

Attractions

A tasty tour of B.C.

Exotic Asian cuisine, Olympic sports and wines highlight of visit

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Deep fried chicken skin and stinky durian milkshakes. Two of the more unusual culinary “treats” at North America’s largest Asian night market located next door to Vancouver in Richmond, B.C.

For most of the year this suburban city of 200,000 hosts more than 100 vendors, mostly Asian, at the Richmond night market. They sell a huge variety of traditional and non-traditional cuisine primarily from China but also Korea, Japan, Malaysia and other countries. The joyous, colourful bazaar attracts thousands of locals and tourists who come mainly for the food but also for the craft and souvenir shops.

Richmond, with over 50 per cent of residents identifying as Chinese, has the largest proportion of Asians of any city in North America. This makes the Richmond Dumpling Trail extra special. A recent addition to the successful Vancouver Food Tours, the morning route took us to an active day market and to five authentic and bustling restaurants featuring all manner of Asian dumplings. We were particularly impressed by the large number of midmorning diners at the Empire Seafood Restaurant and by the quality of its dim sum. As good as any we’ve enjoyed in Hong Kong.

Before leaving the Vancouver suburb and heading towards British Columbia wine country we stopped at the remarkable Richmond Olympic Oval. This huge building, the size of six Olympic hockey rinks, was used to house the long track speed skating events at the 2010 Olympics. Continually evolving, the venue now includes a couple of hockey rinks, 10 basketball courts, 13 volleyball courts, 15 badminton courts and more than a dozen high end ping pong tables used by the Canadian-Chinese Table Tennis Federation. In addition to the sports venues, the Richmond oval now includes the Olympic Experience, an excellent interactive museum celebrating the Olympic spirit with unique displays and simulated bobsled, ski jump, car racing and kayak rides. A gold medal for creativity.

More creativity comes from British Columbia’s vineyards.



The white water kayak simulation at the Richmond Oval. SANDRA AND JOHN NOWLAN PHOTOS



Deep fried chicken skin can be found at the Richmond Night Market.

The province’s best known wines come from the Okanagan Valley but a relatively new wine region in the Fraser River Valley, much closer to Vancouver, is winning awards and exciting sommeliers. Abbotsford, about an hour drive from Vancouver, is in the centre of the region and

boasts of several wineries that are now winning national and international awards.

In Abbotsford, we stayed at the Brookside Inn Boutique Hotel, run by Chris and Sandi Buis (Sandi is an excellent chef), featuring just six suites all named after famous movies. Ours was called, “Under the Tuscan Sun” and included a DVD copy of the film for playback in the room. TripAdvisor has called the Brookside, the Top Small Hotel in Canada. The included breakfasts were especially imaginative and tasty.

The Fraser Valley, located between the Coast and Cascade mountain ranges, is the largest agricultural region in British

Columbia and has a unique terroir that has traditionally produced berry wines and honey mead. But, in recent years, many acres of grape vines have been planted with excellent results.

Close to the Brookside Inn, the Singletree Winery has produced several gold and silver medal vintages in its nine years of operation.

Winery owner Debbie Etsell led us through a sampling. Especially delightful were the Pinot Gris, Merlot and our favourite, GrunerVeltliner - remarkably good dry, white wine with aromas of citrus, peach and honey.

Two other nearby wineries (with two more opening soon) also produce some of the best

B.C. vintages. The Mt. Lehman Winery started with three acres of grapes in 1991 and has now expanded to 15 acres. In 2011 this boutique producer won the Lieutenant Governor’s Award for Excellence in British Columbia Wines.

Among the tastings we enjoyed were Three Amigos (a blend of Cabernet Franc, Cabernet Foché and Merlot), Pinot Noir, Unoaked Chardonnay and Gewurztraminer.

The Seaside Pearl Farmgate Winery is built to resemble a small church and its cozy Chapel Tasting Room does reflect the spirit of Fraser Valley wines. In addition to its fine reds and whites (especially the red blends) Seaside Pearl sells some excellent sparkling wines. Standouts are the 2018 Daffodils (Petite Milo, Gewurztraminer and Orange Muscat) and Magnolias Estate Cabernet Foch Rosé (in sparkling or still).

Our final visit to a wine maker that takes advantage of Abbotsford’s cool climate was the Ripples Estate Winery in the east end of the city. In addition to some tasty grape blends and high bush blueberry wines the unique property includes a water garden nursery, display gardens, an attractive wedding venue and several koi ponds where visitors are welcome to feed the fish.

Abbotsford, population 140,000, was an unexpected treat with excellent wines, superb accommodation and a lively restaurant/craft beer scene. Compared with Richmond, it’s like two different worlds, but just an hour apart by car.



Singletree Winery owner, Debbie Etsell, holds a pair of her award winning wines.



The Chapel Tasting Room at the Seaside Pearl Winery.