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Swirl, sniff, sip, ski: In British Columbia's ice-wine country, these four S's create a tasty new to-do list.

By Susan Reifer

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Like California's Napa and Sonoma Valleys, B.C.'s wine country runs north-south in an arid, scenic basin that features several distinct growing regions, or zones of terroir. But unlike its California cousins, the Okanagan Valley boasts skiing less than an hour away. British Columbia powder and fine wine: There might not be a better pairing in snow country.

Located at the same latitude as Germany's Rhine Valley and France's Champagne region, the Okanagan's mix of aridity, cool nights and rich, well-drained soils produce classics such as pinot noir, cabernet sauvignon, chardonnay and pinot blanc, plus limited-edition ice wines—pressed from grapes that freeze while still on the vine.

In the summer, vineyards attract as many as 800 tasters per day. During winter, however, even the most visited tasting rooms see only 10 or 20 daily visitors. Without the crowds, skiers who love wine benefit from greater attention—and more generous pours. "In winter, we have the time to talk about the wines," explains a wine steward at CedarCreek, a boutique winery near Big White Ski Resort.

Like CedarCreek, most of the region's wine stops—notably Quail's Gate, Mission Hill and Sumac Ridge—are unknown to Americans. The reason? Less than five percent of B.C.'s wines are exported to the U.S. Of those, most are ice wines.

Start a wine tour in Big White, where the ski-through base village is second only to Whistler in size. Après-ski at Globe for limited-edition local wines paired with artisanal charcuterie and cheeses. From here, it's 45 minutes to the Okanagan's two most dramatic estate wineries, Quail's Gate (renowned for pinot noirs and exceptional dining) and Mission Hill (where the ice wine ranks world's best). Farther south is Sumac Ridge, the region's oldest estate winery, known for sparkling bruts and deep cabernets. These vineyards are such hidden gems that even skiers who didn't come with an appreciation for the fermented grape are sure to leave with one.

IF YOU GO:

INFO

Fly into Kelowna; there are nonstops from Seattle, Las Vegas and Vancouver.

CONTACT

[cedarcreek.bc.ca](#); [quailsqate.com](#); [missionhillwinery.com](#); [sumacridge.com](#)



Ice wine, a specialty of B.C.'s Okanagan Valley, is made with grapes that freeze on the vine.

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