to flatbreads, burgers and slow-smoked ribs. Closer to town, check out **Watermark Wine Bar** at Watermark Beach Resort (watermarkbeachresort.com) for a great local wine list and fun share plates.

Head north and you come to Oliver, home to B.C.'s first official sub-appellation, the Golden Mile that runs along Highway 97 and includes such renowned wineries as **Burrowing Owl, Hester Creek, Road 13** and **Tinhorn Creek**. At the latter, you will find the famed **Miradoro** and executive chef Jeff van Geest, who dishes out some of the region's most innovative and delicious plates, like Moroccan-spiced beef crudo or any of the delicious Napoletana-style pizzas (the mushroom is a fave).

Miradoro isn't the only big dining game in town. **The Sonora Room** at Burrowing Owl has long been a dining destination. The new resto on the bench is **Terrafina** at Hester Creek (terrafinarestaurant.com).

The Tuscan-style restaurant was recently taken over by chef Rod Butters of Kelowna's **RaudZ** and **Micro**, along with his partners. While the Italian focus remains, the menu has been reworked into dishes like the cauliflower and saffron soup, cherry-smoked steak, and grilled arctic char (from just down the road) with farro-pancetta salad. For a more casual experience, there ain't no place better than **El Sabor de Marina** (facebook.com/elsabordemarina) for the best roadside tacos (literally, it's an outdoor stand on Highway 97) north of Mexico.

Burrowing Owl and Hester Creek both offer luxe guest suites, but if you're looking to save money for all those dinners, check out **Maple Leaf Motel and RV Campground Resort** (mapleleafmotel.ca). If you're not into the whole RV and tent scene, there are very nice renovated rooms in the motel that are air-conditioned and include a nice pool for a mid-day cool-off. There's also a barbecue if you want to fire up your own steaks.

Next week we'll continue through Okanagan Falls, Penticton and points north.



Miradoro's chef Jeff van Geest creates some of the Okanagan's most innovative and delicious plates. - Contributed photo