



Photos, Courtesy Spirit Ridge Golf Course

View from the ninth hole of Sonora Dunes Golf Course overlooking Spirit Ridge Resort and Lake Osoyoos.

OKANAGAN OASES


LISA
VLOOSWYK

The southern interior of British Columbia is well known for its popular golf destinations.

It beckons players looking for an all-in-one vacation experience. A little golf, a little wine, fine dining and perhaps, if your arm is twisted, a siesta by the pool.

An increasingly popular destination is the town of Osoyoos.

Osoyoos boasts Canada's lowest annual precipitation, warmest annual temperature and warmest fresh-water lake. The golf season typically starts in February and runs through the end of November.

If you are looking for a destination resort, the new Spirit Ridge Vineyard Resort and Spa, on the edge of Osoyoos, is a must-stay. It is one of only nine four-star resorts in B.C.

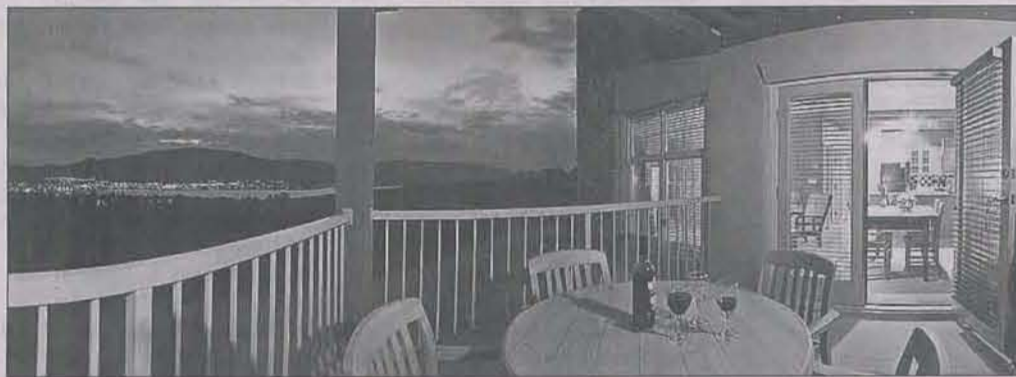
The 94 one- and two-bedroom villas and suites have a wonderful southwestern flair, giving you the sense you're nestled in a quaint town in New Mexico.

Spread amongst the rolling desert hills, Spirit Ridge is perfectly perched to offer stunning views of Lake Osoyoos and the Nk'Mip Cellars vineyard in its backyard, and is only steps away from the Sonora Dunes Golf Course.

Sonora Dunes is a desert links-style course located on site a chip shot away from the accommodations. This nine-hole, par-35 course is a fun-filled round chock full of risk-reward shots.

The holes weave through the desert landscape, trapping errant shots in rattlesnake country. Incredible elevation drops require appropriate club selection, but eagle and birdie opportuni-

Looking for an all-in-one vacation experience? Destination resorts in B.C.'s southern interior offer spectacular vistas, fine dining and lots of good golf



The private balcony of a Vineyard Villa at Spirit Ridge affords a stellar view of Osoyoos.

ties are there for the taking.

If you are looking for an 18-hole track, the Osoyoos Golf and Country Club is a must-play. Located in the heart of Osoyoos, this course is home to 36 holes.

The Park Meadows course is a favourite among members and visitors looking for a relaxing day on the links. For those players looking for a challenge, the newly opened Desert Gold course beckons.

Although only 6,500 yards from the tips, Park Meadows has bite. The course offers a stark contrast between the lush, green fairways and the desert landscape.

Be prepared for some major elevation changes. Whether it is a 50-foot drop to the fairway below or an elevated green, proper club selection is imperative if you plan to shoot anywhere near your handicap.

The stunning views of Lake Osoyoos and the beautiful orchards and vineyards below will keep you coming back time and time again.

If you are a wine connois-

seur, you will not want to miss Nk'Mip Cellars, located on the property. This 18,000-square-foot winery is North America's first aboriginal-owned and operated winery, and boasts spectacular views.

