

July 12, 2006

taste

Chinatown tour an exotic food heaven

Deana Lancaster

Contributing Writer

WITH its crowded, broken streets, exotic smells, and unusual comestibles, Chinatown is a must-see for visitors to Vancouver.

Even for many locals, a visit to the busy neighbourhood bordered by Hastings, Keefer, Gore and Taylor streets is like a trip to a foreign land. And while there are great deals to be had on everything from seafood and meats, to vegetables, herbs, even cookware, Chinese languages dominate, and the most cosmopolitan foodie might have a difficult time deciphering labels, chatting with store clerks and reading price tags.

Lucky for us, the Vancouver-based culinary adventure company Edible British Columbia is now running weekly tours of Chinatown. So on a recent Saturday I laced up my



the dish

walking shoes and joined in on one.

Tour guide Stephanie Yuen is a fellow food writer, a fount of information on all things food-related (especially Asian), and possessed of endless energy. After giving a brief history of the neighbourhood, and of the Chinese population in B.C., she led the six of us tour-goers through the Moon Gate into the public area of Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Classical Chinese garden.

"There's magic in this garden," she told us. Indeed, there's a hushed calm next to the lily pad-covered pond,

bamboo forest and intricate wood and tile work that isn't evident in the bustling streets that surround the garden. After a few minutes' respite we were ready to begin our gastronomic adventure.

First stop was the Mylite Café, a small restaurant and retail operation specializing in the sale of tofu. Who knew there were so many varieties and flavours of the soybean curd? Yuen soon had us seated and dished out samples of hot tofu pudding: light and creamy, sweetened with ginger syrup and served with deep-fried long bread, it was a tasty start to our tour.

Then it was on to Ten Ren Tea & Ginseng, where we learned about the healthful properties of ginseng and sampled Chinese green tea.

At the Dollar Meat Store Yuen walked us through the varieties of vacuum-packed meats including Chinese sausages, smoked meats, Chinese hams and bacon, and duck, and described her

See Herb page 38

taste



NEWS photo Deana Lancaster

EDIBLE B.C. tour guide Stephanie Yuen helps unravel the mysteries of Vancouver's Chinatown to curious tourists and locals alike.

Herb store is a highlight

From page 37

favourite ways of using them in recipes. She purchased a selection of sausage and pork, and once back out on the busy sidewalk we crowded around her with our chopsticks for samples.

At various fruit and vegetable markets she paused and told us the names of produce unfamiliar to us

— bok choy, daikon, bitter melon and lotus root; lychee, mangosteen and dragon fruit — and the best ways to use and eat them. At the bakery we sated our sweet teeth with coconut buns and watermelon cake, and at the fish shop we exclaimed in delight over the selection and value available.

Most interesting (and unsettling) was our visit to

Kuo Wah Trading, where Yuen gave us a lesson in "Herbology 101." She began with descriptions of fairly benign dried goods: herbs and spices, nuts, berries and mushrooms. She explained how soups and sauces could be flavoured by tiny dried shrimp and scallops, and how many herbs could be

See Intimate page 40