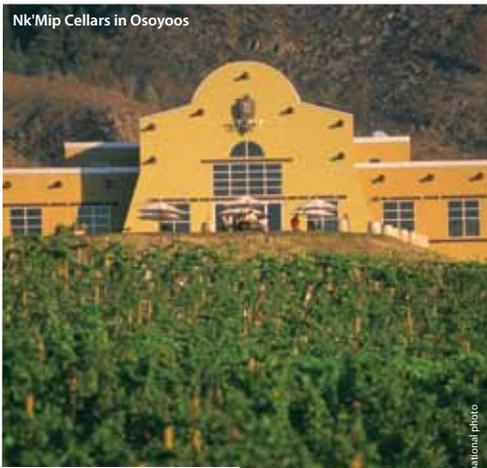


Nk'Mip Cellars in Osoyoos



Vincor International Photo

TRIP IDEAS

SOUTH OKANAGAN/SIMILKAMEEN WINE REGION

The south Thompson Okanagan wine region, which includes Oliver, Osoyoos and Similkameen Valley wineries, is full of prolific wineries and a few surprises. Discover rare wildlife in Canada's only desert, along with beachside wine bars, European guesthouses and rows of summer fruit stands.

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Okanagan Falls Wineries

"OK Falls," as locals call it, is surrounded by lakes, hiking and biking trails, and, of course, wineries. Learn how Blasted Church Vineyards got its unusual name. Sample the award-winning aromatic whites at Wild Goose Winery. Raise a glass to the memory of the eccentric Major Hugh Fraser and his beloved dogs at See Ya Later Ranch, the highest altitude winery in British Columbia.

Be sure to stop at Tickleberry's for an ice cream cone, and bring binoculars for birdwatching at Vaseux Lake Provincial Park.

Oliver Wineries

Oliver, called the "Wine Capital of Canada," is home to many of Canada's wineries, and has the highest concentration of grape production in British Columbia. Some of the biggest wineries – Jackson Triggs, Inniskillin – are here.

Explore the Golden Mile on the west side of the valley. Road 13 Vineyards creates luscious blends and Tinhorn Creek, the area's first carbon-neutral winery, boasts chocolatey Merlot and summertime concerts. Visit Hester Creek for its rare, delicate Trebbiano, and stay at its Tuscan-style villa. Refuel at the casual Firehall Bistro in Oliver; it serves burgers, poutine and other hearty fare.

On the Black Sage bench (on the eastern side of the valley), stop in at Le Vieux Pin for the floral rosé and Black Hills for rich Bordeaux-style blends, including cult favourite Nota Bene. Try the elegant Chardonnay at Burrowing Owl, then stick around for a lunch of crisp duck confit or lamb fettuccine at its Sonora Room restaurant.

Osoyoos Wineries

The Osoyoos area is known for its summer beach culture, and is becoming famous for a handful of wineries. Some notables include First-Nations-owned Nk'Mip Cellars (the Qwam Qwmt series is exceptional), the Italian-inspired LaStella, and Moon Curser Vineyards, which is breaking new ground with varietals like Tempranillo and Tannat.

For the ultimate in wine country comfort food, visit the restaurant at Spirit Ridge Vineyard Resort & Spa. Spirit Ridge is part of the bigger Nk'Mip Resort, which also includes luxurious accommodations, the Nk'Mip Desert Cultural Centre, the Sonora Dunes Golf Course and Nk'Mip Cellars winery.

The new Watermark Beach Resort is a family friendly oasis on Osoyoos Lake that

features a terrific wine bar specializing in local vintages.

Osoyoos Desert

Osoyoos is the site of Canada's only arid desert, which is home to hundreds of rare and endangered plants and animals. Learn more at the Osoyoos Desert Centre just north of Osoyoos, or at the Pocket Desert Federal Ecological Reserve on Black Sage Road.

Similkameen Valley Wineries

Just west of the south Okanagan is the Similkameen Valley and the fruitful communities of Keremeos and Cawston. Until now, it's been better known for its orchards – Keremeos is the "fruit stand capital of Canada" – but its wineries are being noticed for their interesting and complex wines.

Two to check out: Seven Stones Vineyards, which has earned raves for its peppery Syrah and rich Meritage; and Orofino, which produces a stunning Old Vines Pinot Noir and is Canada's only winery with eco-friendly straw-bale construction.

Where to stay in the Similkameen Valley? Expect cosy little B&Bs and guesthouses like the luxurious Argos Guesthouse in Kaleden. Check out the simple, German-style "Landgasthof" (country inn) at Crowsnest Vineyards, where the restaurant and bakery also feature German specialties like schnitzel, warm potato salad and fresh baked bread.

For more culinary options, head to Keremeos and try casual favourites at the Riverbed Bistro, or stop by the historic Grist Mill and Gardens for the "Millar's Lunch" of cheese, salad, ham and bread.

South Okanagan Transportation

From either Vancouver or Calgary, it's a one-hour flight to Kelowna plus an almost two-hour-long drive south down Highway 97 to get to Osoyoos, or about 90 minutes to Oliver. Visitors can also take a direct flight from Vancouver into Penticton Regional Airport, then drive 45 minutes south to Oliver and another 20 minutes to Osoyoos.

Prefer to drive the whole way? The trip to Osoyoos is about 5.5 hours from Vancouver, travelling along the Crowsnest highway through Manning Provincial Park. It takes five hours to drive from Seattle or 10 from Calgary. From Osoyoos, it's only a 20-minute drive north along Highway 97 to reach Oliver, or 45 minutes west on Highway 3 to reach Keremeos.



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