

2011 Best RESTAURANTS



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Contributions by
Laurie Carter and Karen Slivar

Results of your vote!

Opening spread (cw): Herb crusted rack of lamb Hooded Merganser (Penticton);
dessert Bouchons Bistro (Kelowna); pizza Kettle Valley Station Pub (Penticton); savory
bites Crush Bistro (Vernon); specialty coffee Lake Country Coffee House (Lake Country).





Best Indian Experience

Dawetts
1435 Ellis St., Kelowna
250.717.1668

For years our readers have hailed Dawetts as a top pick for Indian food and I have to agree, although my reasoning may be different. While this classy eatery is renowned for its tandoor cooking style, I rarely get past my old standbys. Heading the list is butter chicken (I know, stoke up your taste buds, girl!). But I can't help it—tender chicken chunks with a thick, creamy tomato sauce that absolutely demands a second order of naan to sweep every vestige of sauce from the plate (and serving dish). And let me wax poetic about the naan itself, baked fresh on the hot walls of the tandoor clay oven. Another must is aloo gobi, which I have to order as “the one with the potatoes and cauliflower” because of my mental block about the name. My man is big into lamb, so the vindaloo always finds a spot on our table after we've polished off the curried mussel starters. No tandoori, but what a meal. —Laurie Carter

Best Memories of France

Bouchons Bistro
105-1180 Sunset Dr., Kelowna
250.763.6595

Bouchons instantly transports me to memories of a little bistro in the Latin Quarter. White linen, stained glass and brass rails, the cabaret sounds of Ertha Kit and a cocktail menu with kir royale and Campari and soda. Richard Toussaint and Martine Lef'bvre alternate evenings, personally welcoming guests. If you're looking to satisfy your longing for bouillabaisse or cassoulet, this is the place, although I enjoy the adventure of the weekly chef's table menu that offers two choices for each of three courses for a very reasonable set price. My taste buds remember baked pear and blue cheese tartlet, and duck breast paired with wines drawn from among the 170-label French and Okanagan dominated peek-in wine cellar. Extra treats include a paper cone of crisply perfect pommes frites to share and perhaps a little refresher like pepper/blackberry granular sorbet. Creme caramel for dessert. Sigh. —Laurie Carter



Best Taste of City Life

The Bohemian Café
524 Bernard Ave., Kelowna
250.862.3517

The first time I walked into the Bohemian Café, I thought, wow, I'm back on College Street in Toronto. Vibrant red walls liberally sprinkled with celeb posters, dressed tin wainscoting and an assortment of mismatched furniture both antique and modern, strongly support the name Bohemian, although everybody just calls it the Boh. Open only for breakfast and lunch, Wednesday through Sunday, this is the spot for a walloping great Saturday morning omelette (I'm partial to the Mexican). If you're dropping in for lunch, bring a serious appetite for fresh cut sandwiches with homemade ingredients. I never make it past the chicken breast with pesto, although I'm told the mango chutney turkey salad is over the top good and you have to order a side of broccoli salad—the only way this veg should be consumed. On the lighter side there's quiche, homemade soup and salad along with daily specials. —Laurie Carter



THE BOHEMIAN CAFE, DAWETTS AND BOUCHONS BISTRO PHOTOS BY LYDIA ROSS

Best Place for a Break

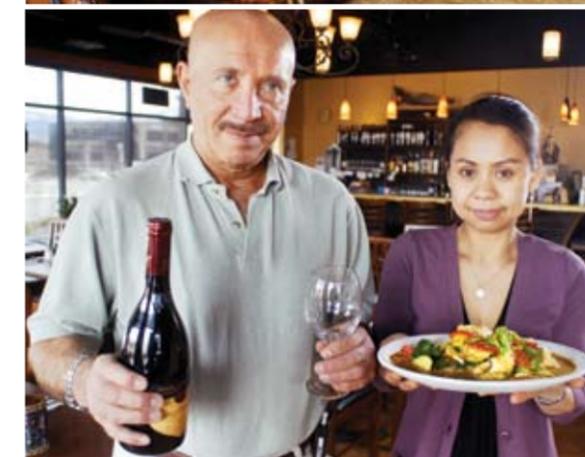
Lake Country Coffee House
10356 Bottom Wood Lake Rd.
250.766.9006

