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Year-round playground

Autumn bridges the seasons with golfing, grapevines and more.

BY YVONNE JEFFERY

Through the summer and well into the fall along Kelowna's lakeshore, golfers can hear the signature call of a golf club connecting smartly with a small white ball, sending both ball and spirits soaring. Bathed in the warmth of some 2,000 hours of sunshine every year, Kelowna's golf courses – more than a dozen, including five championship facilities – are blessed with one of the longest, driest seasons in Canada.

That gives enthusiasts, from duffers to experts, every reason to pack up the clubs and head to B.C.'s Okanagan Valley. "There's so much to choose from that you could golf a different course every day for two weeks," says Shannon Meyer, of GolfBC, which represents several highly ranked Okanagan courses. "Kelowna is a great choice, because there's so much to offer and so much variety."

GolfBC courses include Gallagher's Canyon Golf and Country Club, with its challenging fairways

and well-protected greens; Nicklaus-designed The Bear Course at the Okanagan Golf Club, with fairways surrounded by forested and sagebrush hills; and The Quail Course, also at the Okanagan Golf Club, which features a Les Furber design set on a majestic rock bluff that offers dramatic elevation changes.

Among Kelowna's other exceptional courses is the Harvest Golf Club, where the links are intermingled with a fruit orchard and set against a backdrop of vineyards. Here, you'll find stunning scenery,

gourmet cuisine and a remarkable commitment to customer service. Predator Ridge, home to the prestigious Export "A" Skins Game in 2000, is also notable with its three courses and 27 rolling fairways artfully framed by the valley's mountains. And Kelowna Springs Golf Club – another Les Furber design – offers 18 championship holes, along with an 18-hole putting course with its own sand traps and water hazards that even first-timers will enjoy.

Meyers says that Okanagan-area courses stand out, in part, because of the climate. "Our product is second to none," she says, noting that the region's sunny, semi-arid climate and ample irrigation provided by Lake Okanagan add up to a competitive advantage: picture perfect greens and fairways from April into early November.

Of course, the Okanagan climate that nurtures the extended golf season also provides ideal weather for the grapevines and fruit trees that define the lakeside mountain



PHOTO: TOURISM KELOWNA

Kelowna's rugged, desert-like landscape poses a striking contrast to the region's lush greens and fairways.

slopes. Combining the best of both worlds, the Chip & Sip tours offered through Okanagan Wine Country Tours provide luxury transportation to golf courses and wineries, in one day or over several days. "It really seems to work well together," says owner Patti Tetreau of the customized tours. "It's wonderful just to see how enthused people are. They're completely surprised at how beautiful it is here, and the quality of the wines."

And autumn in Kelowna, when

the grapes hang heavy on the vines, offers a wonderful time to explore. Winter will bring the champagne powder ski season at Big White Ski Resort, but before then, the wineries are welcoming the harvest. And with wine, of course, comes the opportunity to dine – so hit a few balls, head out for a bike ride, and then sample Kelowna's outstanding bistros and restaurants...even book a spa treatment to ease those muscles. Enjoy all that fall in Kelowna has to offer.



Getting there

Situated midway between Vancouver and Calgary, Kelowna is the gateway to British Columbia's Okanagan Valley and is home to B.C.'s southern interior's only international airport.

BY AIR

Kelowna International Airport welcomes flights via WestJet (www.westjet.com) and Air Canada (www.aircanada.com) from Toronto, Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton, Victoria, Prince George, Kamloops, Grande Prairie and Seattle (Horizon Air).

BY CAR

From Vancouver, the 395-km drive to Kelowna takes approximately four hours via Highway 97C. From Calgary, via the Rocky Mountains, along the Trans-Canada Highway, the 602-km trip takes about seven hours.

For more information about Kelowna, call 1-800-663-4345, or visit www.tourismkelowna.com.

If you go:

Big White Ski Resort: www.bigwhite.com; 1-250-765-3101
Golf BC: www.golfbc.com; 1-800-1-GOLFBC
Kelowna Springs Golf Club: www.kelownasprings.com; 1-250-765-4653

Okanagan Wine Country Tours: www.okwinetours.com; 1-866-689-9463
Okanagan Wine Festivals' Society: www.owfs.com; 1-250-861-6654
Predator Ridge: www.predatorridge.com; 1-888-578-6688
The Harvest Golf Club: www.harvestgolf.com; 1-800-257-8577
For listings of these and other courses as well as dining and spa options, visit Tourism Kelowna: www.tourismkelowna.com; 1-800-663-4345