

▮ The S400 HYBRID illuminates the dramatic entrance to Sparkling Hill.

# JUST ADD SPARKLE

*A new spa resort in the Okanagan delivers a European vision of wellness in a glittering Swarovski-crystal-inspired setting.*

**T**he road through British Columbia's Okanagan region is paved with beautiful distractions. From behind the wheel of my Mercedes-Benz S400 HYBRID, every curve in the road reveals another intoxicating combination of orchard-and-winery-laden valleys, craggy rock faces and views of the azure lake waters. The semi-arid climate, an extension of the Sonoran Desert, guarantees 300 days of brilliant sunshine a year. It's because of all these distractions that my pleasurable 50-kilometre (31-mile) trip from Kelowna to Vernon has taken more than the typical 30 minutes. If my destination, Sparkling Hill Resort, were not so intriguing in its own right, I might have succumbed to the joys of the road and driven right on by.

This European-style wellness facility is a gem itself. The resort is set on a ridge encompassing 76 hectares (188 acres) of pristine Okanagan land. My S400 HYBRID glides powerfully yet silently up the winding ascent to its location, Mount Royce. As I turn off the highway, the lakes in my rearview mirror are replaced with rolling hills, more reminiscent of Irish fields than Canadian mountains. The hills eventually give way to the manicured fairways and greens of nearby Predator Ridge, dotted with golfers and sand traps. Finally, ahead of me in the distance I catch the glint of sunlight reflecting off the enormous diamond-shaped skylight of Sparkling Hill.

The resort overlooks both the Monashee Mountains to the east and the clear waters of Lake Okanagan to the north. This vantage point, unmatched in the area, was the single

most important influence on the design and structure of the resort. Once the valet whisks my S400 HYBRID safely away and I head inside the lobby, a four-storey window rewards me with a panoramic view of the calm blue lake. I look closer and notice three large crystals dangling from a lone fir tree directly outside, bouncing the sun's rays in a prism of colour throughout the lobby.

Sparkling Hill was born out of an idea developed by president and CEO Hans-Peter Mayr (a longtime Mercedes-Benz driver). Mayr, who managed hotels for many years in his native Austria, was so impressed by his vacations in Western Canada that he convinced Swarovski crystal patriarch Gernot Langes-Swarovski to help him build a 152-room resort and 3,716-square-metre (40,000-square-foot) KurSpa here.

Kur spas, or healing centres, may be new to Canada, but they have long been popular in Germany and Austria. At least once a day during my three-day stay at Sparkling Hill I wander through the steam/sauna cycle, which involves seven rooms, each themed to showcase a particular scent, element or temperature. Among the other unique spa experiences is a cold sauna: I spend three minutes in a room cooled to -110°C [-166°F] and leave feeling refreshed and revived. I also enjoy a Fango mud treatment, a mineral-enriched rubdown in an emulsion of Tuscan volcanic dust. For a final polish, I try a uniquely interpreted hammam in which I'm foamed, hand-scrubbed and rinsed.

Guests who book wellness treatment packages can consult with an on-site medical practitioner. This concept, which places health and wellness above aesthetics, may be foreign to the North American market, but Mayr expects it will catch

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➤ (Above) Sparkling Hill's "Serenity Room" and (right) Swarovski-crystal-draped entrance.



➤ The Harvest Golf Club is both a championship-length course and a working orchard.



➤ The S400 HYBRID glides silently through fruit country, high above Lake Okanagan.

