

WITH: NEW ENGLAND DESTINATIONS

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A taste of Niagara



DAVID LYON FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

The thundering beauty of Niagara Falls.

NIAGARA PENINSULA, Ontario — It's hard to compete with Niagara Falls for inspiring awe and wonder. But as the Niagara wine industry has flourished, this compact peninsula on the southwest corner of Lake Ontario has quietly grown into a top foodie destination.

Our mid-May plan was to eat and sip our way through the region, but once we crossed into Canada at Niagara Falls, we couldn't just drive by the thundering natural wonder. We considered booking a sightseeing boat to cruise through the mists, and even toyed with the idea of sliding down a zipline from the high embankment to the river. Ultimately, we settled for walking from American to Horseshoe Falls and cycling the bucolic path that continues downriver

This peninsula on the southwest corner of Lake Ontario has become a hot spot to wine and dine

BY PATRICIA HARRIS AND DAVID LYON
GLOBE CORRESPONDENTS

to Lake Ontario.

By evening, we were back on our food and wine track as we settled at a window table in Elements on the Falls, a restaurant so close to Horseshoe Falls that spray spatters the glass. Because Niagara has some of Canada's richest farmland, chef Elbert Wiersema told us, he buys most of his provisions from within a 60-mile radius. He made his point by pouring a Niagara pinot noir to complement the Ontario lamb steaks sizzling on hot, flat Niagara River stones.

Apart from the cities of Niagara Falls and St. Catharines, the peninsula is largely farm country, with the main wine-growing district stretching about 30 miles along the south coast of Lake Ontario. Wine aficionados speak of 10 different sub-appellations, but one blurs into the next. It's easy to bike or drive the flat, straight roads, following blue signs with bunches of grapes to find many of the peninsula's

NIAGARA PENINSULA, Page M3



Learning to roll with June in Quebec

By Sue Hertz
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

When we roll into the Mont-Laurier parking lot, Patty from Vermont slips on the gloves she bought 2½ hours ago in Saint-Jerome. "I didn't think I'd need these in June," she mumbles. In her early 70s, she has biked all over the world, sometimes with her husband, sometimes with her sister, but she is not eager to hop on her light blue Trek today. She slides her wire-framed glasses up her nose and stares out the window at the gray sky, the evergreens bent sideways in the wind.

I, too, am reluctant to leave the shelter of the shuttle bus that carried 16 cyclists and our bikes over 125 miles to this empty train station deep in Quebec's Laurentian mountains. Patty turns her broad face toward me and smiles weakly. Rain splatters the windows. It is 46 degrees Fahrenheit.

"What were we thinking?" she says.

I can't speak for Patty, but for Bill, my husband, and me, the idea of pedaling the 202-kilometer Le P'tit Train du Nord rail trail through

pristine Canadian woods and lake-dotted valleys before the summer tourist tsunami arrives sounded ideal. And while during our vacation deliberations last winter we recognized that the trail's promotional photos of cyclists in bare legs and T-shirts were shot in August, we figured that June is a great month. Warm but not too warm. Lakes cool but not cold. Mosquitoes small and sparse. June is the month of peonies and roses. The Longest Day.

"I hope the snow is off the trail by then," the Saint-Jerome concierge said when we called. A Canadian joke, we thought.

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Part — perhaps a lot — of the fun of travel in general and bike holidays specifically is the anticipation, the expectation. Prowling bed and breakfast websites, checking out restaurant reviews, flipping through gear catalogs. Envisioning only warm days and cold wine. Feet never blister. Thighs never chafe. Wallets stay plump. The reality, of course, is that something, perhaps a lot of somethings, will go wrong, especially when you

CYCLING, Page M4

A wooden shelter offers respite from wet weather along Le P'tit Train du Nord rail trail.

Black gold fever in Oil Springs



CLAUDIA CAPOS FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

By Claudia Capos
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

OIL SPRINGS, Ontario — We spot the first wooden "walking-beam" pumpjacks nodding up and down in a farm field as we drive down southwestern Ontario's Oil Heritage Road toward Oil Springs.

