Visitors come to Kelowna to enjoy the beaches, water sports and urban experience of the thriving city.

Kelowna ripe with surprises

Kelowna has come of age, and is more than just a pretty city surrounded by lake and orchards.

The city of Kelowna has a new tag. But it sees no pressure itself to live up to it. "Kelowna, ripe with surprises."

The phrase pays homage to the fruit growing industry that first brought fame to much of the Okanagan, including Kelowna. But it also reflects the fact that Kelowna has come of age, and is more than just a pretty city surrounded by lake and orchards.

"Kelowna has blossomed," says Catherine Callary with Tourism Kelowna, "and like fruit that is ripe, it's ready to be picked." Callary says visitors need to come to escape the city life and enjoy the beaches, water sports and other activities. And while they can still do those things, more and more visitors are being drawn by the urban experience of Kelowna itself.

The city of 100,000 people has developed a thriving cultural scene, and a six-block area of downtown once crowned with fruit processing plants has been turned into the Cultural District. Home to galleries, artist's studios, museums and an eclectic mix of dining opportunities, that District has been recognized as one of the best cultural areas in Canada.

Visitors can wander the shops, try their luck in a casino, then stop in at a bistro that has been visited by prime ministers. Or rent a boat and cruise the Kelowna waterfront, hiking at the fabulous lakefront properties that have sprung up in recent years, then return and relax in a wine bar or a night club. "In terms of the urban experience, there is more here than there ever used to be," says Callary. She says the caliber of facilities has also risen to attract the needs of visitors coming to Kelowna to enjoy the urban experience. "When you want to attract that kind of people, you have to be able to deliver."

Kelowna is also a jumping off point for the wine tourism industry, which has seen growing interest by the public in wine tours and tastings. There are 12 wineries in and around Kelowna, and more than 60 in the Okanagan Valley. Major wine festivals take place in Kelowna each spring and fall, and the city is the perfect base camp for exploring what has become known as Canada's Napa Valley. "Wine tourism has added a dimension to touring in Kelowna that has not been seen before," says Callary.

Of course for many people a visit to Kelowna wouldn't be a vacation without enjoying some traditional Okanagan outdoor activities. People still come to play on the city's beaches, and enjoy water sports on Okanagan Lake. There's hiking, camping and horseback riding in the mountains above Kelowna. Most than a dozen golf courses can be found in the area, including some of the top ones in the province. And there are still fruit stands in the summer, selling the in-season produce that is grown in nearby orchards. And just like Kelowna, it's always ripe and ready to be enjoyed.

Visitor information: 1-800-663-4345
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Advertising Feature

Kelowna the perfect escape for big-city blues

Okanagan city's variety of experiences lets you create a tailor-made vacation

Summer in the city getting you down? For wilted Albertans looking to beat the heat, Kelowna is an affordable and quick escape from the day-to-day grind.

This sun-soaked mountain escape on the shores of BC's Lake Okanagan offers a lot more than just some of the finest wineries, top-ranked golf courses and most gorgeous scenery in Canada, although these attractions alone make it a fantastic vacation destination.

Kelowna's magic lies in a unique combination of contrasts that entice and captivate visitors. It is one of Canada's primary agricultural areas, overflowing with rural charm, yet comfortably accessible by three major highways and an international airport. It enjoys a laid-back and relaxed pace, but there are enough exciting outdoor pursuits to delight any sports-loving thrill-seeker.

"The entire region has so much to offer," says Catherine Callary, media relations manager for Tourism Kelowna. "Whether you are passing through on a tour of the region or planning an entire vacation in Kelowna, you will be able to tailor your experience to suit your tastes."

With a population of 104,000, the city of Kelowna has a friendly, small town atmosphere, up-to-the minute amenities and a thriving arts scene.

The lively Cultural District, which stretches along the lakeside, was named Cultural Capital of Canada in 2004 by the department of Canadian Heritage. Visitors can explore museums, galleries, artist studios, live music and theatre or funky boutiques — and do it all within six blocks.

"Kelowna in the summer is a city of festivals," says Callary.

"In July alone, we celebrate the Lavender Festival, the Annual Guisachan Garden Show, and Kelowna's Annual Regata."

A drive out of town along the back-roads will take you through rolling orchards, gorgeous vineyards and past tempting local produce stands.

With tourism growing as an industry in Kelowna, many producers have turned to agri-tourism, offering tours of their businesses, taste-tests and gourmet shopping opportunities.

Visitors can explore a lavender farm, a 100-year-old orchard that pioneered the region's iced apple cider, or tour one of the districts fabulous wineries, including award-winners such as Mission Hill and Quails' Gate.

And where there's wine, there's cuisine. Foodies will love lunching alfresco and sampling the region's delectable organic offerings.

Sports enthusiasts will find easy access to water skiing, boating, water slides, cycling, hiking, camping and fishing. There are 12 golf courses right in Kelowna, five of which are ranked as championship courses. And if you do plan to spend a lot of time outdoors on the greens — you are in luck. Kelowna basks in an average of 2,000 hours of sunshine a year.

Planning a trip to Kelowna is as easy as enjoying yourself once you get there. There is a wealth of information available to help vacationers plan a perfect escape to Kelowna. Check out Tourism Kelowna's website at www.tourismkelowna.com to get started, or call toll free 1-800-663-4345 for personalized assistance from a helpful travel counsellor. Obtain a copy of the Kelowna Visitor's Guide by dropping by the Tourism Kelowna Info Centre at 544 Harvey Ave.