

Vancouver charms with sustainable delights

By Stephen Jermanok
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

VANCOUVER, British Columbia — All it took was one visit to the Granville Island Public Market to discover the variety of culinary delights in Vancouver. Open since 1994 and one of the city's top sites, this is the prototypical food market. With more than 50 vendors, including many here from its inception, and a rotating roster of farmers and culinary artisans, the market is my idea of foodie heaven.

Fortunately my family and I were led around the maze of stalls by Jamie Wilson, a former chef with Canada's Via Rail system, who now conducts food tours for Edible British Columbia. Our first stop was La Baguette, cherished by restaurateurs for its French breads and pastries. My children quickly devoured a just-out-of-the-oven pain au chocolat.

Next we wandered over to Seafood City to try their smoked salmon. A long glass case featured the ocean catch, including black cod, otherwise known as sablefish, halibut, sockeye salmon, monkfish, and large bins of oysters. "They sell only sustainable fish," said Wilson. "Everything at Granville Island has to be sustainable, local, made in B.C."

We passed bins overflowing with fresh fruit like large blackberries, Rainier cherries, golden berries, and loquats, often referred to as Chinese plums. We sampled different types of prosciutto at Oyama Sausage, the tomato, pesto, and mozzarella focaccia at Terra Breads, and a chocolate with a salted caramel middle created by the Belgium-trained owner of Abbotsford. Not everything was a hit with the kids.

"Yuck, this is the worst thing I ever tasted," said Melanie, 13, before spitting a marinated black olive into a napkin.



LISA LEAVITT FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

Fruit — from cherries to loquats — is abundant at the Granville Island Public Market.

I'm still amazed that she and her brother Jake, 15, have progressed beyond years of mac and cheese, pizza, and pasta. When they finally came out of the fog, they did so with aplomb, craving foods that span the globe. Now every Restaurant Week in Boston, Jake asks me to bring him to Taranata, a Peruvian restaurant on Hanover Street, while Melanie favors the spicy Indian cuisine of Brookline's Tamarind Bay.

Food has always been the ingredient that, when chosen correctly, enhances my travel experience. This is especially true in a city like Vancouver. Blessed with a bounty of staples from sea and farm, a vibrant multi-ethnic canvas to spice things up, and a population that has supported the locavore movement from its early stages, it

has become one of North America's top dining locales.

That evening we headed to Coast, a restaurant close to the downtown office buildings. We had reservations and were escorted to a second-floor table with views of the oval-shaped raw bar and chefs slicing and dicing the fish.

All fish are line-caught, and the menu names the fisherman who hooked each. We started with a mango California roll. The chunks of Dungeness crab and creamy avocado mixed well with the sweet mango.

"This is a winner," said Jake, a budding food critic.

The spicy ahi tuna roll was topped with a dollop of hot sauce, while the buttermilk-battered calamari were lightly fried and paired with a garlic aioli sauce. For entrees, the sa-

blefish and slightly charred halibut, a fish I hardly ever order because it's oven overcooked, cut like butter and were incredibly fresh and tasty. Melanie enjoyed the fish and chips, which were made from cod.

For breakfast the next morning we headed to one of the largest restaurants in the city, Floata. Located on Keefer Street in the heart of Chinatown, this third-floor emporium features dim sum daily. Share a table with locals and watch the ladies work their carts as you choose from shrimp dumplings, steamed pork buns, scallop shu mai, salt and pepper calamari, and my children's favorite, sticky rice.

The best known green space in town is a jaunt to Stanley Park along the water's edge. We rented bikes and pedaled

If you go . . .

- Granville Island Public Market**
www.granvilleisland.com/pub-lic-market
The Granville Island Market Tour costs \$35 per person.
- Coast Restaurant**
1054 Alberni St.
604-685-5010
www.glowbalgroup.com/coast
Entrees \$17.95 to \$46.95.
Make reservations well in advance.
- Floata Restaurant**
180 Keefer Street, No. 400
604-602-0368
www.floata.com
Dim sum for four, \$40.
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my favorite restaurants in the city. Shaded by the towering trees, the Teahouse has front-row views of the Pacific.

The food is as glorious as the setting. Yet the venue caters to all, accustomed to bikers dressed in shorts and T-shirts dining with businessmen in suits and ties. We dined on salmon burgers, lightly breaded salt and pepper calamari, and sablefish topped with miso sauce. For dessert, the kids had slices of lemon meringue pie and red velvet cake. I could barely get my fork in for a taste.

On our final night, we took a cab to the Strathcona neighborhood and a local favorite, Campagnolo, known for its northern Italian fare. We sat at one of their butcher block wood tables and dove into a snack of crispy ceci, charred chickpeas seasoned with chili flakes, mint, lemon, and olive oil. The restaurant gets many of its ingredients at the farmer's market at the train station next door.

One bite of the tasty margherita pizza, topped with oregano, red pepper, and Parmesan, and we knew we were in good hands. The agnolotti pasta dish featured slender ravioli filled with caramelized onions served in a pork broth. We ended with cherries, blackberries, and raspberries found that afternoon at the market, topped with whipped cream.

"That was the perfect meal," said Jake, finishing the last bite.

Ask me about that blockbuster Surrealism show at the Vancouver Art Gallery last summer and I couldn't describe one painting. But those sweet blackberries that burst with flavor in your mouth . . . I can taste them now.

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For a family of four, peak experiences add up in Alberta

►ROCKIES
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straight to Banff and Lake Louise to take far more populated treks. I hoped to see as much of the region as possible in a short time and wanted my teenagers to sample new sports like white-water rafting and rock climbing.

