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# TRAVEL

## CLASSIFIEDS

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Editor: Paul Smith > Telephone: 250-380-5240 > Email: features@timescolonist.com

■ RICK STEVES, D3

■ RELIGION, D4

■ WEATHER, D12



Power from solar panels, a wind turbine, a generator and five sets of batteries make Blachford Lake Lodge self-sufficient.

PHOTOS BY STEVE HAGGERTY, TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

## NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

# Luxury in the wilds

Seemingly endless forests and skies lead to a desire to reach out to others

ANNE Z. COOKE  
Tribune News Service

YELLOWKNIFE, N.W.T.

If for some unlikely reason you lose your way in the Northwest Territories and happen to stumble upon Blachford Lake Lodge, a 30-minute flight southeast of Yellowknife, “five-star luxury” won’t be your first reaction.

Yet that’s how visitors who’ve drunk the Kool-Aid invariably describe this deliciously inviting hilltop oasis.

“They wouldn’t call it luxury in London,” said international traveller Diana Pullman, an artist, on her second day at the lodge.

“Or New York. This is wilderness. We’re off the grid. Rustic luxury doesn’t need Persian rugs and gold-framed paintings to make you feel you belong,” she said, knocking the snow off her boots and curling up on the sofa next to the wood stove, where we were drying our socks and debating the issue.

“The logs inside and out, they’re classic log cabin,” she said, gesturing at the peeled log timbers, the unfinished pine paneling and the plywood floors, painted an unobtrusive dark maroon.

“Then look at the open-space design, high ceilings, big windows everywhere, light from all angles. It’s almost contemporary. Get the basics right



— great food and good beds — and you don’t need frills.”

Flying from Yellowknife and landing on the frozen lake, we were greeted not by a bell boy with a luggage trolley but a snowmobiler dragging a sled.

Beyond him came the welcome committee, a handful of smiling Gen Y guides swaddled in thick jackets and wool hats, young adults who introduced themselves, then checked our names off the arrivals list.

Volunteers hired from a half-dozen distant countries, each for a two-month stint, they were as eager as we were to be there, a chance to experience a true sub-Arctic winter.

They weren’t what I’d expected, but it was impossible to ignore their enthusiasm and energy as they escorted us up the hill, talking all the way and recommending things we shouldn’t miss.

“Here, let me carry your backpack,” said Adrian from Australia, pointing out the skating rink in the cove, the trails around the hilltop and the rack of Nordic skis and poles next to the front door.

> See LODGE, page D2



Pete the dog smells a rabbit, but the cliff is steep. The solution: Pete needs to go back on the leash, just in case.



The lounge is a single gathering space that encompasses the bar, dining tables, sofas, the library corner and open-counter kitchen room.



## TRAVEL NOTES

### Heat wave shutter Greece’s landmark sites

ATHENS, Greece — Greek authorities closed the ancient Acropolis in Athens to visitors for several hours Wednesday, along with other popular archaeological sites around the country, due to a heatwave.

The Culture Ministry said all archaeological sites closed between 1 p.m. and 5 p.m., to be repeated on days when temperatures reach 39 C.

During the heatwave, the Culture Ministry said main archaeological sites will open between 8 a.m. and 1 p.m. and again from 5 p.m. to 8 p.m.

Industry estimates predict a record number of tourists in Greece this year, exceeding 28 million.

— The Associated Press

### SeaWorld offers ‘up-close’ tours of orcas

ORLANDO, Florida — SeaWorld Orlando is now offering “up-close” tours of its killer whales, where visitors hear stories from trainers and are educated about orcas’ habits.

The Killer Whale Up-Close Tour announced this week is another move by the theme park toward education and away from orca shows.

During the 45-minute tours, visitors will also watch husbandry demonstrations and learn the whales’ health-care and feeding habits.

Reservations are required for the tours, which cost \$79 US per person and aren’t included in the regular admission ticket.

SeaWorld moved toward an emphasis on education following years of protests by animal-rights activists, the documentary *Blackfish* and the 2010 death of a trainer, who was drowned by a whale.

The company has ended orca shows and stopped breeding orcas.

— The Associated Press



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Winter sun rises late, stays low in the sky and sets early.

## Lodge runs on solar, wind power

> From page D1

"It's this way to the teepee and that way to the sauna," said Maude Bergeron-Lambert from Quebec, who was waiting to lead a brief orientation.

Looking down to the lake, where our transportation — the Twin Otter — picked up speed, lifted off and vanished in the clouds, I suddenly felt alone.

Or maybe it was the endless forest under the endless sky that did it.

Rarely visited Northwest Territories is twice the size of Texas, a 1.35-million-square-kilometre giant stretching from the Arctic Ocean in the north to British Columbia, Alberta and Saskatchewan in the south.

