



Stargazers from around the world come to the Observatory Bed and Breakfast in Osoyoos to watch the heavens with the aid of a 16-inch computer-controlled telescope that is housed under a dome on top of the house.

Canada's only desert is in Osoyoos

From D12

Because for all the great things this working ranch offers visitors — a drop-dead-gorgeous location 180 kilometres southwest of Williams Lake in the remote Nemah Valley; a collection of deluxe log cabins, each with two bedrooms and a cosy sitting room; an extensive list of activities including horseback riding, fishing, hiking, biking, river kayaking and whitewater rafting — what really makes this place special are the people.

Setting the standard is charismatic general manager and head cow boss, Mike Hawksbury. Whether teaching a young buckaroo how to rope a (wooden) cow, showing a wannabe fisherman how to cast a line or entertaining guests with stories over dinner in the main lodge (one guest referred to him as "our own little Buffalo Bill"), Hawksbury embodies the best of western hospitality.

His staff follow suit. Wranglers Carey Goddard and Kim Moss charm hesitant greenhorns with their bright smiles and competent demure. Chef David Correa welcomes inquisitive food lovers to shoot the breeze while he whips up all

manner of delicious food, from simple turkey wraps to take on a day-long ride to wild mushroom cappuccinos and crab-stuffed snapper for dinner.

In fact, all the Elkin Creek staff seem to embrace a philosophy that goes something like this: You're here for a good time, not a long time, so have a good time. And yes, if you're lucky, the sun might shine every day.

More: Elkin Creek Guest Ranch, 1-877-346-9378; www.adventurewestresorts.com

South Okanagan: Osoyoos

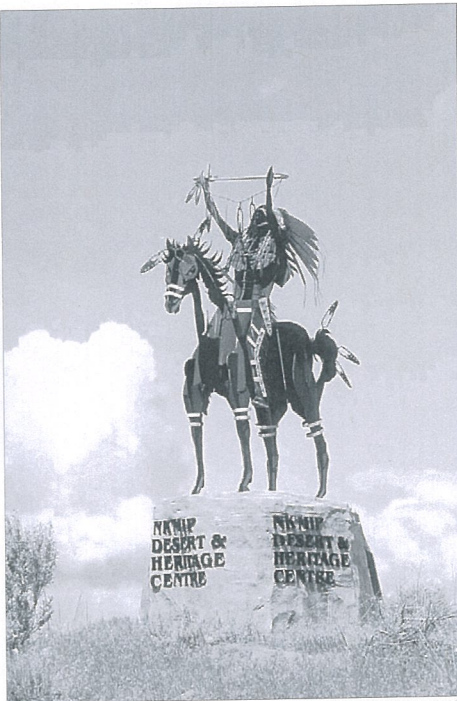
My mind is on fire. My soul is on fire. I'm feeling hot, hot, hot. Given that I'm hiking it through Canada's only pocket desert at high noon, my overheated status is not surprising.

I've just spent the morning at the NK'Mip (In-ka-meep) Desert Cultural Centre on a hillside outside of Osoyoos being immersed in the rich living culture of the Okanagan First Nations people. Highlights include the outdoor gallery of metal, rock and water sculptures representing local

legends, the soulful Coyote Spirit film shown in the theatre, and a display of art done by reservation school children in the 1930s and 40s (there's an intriguing Disney connection).

Now I'm rushing over to neighbouring NK'Mip Cellars, North America's first Aboriginal-owned and operated winery, for an afternoon of wine tasting, traditional First Nations cuisine and native dance. Thankfully, when I'm done all this merriment, it's an easy stroll to my condo-style suite at the four-star Spirit Ridge Vineyard Resort & Spa. Tonight I plan to dine at the resort's Passatempo restaurant and then pass-out after such a full day.

It's obvious this hillside is sizzling, and not just because of the climactic conditions. In addition to the cultural centre, winery and Spirit Ridge, this land is also home to the executive-sized Sonoma Dunes Golf Course and, right on Osoyoos Lake, the NK'Mip RV Resort. A long-popular campground, the resort now offers onsite trailers (for those of us who never want to see the inside of a tent again) and gas campfire pits (for roasting marshmallows when the inevitable



MAXINE HARTLINE/VANCOUVER SUN FILES

A magnificent larger-than-life statue, made by Smoker Marchand, marks the entrance to the NK'Mip Desert and Heritage Centre in Osoyoos.

fire bans are in effect). From the lake, you'll need to drive way up the hillside to reach the Observatory B&B, surely the hottest ticket in town based on how difficult it is to get a reservation. Stargazers from around the world flock here to hobnob with owner and internationally renowned astronomer Jack Newton and his wife Alice.

Each evening, with the aid of a 16-inch computer-controlled telescope that lives under a dome on top of the house, Jack will fly you to the moon and let you play among the stars. You might even see

what spring is like on Jupiter and Mars. Now how cool, I mean hot, is that?

More: NK'Mip Desert Cultural Centre, 1-888-495-8555; www.nkmpidesert.com; Spirit Ridge Vineyard Resort & Spa, 1-877-313-9463; www.spiritridge.ca; NK'Mip RV Resort, 250-494-7279; www.campingsosyoos.com; Observatory B&B, 250-495-6745; www.jacknewton.com; Destination Osoyoos, 1-888-676-9667; www.destinationosoyoos.com

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