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Thom Tischik, executive director of Travel Penticton



From the rooftop of God's Mountain, enjoy a stunning view of the eastern shore of Skaha Lake. It's a great place to sit and relax after a day filled with adventure. *JANE MUNDY*

Because there's hardly any traffic these days, Penticton is like stepping back to a quieter, more peaceful time.

At the same time, this town of 35,000 people has seen a surge in craft breweries and new restaurants, and an urban winery in a former theatre — revitalizing downtown.

Although reservations are pretty much required, wineries and tasting rooms, cafes and restaurants already have plenty of space without having to rearrange the furniture.

“We want Penticton to be recognized as fuel-free, not just for the environment and community, but for your own personal health, both physically and mentally,” says Thom Tischik, executive director of Travel Penticton. He says this time of year, “mature” B.C. travellers would be heading south to their snowbird location but they aren't migrating this year.

Instead, they are wintering in Penticton. “As well, people are returning after many years of being away, and active senior travellers are mountain biking and cycling.”

KETTLE VALLEY RAILWAY

With so many bike lanes and quiet country lanes, cycling is a breeze in and around Penticton. And e-biking the Kettle Valley Railway (KVR) has got to be the most popular activity for those of a “certain age.” Built in the early 1900s, the KVR Trail linked the Kootenays and its mineral riches to the Canadian Pacific Railway's main line. Its tracks now comprise about 650 km of recreational trails and connected pathways throughout the Okanagan.

We fuelled up at The Bench Market, which boasts the best coffee in town and, grabbed a few doughnuts before hopping on our e-bike rentals at Freedom Bike Shop on Main Street.

We breezed past hikers and cyclists, exchanging morning greetings. On trestle bridges, over a deep canyon with jaw-dropping views of Okanagan Lake and the tops of pine trees at eye level, we whizzed up 639

PENTICTON MADE EASY BY E-BIKE

Explore its trails and trestle bridges, and indulge in all the culinary delights of this Okanagan paradise, writes *Jane Mundy*.



Writer Jane Mundy, left, says an electric bike is the perfect vehicle for exploring the vistas of Penticton.

metres to Little Tunnel, thanks to battery power.

After three hours and 17 kilometres each way, we pulled into Little Engine Wines on Naramata Bench for a tasting on the outdoor patio, and left with a few bottles of excellent Chardonnay.

“Range anxiety” is the buzzword for e-bikes not being able

to go far enough, but that won't happen if you book a tour with Hoodoo Adventures. One of the most popular tours, for both locals and tourists, is Myra Canyon: a shuttle from Penticton elevates you 1,219 metres) to the trailhead at Myra Canyon, starting at the most northern end of the Trestles. During the 80 km

cycle with a knowledgeable guide (who checks your battery) you'll learn about the culture and history of the railway and incredible engineering feats building about 8 km of track, 18 trestle bridges and two tunnels. After about seven or eight hours, you're back in Penticton.

“The invention of the e-bike

has opened the door for so many people who may have been intimidated by distance and altitude climb,” says Tischik, “and you get to experience what you may have done in younger years.”

“This was my first time on an e-bike and I was thrilled. I want to return and cycle the trail from Kelowna to Penticton, the downhill parts,” says my pal Carol Wallace, laughing. “And downtown is so cool with wide, flat streets. If I lived here, I wouldn't drive much.”

We could have ditched the car the entire trip if not for God's Mountain Estate, about a 15-minute drive from Penticton up Lakeside Road. This 14-room villa is both quirky and gorgeous and my penthouse suite was heavenly, if your taste runs to the eclectic. It reminded me of the PBS series *The Durrells* house in Corfu, circa 1930, with its glorious decaying splendour. Or think *Mamma Mia*, like a fading elegant Mediterranean villa.

Sarah, the proprietor, has filled every nook and cranny (and there are many) with family heirlooms and tasteful antiques, enough to constitute a small museum.

Breakfast is over-the-top amazing. There is so much food you're urged to take leftovers: a huge outdoorsy kitchen by the salt water pool is a caterer's delight and each room is assigned fridge space and cooking facilities.

A good plan is to get some activities in, lunch in town, visit wineries during the day and lounge about the estate in the evening before falling into a comfy bed wrapped in the finest cotton sheets. There are private places scattered about to curl up with a book and a glass of wine — it was hard to leave.

We would have happily spent our evenings at God's Mountain but for at least one restaurant on par with Vancouver's best. Elma is a big, artfully decorated space with Okanagan Lake across the road. The Turkish flatbread with minced beef was made even better with a fried egg cracked over the top, like breakfast and dinner in one bite.



