



The Spirit of Osoyoos

By Chris McBeath



Nk'Mip Desert & Heritage Centre



Spirit Ridge Vineyard Resort

Osoyoos is a delightful, unexpected place. After all, nowhere else in Canada will you find parched hills of windswept sage, vineyards lush with promise, and a desert ecology that's so anomalous in a province known for its rainforests.

This small community (pop 5,000) sits at the northern tip of the Great Basin Desert, which stretches all the way down to Mexico, and edges along Canada's warmest fresh water lake. As a result, summer transforms the sandy shores into 'holiday central' for vacationers looking for affordable accommodations, RV sites, glorious temperatures and sun-drenched, safe swimming beaches.

In recent years, however, Osoyoos has charmed its way into the hearts of the getaway crowd. With its First Nations art and culture, unique environment, wineries, spas, and more sophisticated accommodation, the lakeside town is finessing the Art of the Getaway on a multi-experiential level.

Fine Wine

The Osoyoos band has grown grapes in the region for more than 40 years so when Nk'Mip Cellars (pg 102) opened 10 years ago – the first aboriginally-owned winery in North America, it was a natural evolution into the tourism industry. Set on the sage-brush hills overlooking Osoyoos Lake, the winery is the anchor destination for the entire resort, and is an award-winning producer of Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and a Riesling Icewine, among others.

Nk'Mip Cellars



A Luxury Stay

Next came Spirit Ridge Vineyard Resort, an elegant pueblo-style inn with 226 sumptuously appointed suites and villas, all with breathtaking views, and stunning, al fresco features that inspire you to relax amidst the vineyard beauty. Much of landscaping is a framework for various art pieces like an oversized metal gecko clinging to the horizontal side of a boulder, and the imposing sculpture of horse and rider that flashes dramatically beneath the Osoyoos sun. Resort amenities include a quality restaurant, a nine-hole golf course, and rentals, as in scooters, mountain bikes, paddle craft and boats. And there's a first class spa with pampering treatments such as Desert Glow facial and a Sun Dance massage.

Cultural Heritage

Celebrating the textured history of the Osoyoos band, the Nk'Mip Desert & Heritage Centre is the cultural heart of these First Nations lands. The extraordinary, eco-designed building houses a terrific collection of hand-crafted items, a multi-sensory Pithouse, a film theatre, and a 'Critter Corner' where you'll see some of the desert's smaller creatures.



Nk'Mip Desert & Heritage Centre

Outside, you can dig for artifacts in the Living Lands garden, stroll through the outdoor art gallery, take part in storytelling in a traditional tule mat teepee, or simply follow one of the self-guided trails through the desert brush. But tread carefully and wear good shoes. This land is a biological treasure, and home to more at-risk species than any other ecosystem in British Columbia.

Paths meander past scented sage, weave around twisted branches of antelope brush, travel beneath lofty Ponderosa pines with their fire-protective skins of thick bark, and beside clumps of prickly pear cactus. You might even come across a spadefoot toad or a burrowing owl, or even an endangered Western rattlesnake resting atop a rock, coiled in sun-bathing repose – perfecting its own art of a getaway.