In the heyday of Canada's black gold rush, pumpjacks, spring-pole drills, and Canadian pole drilling rigs spread like a swarm of locusts across the gumbeds around Black Creek in Lambton County. Horses hauled wooden tank wagons loaded with "black gold" along a plank road from Oil Springs to the railroad in Wyoming. Later, a railroad spur was built to transport the crude oil to refineries in Petrolia.

Today, the sultry smell of black gold still wafts over the Oil Heritage District, located a half-hour drive southwest from the Blue Water Bridge linking Port Huron, Mich., to Point Edward and Sarnia, Ontario.

This year the Oil Museum of Canada, a national

OIL, Page M3

Fourth-generation oil producer Charlie Fairbank III had a mural depicting the beginning of Fairbank Oil in 1861 painted on his barn near Oil Springs, Ontario.

Inside

NEWPORT, R.I.

RACING HEARTS

The Volvo Ocean Race is coming in May.

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Wine and dine in Niagara area

► NIAGARA PENINSULA

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roughly 90 wineries.

We began with two pioneers. Inniskillin wines opened in 1975 as Ontario's first licensed winery in almost 50 years. Co-founder Karl Kaiser, an Austrian immigrant, was determined to make and drink the wines of his new country. In addition to producing table wines, he and partner Donald Ziraldo electrified the wine world by making New World icewines — sweet, highly concentrated wines from grapes that have literally frozen on the vine. Conditions to make icewine are hit or miss in Germany and Austria, where the style originated. Inniskillin hasn't skipped a vintage since beginning in 1984. The winery even offers flights at its signature Icewine Tasting Bar.

A few miles away, former Algerian winegrower Paul-Michel Bosc planted Niagara's first commercial vineyard devoted entirely to European wine grapes. That was 1978, and he wanted to prove that the grapes of Burgundy and Bordeaux could flourish in cold-climate Niagara. Mission accomplished. Of more than two dozen wines produced at Château des Charmes, we opted for "Four at Four" — a tasting of four wines with four snacks at 4 p.m. The gamay noir grape might make even better wine here than in its native Beaujolais. The Bosc family's own distinctive clone ("Gamay Noir Droit") produces wine with an intense elderberry nose and soft tannins.

We found a snapshot of Niagara agriculture at the St. Catharines Farmers' Market (Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday at Market Square), which dates from at least the 1860s. In

mid-May, the tables overflowed with asparagus, rhubarb, lettuce, onions, radishes, and greenhouse tomatoes and sweet peppers. Baskets of cold-storage apples and colorful glass canning jars full of peaches demonstrated that grapevines haven't completely displaced the historic tree fruit industry.

Farming west of St. Catharines was long dominated by Pennsylvania Dutch Mennonites who came north in the 1790s. We observed that legacy when we drove up to Vineland Estates Winery, with its handsome timber and stone structures atop a hillside planted in riesling grapes in 1979. Founder Hermann Weis retained the buildings of a former Mennonite farm, placing the Vineland tasting room inside the soaring, log-timbered 1877 barn. Within the 1845 farmhouse, the Vineland restaurant serves sophisticated contemporary fare that's a match for the magnificent vineyard and forest views.

Where good wineries flourish, great restaurants often follow. Cave Spring Cellars, in picturesque nearby Jordan, claims the first winery restaurant in Canada. In 1987, the winery jump-started the village's rejuvenation by moving into a limestone building that had housed a vinegar works. Now a smattering of boutiques clusters around the winery and its sister property, Inn on the Twenty, across the street in a former sugar mill. The dominoes fell naturally. The founders planted an abandoned pear orchard in riesling and chardonnay grapes and produced their first wines in 1986. They created a restaurant in 1993 and opened the inn in 1996.

