

## BRITISH COLUMBIA

## Green tea. Roast duck. Are we in Hong Kong?

With its majority Asian population, Richmond makes visitors feel like they've arrived in Asia – not on Canada's West Coast

MARGO PFEIFF RICHMOND, B.C.

Richmond, with a population of 200,000 that is 60 per cent Asian, isn't just a suburb of Vancouver: It's a thoroughly modern Asian city in its own right. Richmond has more residents of Chinese ancestry than any other Canadian city, and that ancestry is celebrated in tasty and glorious style. Think Big Feet Massage, Millennium Karaoke, dragon boats, the aroma of crispy-skinned roast duck. Here are six ways to experience the Far East on the West Coast:

### 1. Shopping, Contemporary Asian-style

Hop off the elevated rapid transit Canada Line from downtown Vancouver at the Aberdeen station and you're in the Golden Village, four easy-to-explore square blocks that are the heart of Richmond's Asian hub. Be sure to explore Yaohan, a super-size supermarket with an aquarium-calibre live-fish section, and a pan-Asian selection of everything from sauces and snacks to freshly made take-away dishes from Taiwan, Thailand, China, Vietnam, Japan. Across the street, Parker Place feels like retro Hong Kong with a shopping labyrinth of tiny shops stuffed with fashion, jewellery, bins of dried critters and plants, and culinary surprises like Singapore pork jerky. Nearby is the contemporary Aberdeen Centre, an award-winning curvy contemporary mall designed by Hong Kong/Canadian architect Bing Thom. Pick up a Lamborghini, browse Giordano – the Asian Gap – or prowl Daiso, a Japanese "toonie" store where almost everything costs \$2. Learn traditional Chinese tea-making at Ten Ren's, get an herbalist to create a custom brew for what ails you, buy high-end Asian fashion, or browse cultural exhibits in the atrium alongside a massive fountain that gushes with sound and light drama toward a stellar upper-level food floor.

### 2. Foodies get their own street

Speaking of food, Richmond's 400-plus restaurants had a New York Times reporter claiming she tasted the "best Chinese food outside of China" here. Cheap chopstick fare can be had at dozens of mom-and-pop enclaves like Chen's Shanghai Kitchen, while top Hong Kong-trained chefs run high-end kitchens. One of them is Tony Luk at Jade Seafood, which consistently scoops up annual Chinese Restaurant Awards. Don't miss the to-die-for dim sum mushroom dumplings with truffle oil. Jade is one of the gems on Alexandra Road or, in local lingo, Wai Sek Kai – Eat Street – a three-block-long dead end crammed with more than 200 establishments. Poke through them and discover rich Malaysian laksa soup and other cross-Asian comfort food at the Cattle Café, tuck into hot-pot, Korean, or join the lineup for Chinese pastries at the wildly popular Kam Do Bakery.



Richmond's night market, top, is a sprawling riot of stalls open until Sept. 18. By day, explore Chinese gardens and temples, the Aberdeen Centre (North America's biggest Asian mall) and Steveston pier.

MARGO PFEIFF FOR THE GLOBE AND MAIL; TOURISM RICHMOND

### 3. Hit the Highway to Heaven

Stroll through a classical Chinese garden, follow the incense wafting around golden goddesses, then drop in for a Chinese vegetarian lunch. (The cafeteria is being expanded, but will reopen soon.) The International Buddhist Temple is modelled after the Forbidden City in Beijing and is presided over by an abbot with an MBA, the well-travelled Venerable Guan Cheng. Meditation classes in English take place Saturday mornings from 9 to 11, sometimes led by the abbot himself. Not far away, No. 5 Road is nicknamed Highway to Heaven – a Hindu cultural centre serves free Indian vegetarian lunches on Sundays, there's an Islamic Centre, and in 2010 the Thragu Monastery became Canada's first traditional Tibetan monastery.

### 4. Steveston Waterfront

Asians first came to Richmond to man the salmon canneries on the banks of the Fraser River. One of those canneries is now the excellent Gulf of Georgia Cannery National Historic Site. The quaint adjoining fishing village of Steveston's pier is a magnet for fresh-seafood-mad Asians who pick up sea urchins, sablefish and salmon right off the boats.

### 5. A night market that lights up summer

The Summer Night Market is classic Hong Kong-after-dark-kitsch-combing. A riot of stalls sprawls across a 10-acre site; more than 20,000 visitors stream in as the sun goes down every weekend from mid-May through Sept. 18. Crowds wander beneath strings of lights through aisles lined with 240 vendors pitching everything from cheap sunglasses and cellphone accessories to Samurai swords, goldfish, flip-flops and all things Hello Kitty. The epicentre is the food section, bathed in the aroma of garlic and sizzling pork, a pan-Asian street food fest of shrimp dumplings, spicy noodles and grilled squid. Asian-style junk food is a big hit, from bubble tea and spiralling Hurricane Fries to dragon beard candy and stuffed waffle cakes.

### 6. Tackle tai chi or even table tennis

According to a June, 2011, report, Richmond has the lowest obesity rate in Canada and part of the reason is probably the Asian love for exercise. Join in by cycling, fast-walking or jogging along the dikes holding back the Fraser River, or wake up each morning with a round of tai chi in one of the city's parks. Or maybe you want to explore the classic Asian passion for table tennis, which has come out of local basements and warehouses to hit the big time at the Richmond Oval (Richmond-Oval.ca). It now houses a Table Tennis Centre of Excellence complete with private and group lessons, and camps taught by Olympic coaches.

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