**ROADSIDE TEMPTATIONS**

**The Jammery** Visit for on-site production of local fruit jams. The breakfast waffles are a specialty, but afternoon scones with jam and Devonshire cream beckon as well. [www.jammery.com](http://www.jammery.com)

**Gray Monk Estate Winery** Expect ample meals on the patio of this winery founded by George and Trudy Heiss, whose Gewürztraminer won double gold at this year's All Canadian Wine Championships. [www.graymonk.com](http://www.graymonk.com)

**Predator Ridge** A three-minute drive from Sparkling Hill, Predator Ridge's first course (The Predator) hosted the Skins Game twice. The newest course (The Ridge) has just opened, with Doug Carrick-designed links full of scenic vistas and challenging play. [www.predatorridge.com](http://www.predatorridge.com)

**Kelowna Land & Orchard Co.'s Ridge Restaurant** Take in a view of Kelowna over a simple lunch prepared with fresh, local ingredients, created by executive chef Travis Hackl. Wash it all down with a Raven Ridge cider (the Granny Smith is delicious). [www.k-l-o.com](http://www.k-l-o.com)

**Okanagan Villa Estate Winery** Stop in for one of Wyn and Marion Lewis' unique bottles of Chardonnay. Their son, Phil, an internationally recognized artist, created the Grateful Dead-esque label design. [www.okanaganvilla.com](http://www.okanaganvilla.com)

[www.hellobc.com](http://www.hellobc.com)  
[www.tourismkelowna.com](http://www.tourismkelowna.com)  
[www.sparklinghill.com](http://www.sparklinghill.com)

on quickly. "When our guests leave, they won't just have good memories," he says. "They will have health benefits even six months later."

Though health is the goal, an emphasis is also placed on lifestyle. As I stroll across the walkways that traverse the atrium and take in the soaring, elegant chandeliers, it's easy to feel the Swarovski thumbprint of timelessness, quality and innovative design.

I find myself looking for the crystals that are cleverly embedded throughout the hotel. There are more than three million of the shimmering stones, worth an estimated \$10 million, individually hung by Austrian specialists throughout the property. I discover crystals in the inlaid designs on mirrors and the backs of dining room chairs. Clusters of crystals hang from elaborate chandeliers in the atrium and dining rooms. My room even features a crystal "fireplace," lit from beneath with coloured lights that dance and shimmer across the ceiling after dark. In the months ahead, the spa treatments will also make use of the healing powers of crystals, which will be incorporated into a hot-stone style massage.

Serenity Room and lobby courtesy Sparkling Hill Resort

There are over three million of the shimmering stones, worth an estimated \$10 million, individually hung by Austrian specialists.

Between my spa treatments I take in as much of the Okanagan as I can, exploring kilometres of hiking paths that surround the resort, leading to excellent bird-watching habitats. I relive that intoxicating lakeside drive all over again on day trips to wineries, golf courses, roadside stands filled with sun-ripened fruit and restaurants serving up fresh local ingredients. Heading back to Sparkling Hill on the final day of my stay, my peripheral vision catches something else that glitters: Kalamalka Lake (voted one of the world's 10 most beautiful by *National Geographic*). As the sun hits the water's glacial salts, creating emerald-green arcs that dance among the deep blue, I can't help but slow down once more.



**S400 HYBRID**

**ENGINE/PERFORMANCE**

Combined output of 295 hp at 6,000 rpm (275 hp from 3.5-litre V6 engine and 20 hp from electric motor)

**TORQUE**

284 lb-ft at 2,400–5,000 rpm

**ACCELERATION**

0-100 km/h (62 mph) in 7.2 sec

**TOP SPEED**

210 km/h (130 mph) (electronically governed)

**FUEL CONSUMPTION**

9.5 l/100 km (combined), premium unleaded

**CD**

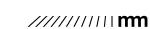
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**TRANSMISSION**

7G-TRONIC automatic transmission

**ENGINE OPTIONS – GASOLINE**

- S450 4MATIC with 335 hp and 339 lb-ft of torque
- S550 4MATIC with 382 hp and 391 lb-ft of torque
- S600 with 510 hp and 612 lb-ft of torque
- S63 AMG with 536 hp and 590 lb-ft of torque
- S65 AMG with 621 hp and 738 lb-ft torque



[www.mercedes-benz.ca](http://www.mercedes-benz.ca)