

THE BUFFALO NEWS

 **PRINT THIS**



Guests can dine, enjoy wine and stay the night at the Merrill Inn in Picton, which also helps organize winery tours.

One-Tank Trip /Picton, Ont.

Time is ripe for Picton's Taste! festival

By Gary May

SPECIAL TO THE NEWS

September 20, 2009, 6:50 AM /

PICTON, Ont.—It might occur to the visitor that the vintners are daft. Why else would they be meticulously

laying their valuable grapevines in shallow trenches and mounding soil overtop them?

Burying the vines in winter has become an annual rite in Ontario's Prince Edward County, required maintenance to ensure the canes are protected from winter kill. In this peninsula that's nearly an island, located on Lake Ontario's northeast shore, January and February temperatures can drop several degrees below those of the Niagara region and New York's Finger Lakes wine district, placing the finicky grapes in peril.

Burying the vines is a ritual that takes time and patience and adds to the cost of producing wine here. But it has allowed vintners to produce some fine pinot noir, Riesling, chardonnay and cabernet franc wines from the vitis vinifera vines that thrive in the limestone soils and short, hot, dry summers.

Transplants from Canada's cities, lady and gentleman farmers, newcomer vintners, and artists and artisans have changed the face of what was once a poor rural region. Many have opened wineries and shops.

Spas, fine dining and luxury accommodations, cookery schools, art galleries and antique shops are sprouting up alongside roadside fruit and vegetable stands and economy motels throughout the county that has been dubbed Canada's "burgundy" region. But the solid, century-old farmhouses, the green fields and farm villages remain.

Western New Yorkers are long familiar with Canada's Niagara wine district, just across the Niagara River, but few may be aware of this upstart region farther up the lake shore from Buffalo, even as it has been gaining widespread praise.

Festivals begin at maple sugar time in March and carry on until autumn. There are studio and gallery tours, live theater, entertainment and various salutes to the vine, but perhaps the best festival is the annual Taste! celebration, tied to the fall harvest and scheduled this year for Sept. 26.

Taste! pays tribute to the region's cuisine as well as its wine. Local favorites include pan-seared perch, elk goulash poutine (poutine is a French-Canadian favorite consisting of melted cheese curds in gravy slathered over French fries), old cheddar, creamy rhubarb-ginger ice cream and lavender-scented chocolate truffles.

Among the not-to-be-missed highlights of a visit to Prince Edward County are:

- The sand dunes of **Sandbanks Provincial Park**. They have been kicking around, shifting and moving, since the end of the last ice age about 11,000 years ago. More recently, this largest stretch of sand beaches on Lake Ontario has become wildly popular with campers and day-trippers looking for a sunbathers' paradise.
- There are 14 or so wineries, with Norman Hardie **Winery and Vineyard** offering some of the best pinot noir and chardonnay wines available in the county, albeit at a higher-than-average price (expect to pay \$30 or more). Don't be fooled by the unassuming barn that greets you, or by the likelihood you'll have to step over a pile of rubble on your way to the not-well-marked entrance. Hardie's 2007 County Pinot and the 2007 County Chardonnay (rich, velvety) are worth a taste.

For a place that's friendlier on the wallet and produces several fine vintages, try **Sandbanks Estate Winery** (check out the baco noir reserve).

Several wineries offer interesting places for lunch, but the one offering the most spectacular view is **Waupoos**, at the far eastern corner of the peninsula. For winery accommodation, **Huff Estates** has a 21-room inn, including six whirlpool suites and the 1,100-square-foot winemaker's suite.

Offbeat food stops include **Picton's Buddha Dog**, with its Formica tabletops and fabulous hot dogs. Try yours with the red pepper jelly and cheddar. Arguably the best ice cream in the county can be found at **Slickers** in Bloomfield. Slickers is also home of the rhubarb-ginger ice cream. And if you're a cheese fan, head over to the **Black River Cheese Company** at Milford. They've been making cheese for more than a century.

Among the other fine accommodations is the **Merrill Inn** and the **Claramount Inn and Spa**, both at Picton. Both

offer packages that include winery tasting tours and sumptuous dinners. The Claramount's overnight packages begin at \$162.50 per person and the Merrill's two-night stays start at \$275 per person.

County chefs pride themselves in cooking with locally produced food. Another fine example of local food presentation is the **Waring House** at Picton, which also offers dining and accommodation packages, as well as cooking classes.

For a variation on the wine theme, pay a visit to the **County Cider Company**, past Picton, where owner Grant Howes performs his magic on the simple apple. Howes turns his apples into an ice cider that is ambrosia, a velvety drink that has more in common with a fine liqueur than cider. It is indeed a place where the "cider house rules."

If you go:

Prince Edward County is 240 miles from Buffalo. From the Peace Bridge take the Queen Elizabeth Way to Highway 427, north on 427 to Highway 401 and east on 401 to exit 522 (Wooler Road) near Trenton. Head south on Wooler for four miles to Loyalist Parkway, which takes you into the county.

Useful contacts:

Huff Estates Winery: www.huffestates.ca or 866-484-4667. Norman Hardie Winery and Vineyard: www.normanhardie.com or 613-399-5297. Prince Edward County tourism: www.pec.on.ca/Sandbanks Provincial Park: www.ontarioparks.com/english/sand.html Claramount Inn: www.claramountinn.com or 800-679-7756. Merrill Inn: www.merrillinn.com or 866-567-5969. Waring House: www.waringhouse.com or 800-621-4956. Black River Cheese Company: www.blackrivercheese.com or 888-252-5787.

Reader comments

There on this article.

Rate This
Article

Log into MyBuffalo to post a comment

MyBuffalo user:

Password:

Log In 

[Forgot your password?](#)

What is MyBuffalo?

MyBuffalo is the new social network from Buffalo.com. Your MyBuffalo account lets you comment on and rate stories at buffalonews.com. You can also head over to mybuffalo.com to share your blog posts, stories, photos, and videos with the community. [Join now](#) or [learn more](#).

sort comments:

Showing comments to of (pages total).

Find this article at:

<http://www.buffalonews.com/185/story/801351.html>

Check the box to include the list of links referenced in the article.

© 2008 The Buffalo News.