From the Canadian Shield, where we were, to the mountains and beyond, to tundra, enormous lakes, immense canyons and towering waterfalls, wilderness was a universal feature.

No wonder it didn't take long for most of us, 29 guests in all, to reach across the void that separates strangers and find a kindred spirit.

Ray, in the room down the hall, said the atmosphere reminded him of how fast he made friends when he was a kid at summer camp in Wisconsin. As for me, our four days there felt more like the classic house party of yore, the gathering you read about in novels where the wealthy (or titled) estate owner invites a dozen or so mutual friends to his country house for a long weekend of revelry, fresh air, brisk strolls, trout fishing and candlelit dinners.

Candles were thin on the ground at Blachford Lake, and that wasn't all. There were no elevators or silk draperies, no crystal chandeliers or marble-tiled bathrooms. Minibars and television were absent, as was 24-hour room

service, air conditioning and high-speed internet access. With no roads, cars were irrelevant. After a brief mental reboot, we realized we didn't miss any of them.

What remained were the basics: fresh air, brisk strolls and a chance to actually catch some trout. Since the lodge provided Nordic skis, snowshoes, ice skates and hockey sticks, there was no reason not to spend every sunny hour outside. Even ice fishing — through the ice — was possible.

The most popular activities were the guided snowshoe hikes on various signed trails looping away from the lodge, through the trees and around snow-covered meadows, returning past a vista point with spectacular views.

Clumping around on what might have passed for homemade tennis rackets was not just the easiest but the most fun. The pace was slow enough to talk on the way, and predictably droll when you — or someone else — tipped into a snowbank.

Hockey fans put on skates and headed to the pond. And alpine (downhill) skiers who'd never tried cross country skiing — and were confident they had the right stuff — went down to the lake where the staff, using a snowmobile and roller, had laid down a series of intertwined groomed tracks.

The longest track headed straight down the lake for two kilometres, circled a small island and returned on the far side, an exercise in swooping strides that quickly revealed previously unknown muscles. The shorter track curved in and out of several unusual coves, a bonus for multi-tasking photographers.

But not everything involved aerobics. We joined the igloo-building session, a chance to prove you were handy with a saw, able to cut blocks out of hard snow and add an angled edge, and



Blachford Lake Lodge relies on the lake for float and ski plane deliveries, piped water and sports activities. PHOTOS BY STEVE HAGGERTY, TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE



Guests in Raven's Roost cabin, which sleeps four, feel like pioneers, but warmer and more comfortable.

pile them into a dome. Not to mention hot-tub soaking, sauna steaming and cosy campfire evenings with marshmallows on a stick in the teepee.

This canvas structure, pitched around long poles, stood on a north-facing ridge where the aurora borealis was most likely to appear. This it did after midnight, a ghostly, shape-shifting ribbon of green that rose, wavered in the sky and slowly faded away.

Though sightings are never guaranteed, Blachford Lake Lodge's location, close to the magnetic North Pole, makes viewing better than most.

As for basics, "off the grid" lodges such as Blachford Lake Lodge depend on simplicity, says lodge manager Sarah Van Stiphout, one of four paid employees at the lodge.

"When owner Mike Freeland bought the property in 1981, it had one small cabin — now restored and named Old Trapper's Cabin — and nothing else," she told me. "No electricity, gas, water, lights, nothing. Friends who came out to

visit brought their camping gear."

And it's still off the grid. But this time, environmental sustainability has triumphed, creating an eco-smart model for living no matter where you are.

At Blachford Lake Lodge you can switch on the lights in your room and read. You can charge your camera batteries, drink the water, use the modern bathroom, take a hot shower and stay warm in your shirtsleeves. You can ask Chef Carla to mix up a blender-whipped smoothie and never notice that hidden inventions are at work.

Four sets of solar panels installed below the main floor convert solid waste to compost.

And the "contemporary" open-space architecture that Pullman admired so much not only helps to circulate warm air, but brings guests and volunteers together in the lounge, a single space that encompasses the bar, dining tables, sofas, the library corner and the open-counter kitchen room. As those who've drunk the Kool-Aid know, wilderness always deserves five stars.



### IF YOU GO

The lodge is open in summer and winter, as long as the ski-float plane is able to land, on solid ice or open water.

Each of the five rooms and five cabins at Blachford Lake Lodge is outfitted to sleep four or more, in king, queen and/or bunk beds. Child rates are available, depending on the season and dates.

All rates include excellent cuisine served buffet-style; two chefs prepare everything on site, from breads to salads and main dishes. Summer activities include kayaking, canoeing, swimming and hiking. Plan to take a commercial flight to Yellowknife and spend your first night there. For details and suggestions, go to [blachfordlakelodge.com](http://blachfordlakelodge.com).

