



British Columbia's Garden Spot

BY KURTIS KOLT

RURAL YET
REFINED, THE
FRASER VALLEY
IS A BOUNTIFUL
HARVEST OF WINE,
BEER AND
FARM-TO-TABLE
DINING

Quietly nestled between the cosmopolitan metropolis of Vancouver and the United States-Canada border, and west of the booming Okanagan Valley wine region, British Columbia's Fraser Valley is where the province sources much of its bounty. But for those in the know, the region is also a close-to-the-heart tourist destination, whether you're coming from Seattle or Sydney, B.C., or all points in between.

Much of the fertile valley sits snugly south of the mighty Fraser River. Moderate temperatures, diverse soils and proximity to water have allowed the Fraser Valley to become the garden of this picturesque corner of the world, where much of the area's berries, orchard fruits and vegetables are grown. It is also a hub for poultry

and dairy farmers. This makes the rural cities, towns and villages of the region ideal for farm-to-table dining, boutique wineries, craft breweries and more.

Getting from one spot to another is straightforward — the easily navigable roadways along attractive routes feature rolling family farms, roadside fruit stands, chains of mountains in the distance and Washington state's Mount Baker rising handsomely above it all. The sense of community is palpable throughout the valley, with locals always eager to help with directions or, more likely, pointing a traveler toward the next great spot for sips and snacks.



EXCELLENT COFFEE, AS EXPECTED IN THE PNW

Just because the Fraser Valley is apart from the big cities, that doesn't mean there is a shortage of excellent coffee — it is still a stone's throw from the java epicenter of Seattle, after all. **AURORA CAFÉ + ROASTERY** in Abbotsford is a newer café that will hit the spot whether you're stepping in for a quick espresso to go or looking for more of a sit-down nosh. (Time seems to slow down here in the Fraser Valley, so we recommend the latter.) Roasting their beans in-house, Aurora also features an excellent array of baked goods, which include classics like a blueberry jam biscuit to more unique treats. Multigrain truffle croissant, anyone?

Just a few blocks away in Abbotsford is **OLDHAND COFFEE**, which serves coffee from an array of cool-kid roasters, a good slate of baked goods and sandwiches, and a micro bottle shop featuring wines to go from natural and organic producers, both local and global. When in Fort Langley, step into Gasoline Alley just tucked away from the heart of town and discover **REPUBLICA COFFEE ROASTERS** situated in a quiet, sun-dappled nook alongside various local merchants. Although the specialty here is Fair Trade coffee, don't miss the solid selection of artisan sodas, kombuchas and other fun treats.



Cannon Estate Winery



DEEP ROOTS AT FRASER VALLEY WINERIES

With wineries offering everything from crisp and fruity sparklers to rich and rugged reds, the Fraser Valley wine country offers a little something for everyone. The Etsell family behind **SINGLETREE WINERY** in Abbotsford has a background in growing blueberries and raising turkeys not too far from their estate, so their local roots run at least as deep as the Siegerrebe and Pinot Gris vines they tend on the property. The whites are quite lively and juicy, but for those looking for opulent reds like Merlot, Singletree sources those grapes from farther east — the Okanagan Valley's sun-baked Naramata Bench. A little rain falling? No worries. You'll find a couple of adorable "Di Vine Domes" at the foot of the vineyard where you can cozy up with some wine and perhaps a local cheese or two.

The ambition at the brand-new **CANNON ESTATE WINERY** in Abbotsford is clear, judging by their sharp new digs. Locals Andi and Justin Manuel gained a deep passion for B.C. wine, spending plenty of time in the Okanagan over the years. This led them to break new ground figuratively and literally for what has become the new stomping grounds for French-born viticulturist and winemaker Patrick Blandin. Fresh, lively blends like Bonhomous — a Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc and Pinot Blanc-driven ode to Sancerre — are what should be in your glass the moment you step up.



Chaberton Estate Winery

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Whispering Horse Winery

Over in Langley, **CHABERTON ESTATE WINERY** is a bit of a rite of passage when wine touring around these parts. While the oldest and largest vineyard in the Fraser Valley has many varietals including Siegerrebe, Ortega and Gamay Noir in the ground, it's their Bacchus coming from 35-year-old vines that's had people flocking there for its peachy, honeyed, lip-smacking goodness for decades. Enjoy a glass or two at the on-site **BACCHUS BISTRO**, while tucking into fare like pan-roasted Columbia River steelhead or Fraser Valley duck leg confit with beluga lentil salad.

Of course, a glass of sparkling wine is always worthy of a toast, and for some of the best around here, you'll want to hit **TOWNSHIP 7**'s Langley outpost. (They also have an Okanagan spot in Naramata). In the energetic tasting room, we recommend reserving a spot for the Seven Stars tasting flight, featuring an array of traditional-method fizzes you can enjoy with local charcuterie and cheeses.