We appreciated the synergy,



PATRICIA HARRIS FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

Touring the Niagara wineries on bicycle is a popular pastime.

enjoying a leisurely meal in On the Twenty restaurant overlooking the wetlands of Twenty Mile Creek. After roasted Chinook salmon from Lake Ontario paired with a zingy Cave Spring riesling, we walked across the street to our room at Inn on the Twenty and called it a night.

Less than 5 miles away, Tawse Winery was founded in 2001 to emulate the great wines of Burgundy. The cunning modern architecture of the facility allows the entire winemaking process to be gravity fed, from the delivery of grapes at the top of a hill to the cellaring in oak in subterranean caves. The four-time Canadian winery of the year makes organic and biodynamic wines. They include a Mâconnais-style chardonnay and a flagship pinot noir that would be great with roast chicken. In contrast to the winery's sleek modernism, the vineyards are tended by a barnyard menagerie. Sheep graze on the lower canopy of the vines, while horses crop the upper canopy. Chickens strut up and down the rows, eating bugs and picking out weeds around the vines.

As Niagara gastronomy comes of age, craft brewing has

also exploded. Niagara Oast House Brewers, located on a rural highway outside Niagara-on-the-Lake, combines serious brewing with a refreshing playfulness. Its big red barn, built in 1895, has housed a fruit basket factory, a fruit packing plant, a farmers' coop, and even a John Deere dealership. Oast settled here in 2012 and goes through a silo of malted barley every three months. Franco-Belgian farmhouse ales in thick wine bottles are the brewery's forté. Oast's whimsical Rural Route canned beers include about a dozen made with local fruit, including a springtime strawberry rhubarb ale.

Genteel Niagara-on-the-Lake is home to the acclaimed Shaw Festival of new and classic drama. Downtown is anchored by the Victorian gingerbread Prince of Wales hotel, which serves a lavish daily afternoon tea. Inspired by their scones to make some at home, we stopped at Greaves Jams & Marmalades (55 Queen St.) for some Niagara fruit jams. That same bounty finds its way into the frozen confections of Il Gelato di Carlotta (59 Queen St.).

The town's Backhouse restaurant perhaps best exemplifies the Niagara food and wine ethos. We had read such raves (voted best new restaurant in Canada in 2016) that we were

If you go . . .

For an overview of Niagara wineries, see the Vintner's Quality Alliance of Ontario (vqaontario.ca). See Visit Niagara (visitniagara.com) for attractions, restaurants, and lodging. All wineries below are open daily. Restaurant hours vary with season. Prices are calculated at an exchange of US\$1 = CAD\$1.27.

WHERE TO STAY

Inn on the Twenty
3845 Main St., Jordan;
905-562-5336; innonthetwenty.com; rooms from \$167, On the Twenty entrées from \$23

Prince of Wales hotel

6 Picton St., Niagara-on-the-Lake; 905-468-3246; vintage-hotels.com/princeofwales/; rooms from \$180, afternoon tea from \$25

WHAT TO DO AND WHERE TO EAT

Elements on the Falls
6650 Niagara Parkway,
Niagara Falls; 905-354-3631; niagaraparks.com/visit/culinary/elements-on-the-falls-restaurant; entrées from \$22

Inniskillin Niagara Estate Wines

1499 Line 3, Niagara-on-the-Lake; 905-468-2187; inniskillin.com; tasting flights from \$15.75

Château des Charmes

1025 York Road, Niagara-on-the-Lake; 905-262-4219; fromtheboscfamily.com/chateau-des-charmes; tasting flights from \$11.80