Meanwhile, a waterless process installed below the main floor converts solid waste to compost.

And the "contemporary" open-space architecture that Pullman admired so much not only helps to circulate warm air, but brings guests and volunteers together in the lounge, a single space that encompasses the bar, dining tables, sofas, the library corner and the open-counter kitchen room. As those who've drunk the Kool-Aid know, wilderness always deserves five stars.

## Kelowna's tech boom inspires dining renaissance

ADAM STANLEY  
The Canadian Press

KELOWNA — Thanks to a thriving tech industry that has seen more than a 30 per cent growth in just two years, Kelowna has seen its demographics change drastically and its cultural scene adapt to appease younger tastes.

The B.C. city has long been known for just its world-class wineries — Mission Hill, for example, has won numerous awards for its wine, including best Riesling and best Pinot Noir in the world at the Decanter World Wine Awards — and its 2,000 hours of sunshine, minimal precipitation and flat terrain made it idyllic for retirees.

However, given a recent tech boom, and with many natives of Kelowna returning home after being priced out of Vancouver, the city has changed in recent years. It's now skewing much younger.

The economic impact of the tech industry in Kelowna is currently \$1.3 billion, with 633 companies as of the fall of 2016 employing 7,600 people. And 52 per cent of those workers are under the age of 35.

"We're basically changing the demographics of this whole area," says Raghwa Gopal, CEO of Accelerate Okanagan and a 40-year resident of the city.

Accelerate Okanagan, a non-profit organization that was started seven years ago, is the primary tenant of a brand-new \$11-million innovation centre in Kelowna's downtown core.

Gopal says seven years ago, it would have been difficult to "even dream" of a place like the innovation centre, but with Kelowna having the fastest-growing tech hub in the country, it was time for a change.

"You come downtown Sunday evening and there are actually



BNA Brewing Co. & Eatery has been getting rave reviews from diners, and not just for its food and beer: it was a finalist in the Canada's Best Restroom competition in 2015. BNA BREWING CO. & EATERY

people walking around, going to restaurants, and it has definitely spurred a lot of new businesses," says Gopal.

"A lot more younger people are coming into town, sure, but we have two high-level post-secondary institutions here [the University of British Columbia's Okanagan Campus and Okanagan College] and we're starting to keep a lot more of those graduating students in town."

Kelowna Mayor Colin Basran says young people were leaving Kelowna for opportunities, but that trend is now changing.

"Young people are recognizing there are opportunities in our city, and a lot more of them are staying," says Basran, who points to a recent study by the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, which named Kelowna as one of the top cities in Canada for entrepreneurs, as a key reason younger people have decided to stick

around. "The more businesses that are here, and can flourish ... that speaks to the whole 'providing opportunity' piece that we're proud of," Basran says. "We don't want to rest on that, though. There's a great entrepreneurial spirit in our city."

One of the businesses making a name for itself — and finding quick success — is BNA Brewing Co. & Eatery.

The craft brewery and restaurant, just a few blocks from the innovation centre, and located in a building that was formerly home to the British North American Tobacco Company (hence, "BNA") has been getting rave reviews from local and tourist diners alike. And it's not just food and craft beer they're known for — Cintas Canada Ltd. named them a finalist in the company's sixth annual Canada's Best Restroom competition in 2015.

Marketing director Jill Jarrett



Mission Hill Winery has won numerous awards for its wine. The mayor says the next thing Kelowna will be known for, beyond tech, is microbreweries and cideries. MISSION HILL WINERY

says the brewery's rapid expansion is a microcosm of Kelowna itself.

"Its success and the way it's been received is a reflection of what's been going on in the city, and the demands of the people who are deciding to stay here," says Jarrett, noting BNA expanded its footprint just a year into operation.

Basran says the next thing Kelowna will be known for, beyond tech, is microbreweries and cideries.

"We're seeing an influx of those popping up in our community, and all of them are top-notch," he says.

And Jarrett says "staying local" has been a key reason for BNA's quick success.

"The types of cuisines we have are anything but local. We've had Indian- and Asian-inspired things on the menu, we've got Italian, too, but our chef takes inspiration from all these worldwide cuisines

and showcases Okanagan ingredients within them. Our menu changes seasonally because of that," she says.

Along with more than 20 wineries in the area offering tours and tastings and an annual wine festival, visitors can enjoy beautiful vistas of orchards and mountains surrounding the Okanagan Valley city.

There's a waterfront park and plenty of beaches for swimming, paddling and other water-based activities. Hiking, golf, museums and farmers markets mean there's something for everyone.

### IF YOU GO

Kelowna Travel Guide:  
<http://bit.ly/2s47dRA>  
BNA Brewing Co. & Eatery:  
[bnabrewing.com/](http://bnabrewing.com/)  
Mission Hill Winery:  
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