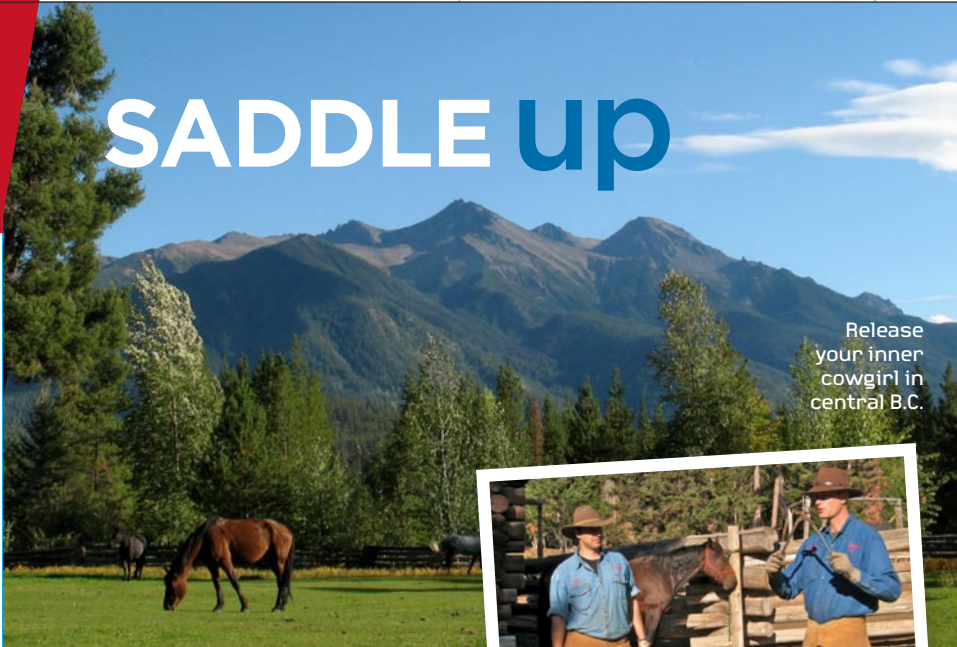


SADDLE up



Release your inner cowgirl in central B.C.

BLAZING THE DUSTY TRAILS

Fancy exploring the interior of a grizzly den (while the bears are on holiday, of course)? What if you were led by a dashing Dane and a gregarious German to the mountainside abode carved beneath a towering Douglas fir? Throw in a perky trail horse called As Good As It Gets....

The Cariboo Chilcotin area is a magnet. Not only do grizzlies love it here, so do brainy, brawny Europeans who come to learn guiding skills. I hadn't expected this southwestern pocket of B.C. to be spiced with continental accents teaching me comfy western-saddle positions, horseshoeing and the fine art of preparing for the trail. But the guides — clad in battered straw cowboy hats and chaps — proved to be extremely knowledgeable, toting university degrees as well as hoof picks.



Summer vacations with Chilcotin Holidays mean choosing a stay at the spacious guest ranch, heading out on a pack trip, renting a cozy chalet, mountain hiking or fishing for trout and kokanee.

Located in a rain shadow on a plateau in the South Chilcotin Mountains, the area boasts tons of sunshine and virtually no bugs. About as biodiverse as Canada comes, it also headlines California bighorn sheep, moose, mule deer, mountain goat, wolf and black bear.

As for the grizzly den, according to my guide, more people have been to Antarctica than have visited the hobbit-like enclosure that, incidentally, was surprisingly roomy and neat (chilcotinolidays.com).

MARKET GREENS

Where better to get a sense of place than a market? When travelling, I always make a beeline to the centre of a city or town where local food and goods are sold to get a taste for the environs. Halifax not only showcases North America's oldest continuous market (since 1750), but in July the place where you buy your greens is going green. Situated on Pier 20, the new farmers' market will be powered by wind turbines and solar panels, and sport a green roof and rainwater barrels. Famous for Acadian meat pies, beeswax hand cream and handmade wooden knitting needles, the digs promise to be both delectable and sustainable (halifaxfarmersmarket.com).



TOUR OF BEAUTY

The Amber Road, an ancient trade route that runs through nine countries from the Baltic to the Adriatic Sea, was challenging even for the Romans. But they didn't have three-star hotels, a talented cook or a bike mechanic along for the ride! In mid-July, intrepid cyclists from around the globe will spend six weeks pedalling the 3,100 kilometres from St. Petersburg to Venice on the first such trip offered by **Tour d'Afrique**. Can't keep up with Lance Armstrong? Riders can choose one or more of four shorter sections, ranging from 510 to 965 kilometres.

No stranger to the exotic, the Toronto-based company arranges journeys to some of the world's hardest-to-access destinations. If you have a dream itinerary, you can post a prospective route on the company's website and, if enough people sign



up, you'll not only get a healthy discount but the chance to go on your fantasy spin. Tour d'Afrique also promotes giving back to communities touched by its trips — it donates one bike per participant, for example, to African communities and organizations in need — and raises consciousness about the benefits of bikes as means of sustainable transport (tourdafrique.com).

PHOTOS, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: K. JILL RIGBY (2) TOUR D'AFRIQUE LTD., COURTESY OF NOVA SCOTIA TOURISM & CULTURE