Vineland Estates Winery

3620 Moyer Road, Vineland; 888-846-3526; vineland.com; tasting flights from \$11.80, three-course dinner from \$38

Cave Spring Cellars

3836 Main St., Jordan; 905-562-3581; cavespring.ca; tastings from \$1.60 per glass

Tawse Winery

3955 Cherry Ave., Vineland; 905-562-9500; tawsewinery.ca; tasting flights from \$6.30

Niagara Oast House Brewers

2017 Niagara Stone Road,
Niagara-on-the-Lake; 289-868-9627; oasthousebrewers.com; tastings from \$1.45 per glass

Shaw Festival

10 Queen's Parade, Niagara-on-the-Lake; 905-468-2172; shawfest.com; tickets from \$25

Backhouse

242 Mary St., Niagara-on-the-Lake; 289-272-1242; backhouse.xyz; tasting menus from \$55

surprised to find it in a small strip mall at the edge of town. Code requirements must be pretty strict for a restaurant that does all its cooking over burning logs at a waist-height stone hearth in an open kitchen. Chef Ryan Crawford and his cooks wear leather blacksmith's aprons.

Crawford and his wife, general manager Beverley Hotchkiss, grow much of the food on their farm. The chef does his own butchering, smokes his own fish, and ferments, pickles, and preserves everything the

restaurant can't serve fresh. Prunings from local peach and cherry orchards provide the wood for cooking. "People are always dropping loads of wood at my house," Crawford joked. The best seats are ringside at the chef's counter — close enough to feel the heat and to watch chickens and sausages slowly smoke behind the flames. To drink? Niagara wines, of course.

Patricia Harris and David Lyon can be reached at harrislyon@gmail.com.

Celebrate Canada's rich oil heritage

► OIL

Continued from Page M1

heritage site in Oil Springs, will celebrate the 160th anniversary of the discovery of oil at its Black Gold Festival on July 15 with musical entertainment, blacksmith demonstrations, and wagon tours to the adjacent working oil fields. The one-story white museum building, located at the corner of Gum Bed Line and Kelly roads, is surrounded by historic remnants of the early oil days, including the 1885 Oil Springs railway depot, the 1895 Langbank post office and a vintage blacksmith shop.

In the museum's front yard, Doug and I peer down into the hand-dug well where American-born businessman James Miller Williams first struck oil in 1858. The shallow hole is not much of an oil well by today's standards. A bucket used to haul up crude oil hangs by a rope from a three-pole derrick overhead. A metal grate covers the well's opening to keep curiosity-seekers from tumbling headlong into the "birthplace of the modern oil industry."

Williams's oil discovery ignited the black gold rush in the 1860s and launched North America's first commercial oil business. He also pioneered the manufacture of refined "illuminating oil" for lamps, earning kudos as the "Father of Refining."

Word of Ontario's oil strike spread black gold fever throughout Canada and beyond. Pennsylvania oil speculators and European immigrants flocked to Lambton County's mucky swamplands to seek their fortunes in the gumbeds. They quickly transformed Oil Springs and neighboring Petrolia from backwater settlements into thriving 19th-century oil boom towns with plank streets, lamplights, saloons and general stores.

Inside the museum, we meet up with Charlie Fairbank III, a fourth-generation descendant



CLAUDIA CAPOS FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

Visitors to the Oil Museum of Canada check out the first commercial oil well in North America, dug by James Miller Williams in 1858.

of the world's oldest petroleum-producing family and the president of Fairbank Oil. For decades, the Fairbank family has spearheaded efforts to preserve the oil heritage of Oil Springs, Petrolia, and Wyoming.

Family patriarch John Henry (J.H.) Fairbank started pumping oil in Oil Springs in 1861, and his great-grandson has carried on the 157-year tradition using the same 19th-century technology to operate wells on his 600-acre property. Fairbank Oil produces 24,000 barrels of oil annually, and has been selling its crude to Imperial Oil Company for a century and a half.

"We've been pumping oil longer than anyone, well, in the universe," says Fairbank, his eyes twinkling through a thicket of salt-and-pepper whiskers. "My great-grandfather became very successful."

