



Covert Farms is a pastoral fourth-generation family estate. GABRIEL CABRERA/DESTINATION BC



The Nk'Mip Cultural Centre provides hands-on learning for kids of all ages, such as the writer's daughter, Brooklyn. CURT WOODHALL

AUTUMN IN WINE COUNTRY

Oliver and Osoyoos a perfect way for the entire family to enjoy the best of the season

MHAIRRI WOODHALL

Autumn in Oliver and Osoyoos wine country is a gift. The region's naturally relaxed pace, verdant vineyards, and brightly coloured roadside stands, selling everything from freshly picked fruits and vegetables to ice cream cones and s'mosas, create a whimsical setting for a family adventure.

On our recent visit to the south Okanagan, we enjoyed warm fall weather, which allowed us to explore, play and dine outside for most of the trip.

Our family began at Covert Farms, a pastoral fourth-generation family estate, evoking the wonder and whimsy of a beautifully illustrated storybook. The fairy tale farm's picture-perfect protagonists, Shelly and Gene Covert, use regenerative farming practices for their 650-acre property.

Touring the estate's vineyards, pastures, and organic vegetable plots aboard the Covert's vintage cherry-red '52 Mercury truck gave us a hands-on glimpse into life on the farm. Livestock, including heritage chickens, ducks, pigs, sheep, rams, lambs, llamas, boars and highland cows, play an integral role in the farm's operations, and my daughter Brooklyn loved meeting and feeding all of them. However, her favourites were the beguiling barnyard boars "Dalilah" — a lumbering potbelly princess — and the cheekily chunky Hungarian Mangalica, Mr. Pickles, who boasts a fuzzy, fancy-fat royal lineage dating back to 1833, when the Habsburg emperor created the breed in Vienna. The tour also included blackberry picking and vineyard quality control — tasting cabernet sauvignon, merlot, cabernet franc, zinfandel, pinot blanc and sauvignon blanc grapes. Brooklyn quickly became an expert at both. Our grand adventure concluded with an estate wine and harvest charcuterie toasting, followed by

a jump on the humongous bounce pad. The farm also offers private campfire cookouts, with organic smokies and s'mores, as well as mini kids' tours and tastings, led by Gene and Shelly's high school-aged daughter, Rhya, allowing parents to sip in solace.

Family roots run deep throughout Oliver and Osoyoos wine country. Like Covert, Kismet Estate Winery is family-owned and operated by brothers Sukwinder (Sukhi) and Balwinder Dhaliwal. When the pair first arrived from India in the early '90s, Sukhi drove a tractor for Covert Farms, while Balwinder worked for a handful of wineries, including Black Sage. The dedicated, hard-working brothers eventually saved enough to buy some bare-land property to grow apples and then grapes for Jackson Triggs. Given the area's burgeoning wine industry, grapes soon became their sole focus, and in 2011 supplier became producer, with the launch of Kismet, meaning destiny. We had the great pleasure of a tasting led by Balwinder's son Gagan, who works in the vineyard four days a week, and the tasting room on weekends. Fantastic work ethic, given my daily dishwasher-emptying struggle with Brooklyn. Gagan's mother and sister were also busy behind the counter, cleaning glasses and tending the register. Kismet's Masala Bistro restaurant is another delicious family affair, with dog-friendly garden seating, offering a more relaxed setting with kids. Brooklyn gives the restaurant's mango lassi a five-star review, and I feel the same about the food.

The Coverts, Dhaliwals and many other local families settled in the south Okanagan because of its beauty, climate and rich soil, providing a wealth of agricultural opportunities. However, since time immemorial, this region has been home for generations to the Syilx of the Okanagan Nation. The



The charcuterie board at Covert Farms is a treat. CURT WOODHALL

Osoyoos Indian Band's Nk'Mip Cultural Centre at Spirit Ridge provides an exceptional hands-on learning experience suitable for kids of every age. Our visit began in the theatre, watching Coyote Spirit, the story of Lisa, an Indigenous teen who spends a summer with her grandparents on the reserve. Lisa's initial petulance toward two long, boring months in the hot desert resonated with Brooklyn; thus, she was mesmerized throughout the film.

An exhibition showcasing artwork from Indigenous students at the Nk'Mip Day School, circa the 1930s, also captivated her attention and interest. The Cultural Centre's interpretive guide was on hand, sharing stories and insights while weaving a tiny basket out of long grasses. We then met the slithery creatures in the Critters Corner display and wandered through the outdoor Living Lands. After, we visited Nk'Mp Cellars — the first Indigenous-owned winery in North America — for lunch at The Patio. This stunning outdoor

restaurant pairs farm-to-table cuisine with sweeping vineyard and lake views. Fall is particularly picturesque, and the food and service were terrific. Brooklyn became fast friends and took many selfies with our effervescent server, whose son, the chef de partie, artfully prepared my wild sockeye salmon.