One afternoon while driving around Winfield I noticed a sign on the highway for Lake Country Coffee House and decided a cup of tea would hit the spot. From the number of cars in the parking lot it looked like a few others had the same idea. Walking inside was like slipping on a comfy sweater. Barnboard, bookshelves, artwork and an assortment of tables and chairs filled the space. The snaking overhead rail gives away the building's former life as a butcher shop. My break morphed into an early dinner. I sipped on a Glasgow fog (Earl Grey latte with a shot of vanilla syrup) and devoured a homemade ginger snap while I waited for my sun-dried tomato panini. The wait was worth it. It came out hot with ooey goeey brie cheese. The next day I was back with hubby in tow. I highly recommend the ginger peanut soup, a slice of plum cake (meal size) and a health bar for the road. —Karen Slivar

Best Wine Time

The Rotten Grape
231 Bernard Ave., Kelowna
250.717.8466

I get a kick out of the irreverent name and I think this tiny, stylish emporium is the ideal place to meet over a glass of wine and reconnect with friends. It's also my go-to spot for a taste of the grape and a bite to put me in the perfect mental state for an evening with the symphony. We tend to settle at a bistro table although it's also fun to hold up the bar and make new friends as we watch Rita pour. With technology (way over my head) to preserve the wine while they dole out single servings, this is a great spot to get acquainted with some 200 wines. I usually try the three-wine flights to make head-to-head comparisons. But you can just go for the gusto and order a full glass of your fave. The nibbles are terrific. I'm in a rut with the candied nuts and meze trio. Bigger bites include soups, salads, thin-crust pizzas, flatbreads, Oceanwise seafood and land fare. Open evenings from Tuesday to Saturday. —Laurie Carter



Best Ethnic Food Experience

Soban Korean Bistro
530 Bernard Ave., Kelowna
778.478.9638

A treasure waiting to be discovered: kimchi, jopchae, b-bop, jakshik. This was our first experience eating Korean food. Unfamiliar with the dishes we opted for a dinner combination to get the full experience. We started the meal with kimchi—a traditional Korean dish of raw, highly spiced, pickle cabbage. This one left our taste buds tingling. Next up was jopchae, a dish made from stir-fried sweet potato noodles tossed with vegetables. Normally, we don't eat highly spicy food so we found this dish to be quite hot. Not Thai hot, but certainly hotter than we are used to. We both enjoyed the b-bop (short for bibimbop) a traditional rice dish made with vegetables, egg, choice of protein and dressing. After eating a spicy meal hubby decided to play it safe and ordered the coconut ice cream for dessert. That left me with the jakshik and sujongkwa (sweet rice cake and infused drink). It was the perfect ending to an enjoyable meal. —Karen Slivar

Best Late Night Dinner

Sukho Thai
104 3466 Carrington Rd., Westbank
250.768.7500

It was late when I popped my head into Sukho after a late night meeting to see if I could still order some takeout. "Yes of course," said the young man standing at the till. He handed me a menu. I squinted my eyes in the dim light trying to read the menu. I'd left my readers at home and could only make out the main sections: salad, seafood, stir-fry, curry, noodles and rice. I asked him what veggie options they had for a salad, curry and noodle dish. Spicy Thai salad with tiger prawns. Yes. Mixed vegetables sautéed in a yellow curry with coconut milk. Oh, yes please. Quick fried vermicelli sautéed with fresh vegetables and house gravy sauce. You bet. While I waited I was offered tea or a cold drink. "You phone if anything is wrong with your order," said the owner as he handed over my goodie bag. From the delicious aromas I couldn't imagine there being a problem. We dug in and had a second helping. —Karen Slivar