The wine showroom is an inviting, spacious area where knowledgeable staff offer a comprehensive tasting experience sure to help you leave your double bogeys behind.

To cap off your day, enjoy a relaxing, intimate and pampered evening at the contemporary Passatempo bistro-style restaurant located in the main building.

This is a dining experience you will not soon forget. An emphasis is placed on fresh quality ingredients, and special efforts are made to get regional fare, complimented by an extensive wine list featuring local wineries.

Coming soon to the resort will be a full-service spa offering wellness treatments that will be sure to keep you relaxed and rejuvenated.

For more information about Spirit Ridge or rates,

visit www.spiritridge.ca.

And for visitors to B.C.'s southern interior who are looking for an extended stay and a few extra rounds, look no further than Bellasera Tuscan Villas and Piazza, located five minutes from the Kelowna airport in the heart of the Okanagan Valley.

Bellasera is one of Kelowna's first resort residence clubs, ideal for monthly vacation rentals or snowbirds. This vacation property offers 58 luxury two-bedroom, two-storey villas on the second hole of the championship Quail Course at Okanagan Golf Club.

To make your stay complete, the Okanagan Golf Club is only minutes away. Two championship courses are available and are sure to delight and challenge golfers of all abilities along with a spacious and expansive practice facility.

The original course on this property is the Quail Course, designed by renowned course architect Les Furber. The Quail was built in 1994

and is the epitome of target-style golf. It would behoove players to know the yardage off the tee to the landing area, since driver is not always the best bet.

The elevated tees and greens place added pressure on club selection, and if you escape many holes with a par, you should count your blessings.

Tree-lined, undulating and multi-tiered fairways add to the splendour of the course. Unique holes such as the split fairway and massive waste bunker on No. 14, and a challenging finishing hole in which your drive comes dangerously close to the lake, keep you coming back to make up the lost strokes.

The other course is famed Jack Nicklaus' The Bear, opened in August 1999.

If you are looking for remarkable vistas, this course is for you. The views of the Okanagan Valley are fantastic and there are several dramatic elevated tees creating the illusion that your ball is weightless. Generous landing areas offer players a variety of club selections, and you don't have to be afraid to pull out the Big Dog.

The greens are undulating and well-bunkered, requiring precision on your approach shots. A ball on the wrong part of the green can quickly lead to a smooth three-jack.

Other great courses in the area include Predator Ridge, Gallagher's Canyon, Harvest, Kelowna Springs and Sunset Ranch.

If you are looking for a day off from the links, there are dozens of award-winning wineries in the region that you can check out.

Some must hits include Mission Hill, Gray Monk, CedarCreek and Summerhill Pyramid. Select a bottle of your favourite wine to bring back to your villa for a taste of Tuscany on your balcony.

For more information on the Bellasera properties, visit www.bellasera.ca.

LISA IS A FIVE-TIME CANADIAN LONG DRIVE CHAMPION AND CAN BE REACHED THROUGH HER WEBSITE AT WWW.LISALONGBALL.COM.

OSOYOOS

(MEANS: "NARROWING OF THE WATERS" IN LOCAL OKANAGAN LANGUAGE)

- Population: 4,800
- Elevation: 277 metres above sea level
- Average July high: 29 C
- Annual rainfall: 25 centimetres
- Annual snowfall: 40 centimetres
- Osoyoos Lake (Canada's warmest lake): Average summer water temperature, 24 C
- Hometown of Chuck Kobasew (NHL's Boston Bruins)
- Golf season: Feb. through Nov.

KELOWNA

(MEANS: "GRIZZLY BEAR" IN THE LANGUAGE OF THE SALISH PEOPLE)

- Population: 109,000
- Elevation: 344 metres
- Average July high: 28 C
- Annual rainfall: 28 centimetres
- Annual snowfall: 105.5 centimetres
- Okanagan Lake is 110 kilometres long
- Hometown of the late premier of British Columbia, W.A.C. Bennett, and the rock band, The Grapes of Wrath
- Golf season: March through Nov.