Fairbank wends his way around the museum's displays of oil samples, early tools and drilling-rig models to a photo of his illustrious ancestor. Two years after drilling his first well, "J.H." revolutionized the oil industry by inventing the "jerkerline" system. The simple contraption allowed a single steam engine • connected to multiple pumpjacks via a network of moving wooden rods • to operate dozens of oil wells simultaneously. J.H.'s cost-saving innovation propelled him to promi-

nence as Canada's largest single oil producer, a founder of Petrolia and a member of Parliament.

At age 76, Fairbank has vivid childhood memories of growing up in Canada's oil country. "We lived in Petrolia, and as kids, we came down to Oil Springs to cut pine bushes at Christmas," he recalls. "I would see a forest of three-pole derricks lining Kelly Road. It was a magical sight."

In the museum's theater, we watch a 12-minute film about the early days of the black gold rush in Canada's Wild West. The road to oil riches was paved with hardship and mishaps. The first gusher, in 1862, sent crude oil flowing down Black Creek to Lake St. Clair, the watery divide between Canada and the United States, where it fouled the hulls of passing boats.

Once the surface wells around Oil Springs were tapped out, drillers used nitroglycerine torpedoes to "shoot the well" and break through the limestone rock below • often with disastrous results. Oil field fires were common, sending flames and smoke 100 feet into the air. Canada's relentless quest for oil reverberated around the globe. Between 1874 and 1945, 500 Canadian "foreign drillers" traveled to remote locales in 87 countries to open new oil fields and plant the seeds of petroleum production.

An interactive display inside a large canvas tent transports visitors back to an era when the "Lambton boys" battled deadly mosquitoes, hostile natives, violent revolutionaries and brutal weather to drill oil wells in Borneo, Sumatra, Egypt, Russia, and Venezuela. In the base-

ment, glass cases display trophies and trinkets, including Amazonian spears, a Borneo headhunter's knife and a tarantula, brought back by the foreign drillers from exotic places.

At noon, we are joined by Patricia McGee, who has authored books about her husband's famous oil family and Canada's oil history. The couple drives us around the Oil Springs historical trail, where life-size metal sculptures pose next to horse-drawn tank wagons, power houses, pumpjacks and ash-pole derricks. "We wanted to tell a story through these vignettes," McGee explains. "The images are based on photographs and portraits of real people."

We wind up at the Fairbank family's yellow farmhouse to admire their 1913 barn with its iconic mural of a man driving a horse-drawn oil tank wagon.

Oil Springs's oil boom went bust in 1866 when the first gusher was struck in Petrolia,

drawing muckers and greasers eight miles north. Wealthy oil barons, including the Fairbank family, built elaborate Victorian mansions in Petrolia, which produced 90 percent of Canada's oil for 40 years.

To complete our exploration of the Oil Heritage District, we head to Petrolia, the "cradle that rocked the oil industry," and park at the Farmers' Market, which is a big draw during the summer. On Station Street, we step inside Van Tuyl & Fairbank Hardware, owned by the Fairbank family since 1865, to marvel at the nuts and bolts and gizmos and gadgets that have kept the oil business humming for 153 years.

A stroll through Petrolia's downtown takes us past the 1903 Victorian-style Grand Trunk Station (now the public library) with its dramatic red turrets. We stop at the gift shop inside the 1894 Olde Post Office before going to Victoria Hall on Greenfield Street, where we

meet Laurissa Ellsworth, who gives us a quick tour. She tells us the 19th-century Queen Anne-style public building, notable for its clock tower, was rebuilt after a 1989 fire.

Today, it is the home of Victoria Playhouse Petrolia, a popular summer theater that attracts 50,000 visitors annually. In the entryway, we admire two Oil Heritage stained-glass windows, presented to the town by Fairbank Oil.

"Our oil heritage is a remarkable story that we need to keep retelling," Ellsworth says.

If you go . . .

For more information about the Oil Museum of Canada, visit www.lambtonmuseums.ca/oil or call 011 + 519-834-2840. For more information about Petrolia, visit www.town.petrolia.on.ca or call 011 + 519-882-2350.

Claudia Capos can be reached at capocomm@sbglobe.net.

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