Stop for a well-deserved rest and enjoy the breathtaking views from Little Tunnel on the Kettle Valley Railway as you explore the region by battery- or pedal-powered bicycle. *GETTY IMAGES*

We ordered another to take away. All mezes (appetizers) were worth doubling up, such as roasted eggplant with pomegranate molasses, charred red pepper, pan seared prawns. I've never had Turkish food this good outside of Istanbul.

Lunch has to be "Liam's Angry Chicken Sando" at Slackwater Brewing, another big bright room fuelled with an open-faced brewery. Co-owner Liam Peyton says he wanted a deep-fried spicy sandwich but the cooks couldn't quite get it right. "They were getting mad at me because I kept sending it back," says Peyton. "It's the crowd pleaser now, especially with a side of poutine and melted Gouda cheese."

Wayne and Freda's coffee selections are a hit with locals particular about their coffee, and the chai tea is terrific. The menu offers healthy bowls and smoothies and sneaks in a few meat items — like short-rib sandwich and bacon, all locally sourced.

With authentic and creative pies straight from a woodfire oven, we weren't steered wrong at Pizzeria Tratto. Big tomato cans repurpose as ice buckets and doorstops, and the reception desk is made from wood pallets. Save some arugula salad to dress Margherita and intriguing Bee Sting — with local honey and chili — pizzas.

If you're craving a burger, Time Winery & Kitchen — housed in a former movie theatre in downtown Penticton — is the ticket. Chef AK Campbell's menu features seven burgers: go for the Hot Shitake (vegetarian) and Blue Tatanka, blueberry bison and brisket. And a side of triple cooked tallow fries.

Maybe I should get back on the exercise bike at the gym.



The well-treed grounds of God's Mountain Retreat in Penticton are a welcoming and tranquil home base for your adventures. *JANE MUNDY*



Elma is an artfully decorated space with views of Okanagan Lake, serving such delights as Turkish flatbread and minced beef with an egg cracked on top.



Holy cannoli! Sicily's tastiest treats

Crossroad of cultures influences distinctive cuisine on southern island

RICK STEVES

As we've had to postpone our travels because of the pandemic, I believe a dose of dreaming can be good medicine. Here's a reminder of the fun that awaits us in Europe at the other end of this crisis.

While food may be an art form in Italy, it's more like a religion in Sicily. Sicilian cuisine will surprise you with its complexity — a legacy of successive waves of settlers and invaders who influenced the cuisine.

The first time you find yourself choosing between fish couscous and spaghetti Bolognese on the same menu, you know you're at a crossroads of cultures. Thanks

to centuries of North African and Middle Eastern influences, Sicilian cuisine includes distinctive ingredients such as couscous, almonds, ginger, apricots, cinnamon, and lots of citrus. Arabs who came here popularized fried foods which is why so many Sicilian street food classics — and even some pastas — are deep-fried. Sicilian cooking also comes with Greek and Spanish touches.

The Sicilian diet relies on Italian staples such as pastas, olives and tomatoes, but with a local twist. The island's warm temperatures and fertile volcanic soil mean that everything from citrus to nuts are available. Produce is plentiful — and sold at markets that more closely resemble an

Arab souk than a European marketplace. Seafood is abundant.

Sicily has a remarkable range of local specialties. Trapani, on the west coast, is geographically and culturally the island's closest point to Africa — and the best place to try couscous al pesce, couscous served with a side of fish broth that you ladle on.

In Catania, quench your thirst with a seltz e limone (seltz, for short) — fresh-squeezed lemon juice with seltzer water. They'll ask "sale?" to see if you want salt added.

Sicily also has its own pasta dishes. Anelletti al forno is ring-shaped pasta, baked with tomatoes, meat, eggplant and cheese. Busiate alla Trapanese is a twisty noodle topped with red pesto, made from almonds, tomato, garlic and basil. Pasta alla Norma is made with fried eggplant, tomato sauce and basil



Sicily's regional specialties include fish couscous and Busiate alla Trapanese, a twisty pasta with red pesto. *CARRIE SHEPHERD*

with salted ricotta cheese on top. A top-end choice for seafood fans is spaghetti ai ricci, spaghetti topped with sea urchin.

Sicilian desserts are delicious. The island's most famous and best sweets are cannoli. A crispy fried pastry tube is filled with sweetened ricotta, then dusted with powdered sugar. The mark of a high-quality cannoli is one

that's filled right when you order it — otherwise, the shell gets soggy. After tasting cannoli at a Sicilian pastry shop, I know why they say, "Holy cannoli."

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