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Published by the National Post Company,  
 a subsidiary of Canadian Newspapers Inc.  
 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4  
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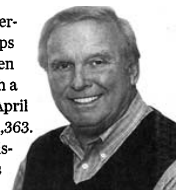
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NATIONAL POST, SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 7, 2009



Cruise news you can use  
 OF THE WEEK

This week's pick is a long, but very interesting, cruise on Holland America's 1,300-passenger Amsterdam. The cruise is from Valparaíso, which serves Santiago, Chile, to Seattle. There are two more stops in Chile, then an overnight stay in Lima, Peru, then on to Manta, Ecuador, up to Costa Rica and then four stops in Mexico, including Acapulco and Cabo San Lucas. From there, it sails to San Diego with a stop in Victoria, before arriving in Seattle to start the Alaska cruise season. The cruise departs on April 24 and lasts for 22 days. The starting price, based on double occupancy without fees or taxes, is \$1,363. The trip was available at the time of writing. More details can be found at [hollandamerica.com](http://hollandamerica.com). Visit [portsandbays.com](http://portsandbays.com) for daily updates on the latest cruise news, best deals and behind-the-scenes stories from the industry. Phil Reimer, Canwest News Service, [preimer@canwest.com](mailto:preimer@canwest.com)



B.C. BURBCHOMP  
 Richmond's true riches are in its amazing Asian eateries By Amy Rosen

The Travel Media Association of Canada had its annual conference last week in Richmond, B.C., which meant there were hundreds of hungry writers anxious to sample the local delicacies. And where the instinct would be to grab a cab and head to downtown Vancouver, a lot of them decided to stay in suburbia instead. (Hear me out.) Richmond's so-called Golden Village is an intensely concentrated taste of authentic China. Most of its chefs are from tradition-soaked Northern China, while most of the diners are part of the New Era of Chinese in British Columbia. Put the two together and you get a tastier whole — be it a twist on a dumpling or a reimaged hot pot. And besides, the 15-day celebration of Chinese New Year was in full flight.

Here are some of the best spots the Vancouver suburb has to offer.

**1 Shiang Garden Seafood Restaurant** A framed photo of Jimmy Carter shaking hands with the owner is just one of reasons to start the day with dim sum here. The decor is old-school Chinese opulence, with chandeliers and a giant glitter ball, but you've come for the steamer baskets of oversized yet delicate Cantonese dumplings — peanut and minced pork; shrimp with pea shoots; the profound textural bliss of winter melon wrapped around chopped scallop and abalone mushroom — all helped along with a strangely addictive house-made XO sauce. Finish with the vanilla-scented custard "rabbit dumpling," which tastes just like a Jewish cheese Danish.

**2 Sun Sui Wah Seafood Restaurant** This popular local chain resto is more contemporary than your average Chinese joint, with attentive service and impressively fresh dumplings. While the dishes are steadfastly traditional, the dim sum menu changes every six weeks to incorporate local seasonal products, such as fresh seafood and gai lan (Chinese broccoli). This translates into ethereal crabmeat and pea shoot dumplings, and lacy crunchy tofu pockets packed with plump day-boat shrimp. Check out the seafood tanks on the way out: The Dungeness crabs are as big as bear cubs.

**3 Jade Seafood Restaurant** Clay pot dishes are often labelled as "hot pot" dishes on Chinese restaurant menus in English-speaking areas of the world, but they shouldn't be confused with the large metal hot pots cooked at the table (more on those a little later). The variety of Cantonese-style clay hot pots served at Jade Seafood Restaurant includes a mini Thai seafood number boasting big dense mushrooms, tender scallops and shrimp in a sweet and sour sauce. Another features rare sliced beef tossed in a melted foie gras sauce. Many restaurants in Richmond also specialize in perfect tea matches, and here, Shou Mei (a black tea) is a perfect pairing, the tea elevating the food and vice versa.

**4 Fisherman's Terrace Restaurant** Blond wood paneling and wraparound windows make for some West Coast-contemporary Asian digs



Be sure to try the Tung Ting Oolong at Ten Ren's Tea, though be warned that it's a touch pricier than your Red Rose.

— with a lunchtime clientele to match. The specialties here are big-ticket seafood items such as local geoduck — the largest burrowing clam in the world, which we enjoy two ways: sashimi-style and stir-fried. First comes the sashimi, sliced paper thin and layered over ice. It smells of the sea — not fish, but a day at the beach. The texture is stiff but tender and the taste is an acquired winner. The second course is the knockout punch: Clam-like strips kissed with butter and then stir-fried with buckets of crunchy garlic, jalapenos and green onion.

**5 Shanghai River Restaurant** Six thousand dumplings a day are made at this eatery, and oodles of hand-pulled Shanghai-style noodles, all on view from the serene dining room. This type of Northern Chinese cuisine focuses on heavier meats and sauces — it's not as delicate as Cantonese, but perhaps even more satisfying. Thrill to the taste of crab and pork soup dumplings: a volatile explosion (eat with due caution) of juice and flavour concealed within a quivering wrapper that you dip in black vinegar infused with shreds of fresh ginger. The rustic noodles, meanwhile, are soft and meaty, tossed with emerald pea shoots, Chinese cabbage and mushrooms.