I knew we had made the right decision when we arrived in Calgary and the taxi driver told us there was an outbreak of cougars in the region and he didn't mean older women on the prowl. Far more likely, we would run into grizzlies, as evidenced by a huge yellow banner across our bike trail the first afternoon warning bikers to go no farther or face the consequences of running into bears down a narrow corridor. We took to the streets and soon were sweeping downhill, past the panoply of peaks.

I had chosen Austin-Lehman because its home base is in Billings, Mont., so I figured they knew this neck of the woods. I was proven right when my guide Marcy noted that she had been leading trips to the Canadian Rockies since 1994. Yet, even with this level of expertise, Austin-Lehman went out of its way to hire local guides with more refined specialties.

The next morning our group of 10 went on a two-hour whitewater rafting jaunt down the Kananaskis River with outfitter Rainbow Riders. We were cruising down the rapids of the teal-colored river and I quickly realized I didn't need a cup of coffee to wake me up. One splash of these icy waters did the trick.

"They call it a Canadian kiss," said our rafting guide, after the waters drenched me. We went through an adrenaline-pumping series of rapids and Josh, letting out a whoop, said, "This is a better rush than Xbox."

Perhaps it was too much of a rush. After paddling back to one rapid to surf atop the wave and be showered by the water, I suddenly heard my wife screaming, "Jake, Jake!" I looked to my right and saw my son outside the raft, floating to the opposite bank. We threw him a rope and quickly had



LISA LEAVITT FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

Biking on the outskirts of Banff National Park in Alberta.

him back in the raft, but he received something far more valuable than any souvenir. Spontaneous mishaps while traveling often lead to the most vivid memories years down the road.

That afternoon, we were led by another reputable guide, Dave Stark, to the base of Mount Yamnuska, a serious spot for avid mountaineers. When we reached the sandstone cliffs where we would be rock climbing, we were met by a troop from the Canadian Army training on the same rock face.

I looked below at the U-shaped Kananaskis Valley and then across at the snowcapped peak of Mount Baldy, feeling a bit apprehensive about this next sport. Climbing up a slab of rock hundreds of feet in the air is not exactly my idea of a good time. But Stark's quiet confidence made me feel at ease. We started slowly, learning to find our foot and toe holds on the boulders that sat beside the cliff face.

Once attached to a belay, I wasn't surprised to see Jake climb the cliff like Spider-Man. One of his favorite activities at camp is the climbing wall. Yet, it was my daughter, Melanie, 13, who really impressed me. She went up twice, doing the far more challenging climb on the second circuit. I was ready to quit halfway through that climb before I took a deep breath, overcame my initial panic, and made it to the top.

"This is the first time I ever rafted or rock climbed," said a beaming Melanie as she wiggled out of the climbing har-

ness. And it was only the end of day two.

The following day we made it to Banff National Park and walked under a light rain to the raging waterfalls that are the highlight of the popular Johnson Canyon Walk. For lunch, we picnicked at another glorious spot, Cascade Pond, where the lofty peaks reflected off the placid waters. Here, we celebrated Jake's 15th birthday with a cake as our second guide, Anne, presented him with a life-size helium balloon of Mr. Incredible.

We made Jake attach the balloon to the back of his bike as we pedaled in the rain along the shoreline of Lake Minnewanka, which was shaded by the dramatically sculpted massif of the Fairholme Range. On a riveting downhill ride by Two Jack Lake, we zipped past a group of bighorn sheep grazing on the side of the road before completing the loop back at Cascade Pond.

The sun returned along with the crowds the next morning at Moraine Lake, yet we didn't mind sharing this sight with others. A canoe glided through the turquoise waters, ringed by a crown of thorny peaks. After posing for the holiday card shot, we followed Marcy and Anne through an emerald forest of moss-covered ground, tall Engelmann spruce trees, and glimpsed the craggy mountain peaks once the forest opened up. Surprisingly we passed no other hikers even though we left a parking lot full of buses.

"Ninety percent of people visiting Banff don't get more than 2 kilometers from the

If you go . . .

- Austin-Lehman Adventures**
800-575-1540
www.austinlehman.com
Price of the six-day tour is \$2,898 per adult, \$2,318 per child, including all activities, food, and lodging.

trailhead," said Marcy.

That's a shame, I thought, because they would miss the quiet waters of Consolation Lake, backed by a hanging glacier, that Jake said "looked like the marshmallow topping on a sundae." All by our lonesome, we grabbed the front-row seats atop big boulders, had our picnic lunch, and watched small furry critters with rounded ears called pikas scurry in and out of the rocks.

That night we dined at a local landmark, the Lake Louise Station. Built in 1909, the former railroad station is now a popular restaurant. We sat around a circular table and

sampled hot baked rolls, juicy cuts of Alberta prime rib, fish and chips, and stuffed chicken. The room had a nostalgic feel, with old lamps illuminating the wooden paneling, and black-and-white photos on the walls.

Our last full day, we drove on what many call the most scenic mountain pass in North America, the Icefields Parkway. The 143-mile roadway gave us a last dose of alpine splendor.

We arrived at Athabasca Glacier, where a sheet of snow and ice appeared to drop from the high ridge all the way down to the road. It had seemed silly donning winter parkas, gloves, wool hats, and snow boots at the height of summer, but we needed every bit of clothing for a hike atop the glacier. We were led by another local guide, Bernard, who mentioned that the glacier was melting 20 meters (about 65 feet) a year.

The ground crunched underneath as we walked over small rivulets of blue water flowing downhill. "Drink," Bernard said. "Drink the 10,000-year-old water."

I dipped my cup into the flowing water, took a big gulp, and sighed. For one magical moment, I wished time would stand still as I took in the majestic scenery and my family as they drank the icy water, smiling ear to ear.

Stephen Jermanok can be reached at www.ActiveTravels.com.

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