

FAMILY TRAVEL



September apple harvest is a busy time of year at Davison Orchards in Vernon. The petting zoo, playground and rubber duck race track are popular with kids. *DAVISON ORCHARD*

HIT THE ROAD FOR SOME KID-FRIENDLY FUN

There are plenty of things to see and do in and around Vernon and Kamloops

MHAIRRI WOODHALL

Our annual Okanagan exploration was flipped on its head this year when we veered away from our standard wine country itinerary to focus on the sights and attractions found in, and around, Vernon and Kamloops. By setting a vacation goal to try new — for us — experiences, we managed to create new traditions that we're sure to revisit and enjoy for years to come.

KALAMALKA LAKE

Playing on — and around — Vernon's iconic Kal Lake is always a trip highlight for our family. Recognized by National Geographic as one of the world's 10 most beautiful lakes, the stunning kaleidoscopic water transforms from deep blue in winter to a dazzling display of turquoise and emerald hues in warmer months. This year we gave paddle boarding a try with an on-the-lake lesson through Kalavida Surf Shop. As our seven-year old wanted her own board, we spent the majority of our time in the shallow bay fronting Kalamalka Beach. It was a fantastic experience thanks to Kerry, our guide, who offered expert instruction and exceptional patience when teaching paddle basics to our daughter. Afterwards, we picked up a picnic lunch from the Rail Trail Café and relaxed on the beach. Another family-friendly lakefront activity is riding the Okanagan Rail Trail. Bring your own bikes or book a package through Predator Ridge. The golf resort community, where we stayed, now offers shuttle service between Coldstream and Lake Country, which covers a gentle 27-km stretch along Kal Lake. Plan for about 2.5 hours to complete the ride.

ALLAN BROOKS NATURE CENTRE

The Allan Brooks Nature Centre, a tiny hidden gem located just 10 minutes from Predator Ridge, was our most surprising road trip attraction. Although somewhat unassuming on the outside, the centre offers a multitude of treasures, including framed butterfly displays, dozens of bird nests and eggs, snake skins, animal skulls, antlers and bones, taxidermied creatures and an active honeybee colony. Once touring inside, we grabbed a map and wandered the Grassland Trail in search of the native birds, wildlife, flora and fauna we'd learned about. Marmot City, the Pond Learning Centre and panoramic views of the city of Vernon and Okanagan, Swan and Kalamalka lakes are just a few of the sights awaiting your discovery.

DAVISON ORCHARDS

Tour Davison Orchards for a delicious introduction to the Okanagan's bounty. Our agricultural adventure began at the Deep Dish Café. My daughter was thrilled with the kids' lunch bucket, served in a beach pail that included a sandwich, house baked cookie and freshly pressed apple juice. Next, we toured the orchard aboard a tractor-train, to learn about the variety of crops grown in spring, summer and fall. While each month — May through October — offers a unique experience, September's apple harvest is by far the most popular time to visit. The petting zoo, Crazy Cow Kids Corral playground and rubber duck race track were tops with our little one. Before leaving, stop by Davison's Country Market for fresh-picked produce, house baked pies, scones and tarts, pickles, jams, butters and locally made gifts.

PLANET BEE

Planet Bee, next door to Davison Orchards, is another tasty attraction worth checking out. Highlights for the kids include searching for the Queen Bee amid the 10,000 industrious workers buzzing inside the glass observation hive, and sampling 20 different varieties of honey. During July and August, the farm also offers special daily presentations sharing cool facts about bee species, pollination, harvesting and the important role that honey bees play in present-day agriculture. Tastings of Planet Bee's award-winning Honeymoon Mead are also offered on site between 9 a.m. and 3:30 p.m. Fan favourites include the handcrafted Blackberry Twist, Blushing Cherry Mead and Apricot Elixir.

HISTORIC O'KEEFE RANCH

At O'Keefe Ranch in Vernon we discovered the hardships and triumphs of pioneer life. Founded in 1867 by rancher Cornelius O'Keefe, the living history museum features more than 15,000 artifacts, displayed in original heritage buildings. Take a guided tour of the ornate O'Keefe mansion for a highly entertaining and informative tale about the cattle baron's legacy and family history, including his three wives and 17 children. Visiting the General Store for old-fashioned candy, checking out the Okanagan Valley model railway display and meeting Thomas the turkey and his farmyard friends were our daughter's most memorable ranch activities; while my husband will eagerly return for the generously sized prime rib dinner served at Cattlemen's Club restaurant on Friday nights.



Embark on a Canadian-style safari at the BC Wildlife Park in Kamloops. The not-for-profit sanctuary provides a permanent home to a plethora of injured and orphaned creatures. *MHAIRRI WOODHALL*



Discover a host of treasures at the Allan Brooks Nature Centre in Vernon. *MHAIRRI WOODHALL*

BC WILDLIFE PARK

In Kamloops, we spent a day learning about animal conservation and rehabilitation at the BC Wildlife Park. The not-for-profit sanctuary provides a permanent home to a plethora of injured and orphaned creatures that are unable to be released into the wild. You'll find everything from Arctic wolves, cougars and bobcats to elk, mountain goats and Bighorn sheep. While the two grizzlies and white Kermode bear are considered to be the park's top attractions, our favourite exhibit was the impressive birds of prey enclosure, where we viewed and learned about bald and golden eagles and five species of owls. If you're visiting in the summer months, pack bathing suits and towels for the splash pad. Park admission fees

also help fund the sanctuary's Fawcett Family Wildlife Health Centre, a specialized hospital that provides veterinary care and rehabilitation services for upwards of 500 animals per year.

BRUKER MARINA

Bruker Marina at Tobiano Golf Course on Kamloops Lake is a scenic spot for on-the-water play. Arrive early and the cost is just \$20 for a two-hour double-kayak rental. In the summer, plan to spend some time at the beach club after your paddle. Our daughter spent most of her time bouncing on the water trampoline, climbing the jungle gym and touring the floating candy shop. Complimentary beach chairs are available for day use, so bring a picnic or grab lunch-to-go from the marina restaurant. Power boats, jet ski and paddle board rentals are available, with discounted rates between 8 and 10 a.m.

IF YOU GO

While there are many accommodation options to choose from, we opted for suite-style properties with full kitchens. In Vernon, Predator Ridge offers one- and two-bedroom condos in a resort-like setting with an outdoor pool, multiple restaurants and small sundries store. The Sandman Signature Kamloops, overlooking Riverside Park, is an excellent choice for its one-bedroom suites, indoor pool and proximity to the downtown core, grocery stores and restaurants.

RIVERSIDE PARK

Riverside Park, just outside of downtown Kamloops, is a top spot for year-round family fun. Each night throughout the summer you can enjoy live music performances at the Bandsheep, with a food truck party and Brewloops Beer Garden every Wednesday evening. We always arrive early to let our daughter run around the playground and splash park, build sandcastles on the beach and swim in the Thompson River. The park also hosts a variety of festivals and events including the Ribfest barbecue in August and Kamloops Children's Art Festival in late September. To follow Mhairri's family travels visit: www.arrivaltravel.com