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SIX MEALS IN ... PRINCE EDWARD COUNTY

Discovering some Princely delights in a still-unspoiled setting

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RICHARD OUZOUNIAN
TORONTO STAR

PRINCE EDWARD COUNTY, Ont.—For a long time this pastoral area was known for its scenery and tranquility, but not its food and drink. All that has been changing with a burst of activity that has yielded wineries, artisanal food markets and first-rate dining. It's still relatively unspoiled and you can feel you've gotten away from it all. It's a short enough drive (about 2 1/2 hours from Toronto) to make it doable.

Friday night

BLOOMFIELD CARRIAGE HOUSE RESTAURANT, 260 Main St., Bloomfield, 613-393-1087: One of the area's finest establishments, a recent renovation has perked things up enormously from a visual point of view.

The food is as superb as it ever was, with a passionate devotion to local and organic products you'll find throughout the area.

I was blown away by the duck confit and barley risotto as a starter, rich with the aroma of house-cured bacon and a generous benediction of Parmesan Reggiano, followed by a roast venison chop that was incredibly moist and enlivened by the chocolate juniper glaze.

The vanilla crème brûlée with a tart rhubarb compote finished me off nicely for dessert. There's a great wine selection as well.

Saturday morning

BEAN COUNTER CAFÉ, 172 Main St., Picton, 613-476-1718: This is just the kind of place you dream of finding on a weekend morning, with a cozy fireplace with lots of room for unwinding. They really pay attention to brewing their coffee (as you might expect from the name) and the result is light years ahead of your standard franchise drinks. There's not a giant selection of morning munchies, but the fine flaky croissants and sturdy Montreal bagels make up in quality for any lack of quantity in the choice department.

Saturday lunch

FIFTH TOWN ARTISAN CHEESE, 4309 County Road No. 8, Picton, 613-476-5755: If you love cheese as I do, then this is a must-stop-destination for you.

They've only been open for just over a year, but already they've earned a reputation for a high level of product.

Their Cape Vessey is one of my favourite goat cheeses, with a melting texture and a flavour that evokes hazelnuts.

They also do a variety of "Bagel Chevres," which are just right for spreading. Lemon Thyme is my favourite. Come here to sample the wonders on your own or enjoy one of their Saturday tasting

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sessions at 1 p.m. and 3 p.m. Size is limited so make a reservation first.

Saturday dinner

HARVEST, 106 Bridge St., Picton, 613-476-6763: This is generally regarded as the one "can't miss it" place in the area and it's easy to understand why.

Simple country cooking with perfect local ingredients is turned into an art by chef Michael Potters and the restaurant itself has a kind of golden glow about it that makes dining a transcendent experience.

The menu changes all the time, but I fell in love with the full-flavoured beefiness of Rabble Farms Carpaccio and a chicken and dumplings that turned that plebeian dish into a gourmet delight with the addition of wild mushrooms and chive flower broth.

The desserts are lovely as well, but the selection of artisanal cheeses would round things off perfectly.

Sunday morning

LIGHTHOUSE RESTAURANT, Picton Harbour Inn, 33 Bridge St. Picton, 613-476-2186: Start your morning by the water with a nice, unpretentious place that knows how to make breakfast the best meal of the day.

Not many frills, except for the heavenly blueberry pancakes, bursting with fruit this time of year, and the excellent farmer's sausage, nice and zesty. There's also a bottomless cup of good, sturdy coffee and that's about all you need to get you headed in the right direction.

Sunday afternoon

BUDDHA DOG, 172 Main St, Picton, 613-476-3814: I had heard so many extravagant claims for this place over the years that I couldn't believe they were true, but they are.

The all-beef wieners themselves are choice, if on the small side (order at least two), but it's the crazy condiments that are sublime.

Sweet onion sauce, yum. Brie and red pepper jelly, wow. Crab apple sauce and ancho chili ketchup – take me home, country roads.

This is how to end a trip to Prince Edward County.

Richard Ouzounian is the Star's theatre critic. He can be reached at rouzounian@sympatico.ca

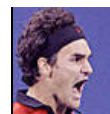
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