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TRAVEL By Joseph Blake Photos courtesy of Portland Oregon Visitors Association

PORTLAND

Where urban dreams become reality

What will be the seed for Victoria's revitalization? Our downtown core needs more residents. With a rapid transit system like Portland's, Victorians would need fewer cars and parking spaces, freeing up space for more vibrant urban development. People living downtown would support neighbourhood pubs, clubs, art galleries, design stores and restaurants. The Pearl proves it can be done.

During my visit to the Pearl in the spring I was lucky to discover Andina restaurant's modern, regional take on traditional Peruvian dishes. The highlight of my meal at the convivial eatery was the bar's Sacsayhuamán cocktail of rocoto-pepper-infused vodka, passion fruit, sugar and cilantro served straight-up, followed by tapas-like marinated beef heart kebobs and a succulent yet crispy scholar fish and mango-shrimp ravioli drizzled with a spicy rocoto pepper and passion fruit syrup, ginger and chive oil. Yum!

A couple of months after my visit, *The Oregonian*, Portland's daily, named Andina the city's top restaurant. Oba, the latest "Nuevo Latino" restaurant in the Pearl, is a high-concept hit too, voted restaurant of the year by the city's *Willamette Week*. The Pearl is an adventurous eater's paradise.

Lawrence Gallery, where a long-running show displayed the 1949 Carmen Collection of Picasso's copper plates and etchings, and Yoshida's Fine Art Gallery, Wine Bar & Bistro, where you can buy a \$5 bento box lunch and check out the work of over 50 regional artists, are just two of the best galleries in the Pearl's wealth of wonderful art venues. During my recent visit I also witnessed the old Armory's transformation into another reborn Pearl institution, Portland Center Stage's new 550- and 200-seat theatres.

Jimmy Mak's is a funky international jazz shrine on the trolley route

through the Pearl. The 80-seat corner joint serves up Greek food as well as some of Portland's finest jazz, including the Mel Brown Quintet's weekly Wednesday night showcase. Very hip.

Take the trolley around the Pearl to the 23rd Avenue stop where you can check out that neighbourhood's sleeker, slightly more polished urban vision. Jo Bar is a très chic dessert and drinks destination, and the 100-martini menu around the corner at Bartini on 21st Avenue is another late-night pick to click. Down the street at Paley's Place, chef Vitaly Paley's playfully experimental regional cuisine has been a Portland favourite for a decade.

During my Portland visits I've stayed at the Alexis, the 1913 Benson Hotel and Hotel Lucia. Recently voted one of the world's best new hotels by *Condé Nast Traveller*, the Lucia's young staff and stylish, modern charms made my recent week in the Rose City very memorable. The 128-room boutique hotel displays more than 600 of David Hume Kennerly's black-and-white photos of slightly askew heartland America, as well as a gallery of challenging modern art in the lobby. My room's bookshelf provided a smart collection of perfect bedtime reading material, and the crisp, high-thread-count bedding and firm, hypoallergenic pillows inspired a deep, restful sleep.

Refreshed nightly by Hotel Lucia's comfort and elegantly minimalist design, I hit Portland's downtown streets running . . . or at least walking briskly toward the river and Chinatown, where after visiting Portland's authentic Classical Chinese Garden, I discovered perfect pork pot stickers at the unpretentious Golden Horse. Nearby at the Republic Café and Ming Lounge, I tasted "the best Long Island Ice Tea in Portland" served by Mary Sasaki, a septuagenarian who has been behind the bar since 1953.