



Well Traveled – Canada’s Wine Country is in Native Territory

By *Pamela Irving*

I swirl the NK’MIP Reisling ice wine around my teeth, nibble on local artisan Carmelli’s goat cheese, my feet up on the balcony at **Spirit Ridge Resort** with a white fleecy robe wrapped against the evening chill. The air is so crisp I could take a bite out of it while I gaze at the setting sun in hues of peach and purple over Osoyoos Lake. I feel civilized, sophisticated and oh-so mellow.

While hubby enjoys hard adventure like **climbing mountains in Jasper National Park**, I am more of a soft adventure kind of gal – soft robes, soft cheeses, soft touch massage, soft pillows and duvets...



This area of the Okanagan Valley of British Columbia is home to the Osoyoos Indian Band, one of the seven bands of the Okanagan First Nations. The 32,000 acres they control are known as NK'MIP (pronounced in-ka-meep) which means bottomland. The Band developed the **NK'MIP Resort** to create jobs for their members by sharing their history and culture with visitors and by creating more respect for the unique Canadian desert environment. One of their most established businesses is **NK'MIP Cellars** which started here with vines planted in 1968. They are North America's first aboriginal-owned and operated winery and have won dozens of awards over the years.

I love the South Okanagan in the offseason. There is something sensual and sumptuous about the quieter energy and lingering scent of Indian summer. I love the leaves crunching underfoot and the earnest efforts of everyone to engage you as the season winds down. Winter here is just as beguiling and myriad activities can be found throughout the mountains in the region.

My evening began with a detoxifying Montecelli mud treatment at onsite **Sonora Desert Spa** and ended with a fabulous meal at **Passa Tempo** with owner and wine aficionado Paul LaGrange and his family. *Wine Spectator* magazine named Paul's wine list the best with over 200 wines to choose from.

Jeremy Luypen, athlete turned chef, served it up right. We started with rock salt shrimp followed by dry-aged steak and rounded out with dessert wine from another local vineyard, LaStella Moscato. Nice and apricot-y.

The next morning, Iris of sales takes me on a tour of Spirit Ridge, one of British Columbia's biggest resorts with full or partial ownership options and rental pool offsetting investment. Or you can just do what I did, and go for a few nights as a non-owner. Perfect for all ages, the Ridge rocks with boomers, babies, boppers and betweenies all grooving to the Okanagan spirit. Iris is a boomer who dresses like a betweenie. All the gals in the Okanagan, the California of the North, look like they live on the beach.



Russell Wuttunee gives a guided talk and chant about Okanagan First Nations landscape, flora and fauna. Credit: Pamela Irving

I wander over to the **NK'MIP Desert Cultural Centre** that promotes a better understanding of the Okanagan First Nations, also a partner in the Spirit Ridge resort. Interpreter Russell Wuttunee takes us on a desert walk where we carefully avoid moulted snakeskins (but no snakes), prickly cacti and learn about desert edibles. Russell, an award-winning Cree singer from Saskatchewan, blessed us with a chant in the round house at the end of the tour. Russell really puts the spirit in the ridge.