**6 Hakkasan Contemporary Chinese Cuisine** This coolly designed boîte would feel right at home in Yaletown: Less than a year old, it may just be the city's first great Chinese date place. Hakkasan gleams inspiration from the Hakka people: nomadic tribes of Han Chinese originating from Southern China. For example, quail and snow fungus (an intriguing mushroom-like vegetable) in young coconut is a double-boiled chicken and pork broth finished within a sweet coconut — you scoop out the softened nut meat as you eat. It's clean and deep, pure but not simple — and unlike anything I've ever had. Wonderful.

**7 Vogue Chinese Cuisine** Here, Taiwanese and Szechwan specialties are presented in a space that's all creams and black with a light-box room divider. And the food is just as sleek. "Don't eat the hot peppers." The Mon-

golian beef is apparently the best example of the dish in all of Richmond, and judging from my crispy-coated strips tossed in a perfectly balanced sweet and sour heat, I'd have to agree. But the Dou Su cod, a Formosa Island specialty, makes for truly luscious eating. Steamed cod (watch for bones) is encased in a thick crust of soybeans that have been deep-fried and ground so that they resemble sand — it tastes like those delicious sticky bites on the bottom of a frying pan. In other words, addictive stuff.

**8 POSH Charcoal Collaboration Dining** Next, a quick pit stop in Japan, for an unbelievable meal deal (all-you-can-eat Sukiyaki is \$11.88 at lunch and \$15.88 at dinner). With its winning bistro-style atmosphere, POSH offers platters of organic vegetables (delivered twice a day), thinly sliced Alberta grade-A beef, tofu, pork and rice noodles, all of which you cook at your table in a cast iron pot filled with a secret-recipe Sukiyaki sauce and

sweet local cabbage and bean sprouts. It's all about convivial communal dining, paired with Japanese beers or unfiltered sakes.

**9 Aberdeen Centre** is modelled after the great malls of China, so here, too, you can buy everything from ancient Chinese herbs to a Ferrari, and a \$600 toilet (no joke). Then relax in the gleaming food court, which, instead of being hidden in the basement, gets top-floor status and mountain view. It is here that you will find Beard Papa's famous airy pastry puffs filled with none-too-sweet pudding-like custard that suits the Asian palate. Originally from Japan, Beard Papa has become a worldwide phenom, with the Aberdeen Centre location breaking the one-day franchise record, and now selling an average of 6,000 puffs per day.

**10 Ten Ren's Tea** And, finally, no

trip to Richmond is complete without tea. While shopping the Aberdeen Centre, take a taste of Richmond home from Ten Ren's Tea, while learning about the sourcing, classification, production, and overall enjoyment of China's favourite beverage. My suggestion would be the Tung Ting Oolong (sweet, mellow, peachy), which Josephine poured for me so that I could decide whether or not I wanted to spend the \$66 to 300 grams. Sadly, I did not.

**Aberdeen Centre:** 4151 Hazelbridge Way, Richmond, B.C.; [aberdencentre.com](http://aberdencentre.com)

YOUR PASSPORT PLEASE

Sally Armstrong is the author of *Bitter Roots, Tender Shoots: The Uncertain Fate of Afghanistan's Women*.

**Q** You have a lot of experience travelling Afghanistan. What's one of your most interesting stories?

**A** The Panjshir Valley stands out. It's this stunningly beautiful part of the country where the highway clings to a mountainside on one side and drops into a river canyon far below on the other. It is actually where the militia showed up, calling me a spy and a whore.

**Q** How did you get out of that?

**A** My driver told me to say that I didn't have a passport, and then one of them said, "No foreigners come to Panjshir unless they are from France, because the French support the Muslims." Without missing a beat my driver said I was from France and they let us through.

**Q** Do you travel places where you don't get stopped by militias?

**A** I took a glorious trip to Costa Rica after I had just come back from Afghanistan, but I've been going back and forth to Afghanistan since the Taliban came in the fall of '96.

**Q** You must have some interesting hotel stories then?

**A** I spent most nights sleeping on the floor in mud-brick houses, in -20C to -25C at night. You don't get the luxury of hotels, but you do get the luxury of being in extraordinary places, on the front line of history.

Jesse Kinas-Goodin,  
 Weekend Post



77% of adult Canadians have some problems making simple calculations on a bank deposit slip.

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Michael Popper is President and CEO of the Travel Industry Council of Ontario (TICO) and Registrar of the Ontario Travel Industry Act. If you have a question or for more information, e-mail [info@tico.ca](mailto:info@tico.ca) or fax (905) 424-4607. TICO may be contacted at (905) 624-6247 or 1 (888) 451-TICO. Or visit TICO's web site at [www.tico.ca](http://www.tico.ca).

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