LAKE COUNTRY COFFEE HOUSE AND SUKHO THAI PHOTOS BY DANIEL HAYDUK

THE ROTTEN GRAPE AND SOBAN KOREAN BISTRO PHOTOS BY LYDIA ROSS

Best Excuse to Skip Dinner

Wild Apple Restaurant & Lounge
3762 Lakeshore Rd., Kelowna
250.860.4488

A Christmas party found us at Manteo Resort for dinner. The dessert table caught my eye as soon as we walked in the room. My hubby gave me a dirty look when I suggested we eat dessert first. Instead, I dutifully waited for our table's turn at the buffet and was pleasantly surprised at the selection of veggie options. The stuffing was a work of magic. Perfectly cubed pieces of bread, pecan halves and cranberries rolled into a log. Baked. Sliced. Just waiting for a lick of gravy. I helped myself to three pieces and when I finished my plate I went back for more. I hadn't forgotten about dessert, I'd passed by the table four times and counting. Dinner finished, I jumped out of my seat and over to the dessert table before my hubby could stop me. Creme brulee, fancy cake and biscotti. Divine. OK, when hubby wasn't lookin' I snuck another biscotti, candied nuts... but I figured I'd dance it all off later that evening. —Karen Slivar



Best Bite Sized Menu

Crush Bistro
3024 30th Ave., Vernon
250.549.4438

We visited shortly after the place opened last spring. This wine-savvy bistro seats about 40 people around a mix of bar height and traditional dining tables. The red walls and large works of art give the place a modern metropolitan feel. The dishes are plated pieces of perfection. Delicious bites from a seasonal menu. On this occasion red beets with bocconcini, citrus fruit fillets, crushed roasted coriander seed and a pear-guava-tangerine dressing. A refreshing mix of flavours. Florentine flatbread—fresh spinach, caramelized red onion, mushroom, artichoke, roasted pepper, goat cheese and Austrian pumpkin seed oil. This is why the hubby and I try new places. And from the sea—chunky lobster chili rolled inside a spinach lasagna noodle with shaved Parmesan and Pinot Gris cheese sauce. Pair these creations with some of the Okanagan's boutique wines and we've got ourselves a winner. —Karen Slivar

WILD APPLE RESTAURANT & LOUNGE AND CRUSH BISTRO PHOTOS BY LYDIA ROSS

Best New Find in the North

PeakFine @ Sparkling Hill Resort
888 Sparkling Place, Vernon
250.275.1556

This was the surprise of the year for me. I'm not sure what I expected in the way of food service when the hubby and I set up our staycation at Sparkling Hill, but I'm here to say that our dining experience at the hands of chef Ross Derrick far exceeded expectations. Mornings, when the Euro-inspired buffet is laid out, the dining space in PeakFine restaurant is dominated by nature with views overlooking Okanagan Lake from Terrace Mountain to Okanagan Landing. Even the trance-inducing Swarovski crystal chandelier can't compete. But at night when the window wall is dark, attention refocuses on the crystal, the unique fire and ice room divider and the parade of locally sourced, seasonal fare emanating from Ross's kitchen. True to the European term "piekfein" from which the restaurant takes its name, the food is absolutely "top notch." —Laurie Carter



Best Naan Bread

The Curry Pot
3007 30th Ave., Vernon
250.545.9195

Always in the mood for Indian cuisine, the Curry Pot got our vote for a dinner for four. The menu is jam-packed with our favourite dishes like fish jalfrazie (bite sized pieces of fish sautéed with spices, tomato, onion and green pepper), tandoori chicken, paneer (homemade curd cheese), spiced lentils in tomato sauce, and roasted eggplant with onion and tomato. The paneer tikka dinner sparked my interest and came with naan bread, salad, basmati rice, butter sauce and raita. My companions ordered the beef tikki dinner, lamb biryani and saag paneer. All dishes are spiced to order from mild to extra hot. But it was the naan that stole our hearts. The Curry Pot elevates naan from humble to extraordinary with its stuffed variations: coconut topped with honey; cashew and raisin topped with honey. Baskets of naan covered our table. Warm, soft and chewy with a nutty, sweet flavour. Simply brilliant. —Karen Slivar



