

Eating Local in Harrison Hot Springs

Pleasant surprises.



Perhaps it reveals this author's small town skepticism to admit that the food in Harrison Hot Springs is pleasantly surprising. After all, a place known for wholesome family vacations doesn't really have to excel in the culinary department. Still, a few choice establishments are making a difference, sourcing as many local ingredients as possible and preparing food that is fresh, of quality, and truly inspired.

Presented without gimmicks, these mom-and-pop establishments let the food really shine. There are no cocktails served in jars. There are no succulents lining the windows. There are no hip-hop songs blaring over the speakers. There are no Edison bulbs hanging from the ceiling. Rather, the restaurants are perfectly unrefined, unpretentious, and delicious.

Muddy Waters Cafe

Unadorned and sharing a space with Baskin Robbins, Muddy Waters Cafe is really all about the food. There is no funky decor, but who needs it? The only design this place requires is the array of fresh-baked pastries that line the service counter. With vegetables sourced at nearby Pristine Farms and everything made in-house, it's a simple, sumptuous spot for breakfast or lunch. The egg burrito with salsa is hearty and surprisingly filling, while the elk burger with red onion relish sounds as mouth-watering as can be. Fresh fruit, homemade kettle chips—this is what a cafe should be like.

Eat in, and take a bag of little cornmeal button cookies to go—good luck saving them for when you're back home, though.

Morgan's Bistro

Located steps down the main drag from Muddy Waters is the unassuming Morgan's Bistro, which, from its second-level perch, offers beautiful views of Harrison Lake. The real show-stopping view, though, is the plates of food that will soon warm your insides like grandma's Christmas potatoes. The bistro is owned and envisioned by Morgan MacLeod, who has no formal cooking training and yet somehow is operating her fourth restaurant (she began with two in Mexico). Because they lack by-the-book education, MacLeod's recipes are intuitive and insightful, the way you sometimes end up making an incredible meal on a rainy day with nothing else to do.

"There's nothing like it in Harrison," says Stewart Pritchard, who came on board years ago to reinvent the restaurant's wine list, and ended up falling in love with MacLeod's daughter. They got married and now have a one-year-old, and work together in the bistro. A golden glow envelops the place, which is decorated with vintage-looking chandeliers and black-and-white photographs.

Though over 70 years old, MacLeod drives to Richmond every morning to source fish fillets, and then heads to a local farm to pick up lettuce and other vegetables—meaning every dish is incredibly fresh and fantastically made in B.C. The tender meatballs with pecorino make an excellent appetizer, although it is the lobster baked with cheese and balsamic that might actually change lives. Wholesome, wildly flavourful mains include duck leg with confit and roasted potatoes, or beef tenderloin with whipped potatoes and vegetables. Everything is made in-house, down to the sauces for the meats—which all take at least two days to prepare. Go ahead, lick the plate clean.

Bonus in Agassiz: The Farm House Natural Cheeses

On one end of the parking lot, you can see a herd of friendly goats; on the other, you can view the room in which the goats' milk is turned into cheese, and then buy a block to take home. And certainly, nearby Agassiz's The Farm House Natural Cheeses goat cheddar is worth a package to-go. The creamy, rich flavour and thick texture make for an excellent snack paired with baguette or simply all by its lonesome. It's that good, and no wonder co-owner Debra Amrein-Boyes is one of only 12 people in Western Canada and the States to be inducted into the *Guilde des Fromagers Confrerie de Saint-Uguzon*, a prestigious French cheesemakers society.

The Farm House runs a small family dairy farm right on the site of the shop, producing cheese and yogurt from animals that are free of pesticides and hormones. The retail space also boasts meat from the farm, as well as eggs and loaves of organic sourdough. Once you've had a taste from the source and have become (rightfully) addicted, pick up Farm House products in Vancouver at the likes of Les Amis du Fromage, Le Marche St. George, and Benton Brothers.

Harrison may not be Vancouver, but it's not trying to be. The little resort municipality is making legends of its own, like ripples across a hot spring.

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