We also had the good fortune to dine at Spirit Ridge's The Bear, The Fish, The Root & The Berry. Like its name, the restaurant's inventive menu is a nod to its Indigenous roots. Again, the staff were unbelievably kind, and Brooklyn somehow walked away with a new friendship bracelet. But it was the food that stole the show — from bannock and spreads and smoked cauliflower bibs and bobs to my impeccably prepared pan-seared halibut. I've since discovered that the restaurant's chef, Murray McDonald, was the founding executive chef at one of my bucket-list dream destinations — the award-winning, highly exclusive Fogo Island Inn, located on the far eastern edge of Newfoundland.

Enough said.

When we weren't eating ourselves into oblivion, you'd find us poolside at the Watermark Beach Resort — yes, in October. I spent most of my time wrapped in a robe watching Brooklyn burn an exorbitant number of calories climbing the waterslide stairs, as well as rating her launch poses — superman, yogi, backwards, etc. The new on-site dinner restaurant, 15 Park Bistro, is a great addition — we loved the lobster bar items — and the hotel's poolside barbecues made it easy to grill quick post-swim lunches. Watermark's location is excellent for families, especially for those like us travelling with a dog. Every morning, we walked along the beachside path and then to JoJo's Cafe, our favourite breakfast and coffee spot on Osoyoos' Main Street.

We stumbled upon another excellent trail at the Osoyoos Desert Centre, about a 10-minute drive from the hotel. Although dogs aren't allowed, the 1.5-kilometre interpretive boardwalk is brilliant for kids. We first checked out the indoor exhibits and picked up the Centre's trail map, loaded with cool facts about Canada's desert ecosystem. Brooklyn set our brisk boardwalk pace, eager to locate the informative signs noted in the map. She read about bats, badgers and birds, searched for coyote paw prints and even spotted a recently shed snakeskin. The family ahead of us on the trail had kids ages two to six, all of whom happily walked, ran and skipped along the entire path without complaint — a huge parental win.

Our first October trip to Oliver and Osoyoos wine country certainly won't be the last. Vibrant foliage, sunny south Okanagan temperatures and lower room rates are hallmarks of the fall harvest season, offering a welcome escape for families.

For more destination information, visit arrivalstravel.com

COMMENT

Expert advice on navigating the ups and downs of therapy

SUNNY FITZGERALD

This summer, I quietly marked a milestone: 52 therapy sessions in 52 weeks.

Knowing what to expect could have made some of it easier, so I've come up with some tips based on experience and advice from mental-health experts:

Determine your needs: As licensed therapist and trauma expert in Birmingham, Ala., Candyce Anderson said, "you don't have to have a crisis to see a therapist." There are innumerable reasons people seek therapy.

"Figure out what you want to get out of therapy," said Aisha R. Shabazz, a therapist, licensed clinical social worker and anxiety specialist in Philadelphia. Make a list of goals, such as processing trauma or grief, or acquiring tools to cope with anxiety. Write

down the issues that prompted you to consider therapy. Bring that list to the therapist and identify goals together.

Pick a therapist: Consider identity-related preferences. "For instance, do you prefer someone of a certain gender, racial background or nationality? Is it important for you to see someone who is LGBTQ-knowledgeable and affirming? Do you want someone who understands anti-racism? Your faith?" Anderson said. "Look closely at the therapist's profile," said Brittany A. Johnson, a licensed mental health counsellor in New Albany, Ind. "What credentials and experience do they have? Find someone that speaks directly to your pain points."

Ask whether they offer a free consultation. "Before you open up to someone, you want to have



There are many reasons — not just crisis — for someone to seek therapy, but you should know what you want from it. GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

a baseline level of confidence that they'll be able to help you," said holistic and culturally affirming licensed counsellor Sana Powell, in Austin.

Take time to settle in: The first session often involves info-gathering, so you'll likely touch on a number of topics rather than dive deep into one. Expect questions about your family, relationships, mental health conditions and goals.

"Your first session may be overwhelming emotionally, because this is probably the first time you've said things out loud that you've been holding in," Anderson said. It's normal to feel tired ... but a well-trained therapist

will do their best to 'send you out zipped-up,' Powell said. They may, for example, offer grounding techniques.

Practice between sessions: Engaging during sessions is a solid start, but much of the work happens outside of that time. "You have to do the work between sessions to really solidify and process everything," said Powell. For example, if you're working on changing a behaviour such as fawning (appeasement that can be a result of trauma), you'll need to learn to recognize what triggers that response in you and replace it with the new behaviour you've discussed with your therapist.

Create a buffer: You may have residual feelings, emotions and thoughts after a session, Shabazz said. "Give yourself space, physically and also emotionally, before moving on to the next thing," such as taking the long way to work or going for a walk. You may also need time to regulate your nervous system with strategies such as deep breathing and progressive muscle relaxation — to take you out of the hypervigilant mode.

Share on your terms: Find a trusted person you can count on to help process your experiences. "Sometimes you need someone — who understands and affirms therapy as a part of self-care — to talk to or just sit with you," Anderson said.

If you're not sure how to initiate the conversation, Shabazz recommended role-playing.

Expect ups and downs: There were weeks I made leaps forward and days when I felt I'd been yanked backward. But my therapist and the experts confirmed this is normal.

Celebrate: Your mental health achievements deserve to be celebrated. Therapy requires time, effort and courage.

For The Washington Post