PEAKFINE PHOTO BY BRUCE KEMP; THE CURRY POT PHOTOS BY LYDIA ROSS



Best Twist on Pub Fare

Kettle Valley Station Pub
1070 Eckhardt Ave. W., Penticton
250.493.3388

I love pub food—especially burgers—so it's no big surprise that I was drawn to the Kettle Valley Station. Walking in, I saw what I expected, a big space with lots of room to cobble tables together for a gang of friends, strategically placed big screen TVs for watching the big game (pick your sport) and set-ups for trivia and Texas hold 'em. There's a cozy fireplace in winter, a sunny patio in summer and a big bar that runs four seasons with a tasty range of specialty beers, ales and lagers plus a surprisingly complete wine list. The menu is vintage pub. It's huge—always a problem for me. Everything looks so good: wings, ribs, salads, sandwiches, pizzas. All that you'd expect—except the new take on my old favourite. I mean, what can you do to update a burger? Well, at the Kettle Valley, you can turn it into a thinini. Same great meat, new skinny bun. And how about those braised bison Yorkshires. Definitely some surprises at this pub. —Laurie Carter

Best New Look on the Lake

Local Lounge • Grille
12817 Lakeshore Dr. S., Summerland
250.494.8855

Wow—can we say makeover. A fan of the location of the former Shaughnessy's on the lakeshore in Summerland, I was knocked out one windy March day when I dropped into the Local for lunch. Sleek modern styling in black and white and shades of gray extends to the stainless-steel-look menu covers and the gray stamped concrete of the expansive patio. Even with the overhead heaters, I wasn't prepared to rush the season out there. Instead we opted for a window seat by one of the fireplaces and watched a couple of coots bobbing and diving in the lee of the docks. As the name suggest, executive chef Paul Ceconi is all about locally sourced food and wine. My spaghetti puttanesca sported a tangy tomato relish with capers, two big grilled scallops and a pair of spicy prawns. The lamb rigatoni across the table was elevated to a new level with a stellar mint pesto and the apple ring dipped in donut dough and deep fried...well. —Laurie Carter



Best Reincarnation

The Firehall Bistro
34881 97th St., Oliver
250.498.4867

Cruising into Oliver late last summer after a mind-blowing visit to the Dominion Radio Astrophysical Observatory, we were thinking, sandwich, and wondering where to stop. Imagine our joy when we realized that the lights were on in the old fire hall. Following a painful (for us) hiatus, food service has returned to this stylish historic property. That day the misters were working so hard around the shaded patio tables that it looked foggy outside. Water drops cascaded off the umbrellas and the roll-up fire engine doors were securely closed. We opted for air-conditioned comfort inside. The VQA wine shop was no more, but that expansive bar remains and the interior is still yummy with squash-coloured walls and cherry-stained tables. Chef Bill Reid has laid on something of a road house menu (and I say this with love) with lots of appies, burgers, triple-A steaks, sandwiches, pastas and a few more sophisticated entrées. —Laurie Carter

Best Dining on Stilts

The Hooded Merganser
21 Lakeshore Dr. W., Penticton
250.487.4663

Cross the bridge to the elegant modern structure that reminds me of a wave cresting on the beach and enter a skylit, airy space with year-round view all the way to Peachland and a sunny summer patio, seriously, how much great can one restaurant claim? Well, there's more. The Hooded Merganser (named for the bird that flew into the under-construction building during name selection) at the Penticton Lakeside Resort serves breakfast, lunch and dinner daily. You can start the day with eggs benny or a zesty frittata. At lunch the lengthy appie list includes my personal favourite roasted squash and creme fraiche soup while the menu carries on with a variety of salads, pastas, burgers, steaks and seafood plus some tempting woks and rice bowls. Take in an unforgettable sunset over Glenlivet marinated beef carpaccio, osso bucco or pan seared snapper and cap the experience with a sinful chocolate pecan brownie. —Laurie Carter