A quick jaunt over to Chilliwack is worth the trip to visit Laurent Fadanni and Melissa Giesbrecht, the lovely young couple behind **WHISPERING HORSE WINERY**. As coproprietors with Giesbrecht's parents, the family opted to take the family's historic horse ranch property in the direction of wine growing, with Fadanni at the helm providing honest takes on local grapes. Working solely with cool-climate grape varieties that thrive in the region like Seyval Blanc and Pinot Gris, the winery offers everything from pét-nat sparklers to a squint-and-it-could-be-Muscadet L'Acadie Blanc called Les Galets.



Farm Country Brewing

HYPERLOCAL BEER AND CIDER

One of the best parts of touring wine country is the moment when it is time to pause and, instead, enjoy a cool, refreshing ale or cider. **TAVES ESTATE CIDER**Y in Abbotsford is a product of three generations of family farming that currently includes over 60 acres of eggplant, heirloom tomatoes, currants, pumpkins and — you guessed it — apples. In fact, throughout spring, summer and fall, there are plenty of activities on the farm for families and kids of all ages like u-pick goji berries, corn mazes, hayrides, pony rides and many other forms of hoopla. Of course, the craft cider is what many are here for, and there's nothing better than lazing in Adirondack chairs with a flight of favorites while the couple-dozen cute-as-a-button goats that live on-site frolic nearby. While there are beloved classic styles, do opt for unique pours like gooseberry cider or the barrel-aged vintage versions.

For a good snapshot of Fraser Valley craft beer, there is no better place than the **BARLEY MERCHANT** in Langley. Boasting 50 taps of ales made exclusively in British Columbia, the best way of doing things is getting the friendly and super-knowledgeable staff to build you a flight. Flights can be kept hyperlocal with gems from places like Langley's **FARM COUNTRY BREWING** or Abbotsford's **FIELD HOUSE BREWING CO.** Don't sleep on the food either; everything in the kitchen is made from scratch. Think mac 'n cheese with white cheddar, Parmesan and mozzarella cheese with bacon, farmer sausage and craft beer.



Barley Merchant

FARM-TO-TABLE DINING, NATURALLY

Wine touring and rural strolling can work up an appetite, and with the abundance of ingredients grown in the region, you can bet top-tier cuisine is never too far away. **REVIVE BOUTIQUE BISTRO** in Abbotsford is an Instagram-worthy hybrid of retail and restaurant. On the boutique side, peruse jewelry, bath, body and home products, then settle into the comfy, airy, plant-filled room to share plates like hummus, bruschetta, cheese and charcuterie. **RESTAURANT 62**, also in Abbotsford, has been knocking people's socks off with their elevated, homespun cuisine for many years now. Chefs Matthew Nichols and Jeff Massey take farm-to-table to heart with comfort food like Thiessen Farm pheasant pierogies and Maple Hill Farm chicken breast with risotto and beetroot sauce *vierge*.



Field House Brewing Co.



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Sabà Bistro



Brookside Inn Boutique Hotel



Valley Commons Bistro & Tasting Room

VALLEY COMMONS BISTRO & TASTING ROOM in Fort Langley is the satellite tasting room for the winery's Fraser Valley and Okanagan ventures. Enjoy shared plates of delights like tuna tartare, and a flatbread with truffle cream, mozzarella, prosciutto, Parmesan and pea shoots; they'll all be washed down well with their juicy, cherry-laden rosé and other bottlings. This wine bar fits into this little village well, yet we can imagine it being just as at home in the hipper corners of Seattle or Portland. **SABÀ BISTRO** is a Mediterranean-influenced bright and breezy escape, where you'll have to fend off the many locals who adore the place to nab yourself a table. It's definitely worth it for tasty bites like lamb meatballs, warm mushroom paté, and a veal chop with Parmesan risotto. Don't snooze too late though; their brunch is a must for everything from granola to shakshuka and a good roster of inventive daytime cocktails. You're on vacation, right?

SLEEP IT OFF ... AND START AGAIN

Need a place to stay? There are some creative Airbnb offerings dotting the Fraser Valley, but for a one-of-a-kind experience, book one of the quaint film-themed rooms at **BROOKSIDE INN BOUTIQUE HOTEL** in Abbotsford. It's a cozy B&B, with six charming rooms with odes to favorites like Under the Tuscan Sun and the Secret Garden. Have business you need to tend to? Langley's **SANDMAN SIGNATURE HOTEL** has all the comforts and service the brand is known for, with a business center, meeting rooms and banquet facilities. The pet-friendly hotel also has a fitness center and a pool for any time you may need a well-deserved break. ●