

TRAVEL

DESTINATIONS • DIVERSIONS • DISCOVERY

WWW.CALGARYHERALD.COM

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 8, 2008

Portland is the esthete's answer to a weekend getaway filled with fine food, soulful music and trendy shops

WEST COAST COOL

JOSEPH BLAKE
FOR THE CALGARY HERALD

If you love cities, you'll love Portland. Oregon's largest city is both a nostalgic reflection of North America's early 20th-century urban boom and an in-the-moment vision of a dynamic, environmentally sensitive modern city that works.

First built upon the banks of the Willamette River to process fish and lumber, Portland's economy is

now driven by high-tech modern giants like Intel and homegrown power, Nike. With a handful of local universities, Portland's youthful, highly educated population of about one million is connected by a state-of-the-art public transit network of light-rail trains, trolleys and an extensive bus system.

Powell's City of Books, the world's largest independent bookstore, occupies a full city block near downtown and is the city's

cultural heart, a hive of literary buzz with daily readings, coffee shop and 68,000 square feet of new and used books. Literature, fashion and design are flourishing in Portland, but the city's food and music scenes are the foundation of a rich regional culture that is ground zero for west coast cool.

Portland has probably been cool since local heroes, The Kingsmen first started singing Louie Louie back in the early 1960s. Another Portland band led

by bluesmen Robert Cray and Curtis Salgado inspired The Blues Brothers movie, while current indie-rock darlings like The Decembrists, The Shins and The Dandy Warhols are part of a vibrant, local music scene supported by more than 50 live venues and dozens of independent record stores.

The food scene is equally regional and renowned for its range of influences and organic sources.

SEE WEST COAST, PAGE F2

If you go:

- Hotel Lucia, 400 southwest Broadway, 1-877-225-1717
- Andian Restaurant, 1314 northwest Glisan St. 503-228-9535
- Jimmy Mak's, 221 northwest 10th Ave. 503-295-6542
- St. Honore Boulangerie, 2335 Thurman St. 503-445-4342
- Ken's Artisan Bakery, 338 northwest 21st Ave. 503-248-2202
- Paley's Place, 1241 northwest 21st Ave. 503-234-4263
- Castagna Restaurant, 1752 southeast Hawthorne Blvd. 503-231-7373
- Foster & Dobbs, 2518 northeast 15th Ave. 503-284-1157
- Elephant Delicatessen, 115 northwest 22nd Ave. 503-299-6304
- Heathman Tea Court, 1001 southwest Broadway, 503-790-7752

During a recent, long weekend my wife and I spent hours at Portland's sprawling Art Museum, an afternoon enjoying views of Mount Ranier, Mount Hood and Mount St. Helens while walking the trails of Washington Park, and an evening at the Center Stage production of *Guys and Dolls*, but mostly we ate, and ate, and ate. Great chefs are turning Portland into a culinary destination.

While visiting Portland we stay at Hotel Lucia. Hotels like the Benson and the Heathman are century-old downtown institutions with lovingly-preserved historic charm, while modern accommodation like the Ace and Jupiter Hotel offer an edgier, rock and roll-inspired vision of the city. The Nines just opened above Macy's in the old Meier and Frank building beside Pioneer Square's transit hub, and it offers 10 floors of opulence and local art in 300 luxurious rooms including 1,500 and 2,500-square-foot suites.

We stay in a much smaller room at the Lucia. There is a pillow menu (I like mine hard.), a very comfortable bed with high thread count linens, and walls throughout the hotel featuring hundreds of David Kennerly's dramatic black and white photos, including a famous shot of former president Richard Nixon playing the piano. The 128-room, boutique hotel is centrally located, and its elegantly minimalist design and young, enthusiastic and helpful staff always provide a comfortable home away from home in Portland.

During a recent visit we walked from the Lucia a few blocks to Andina Restaurant in the Pearl, a gentrified warehouse district of lofts, galleries, restaurants and hip stores at the edge of downtown. After pisco (the hip grappa-like South American spirit) cocktails and a feast of Peruvian-influenced cebiches, seared tuna and quinoa-crusting scallops, we took a short, late-night stroll through the Pearl to Jimmy Mak's, one of the world's great jazz joints, for a set by a Portland-based hard bop quartet before returning to the hotel and sweet dreams.

The next morning we hopped on the historic trolley for a ride to the trendy, 23rd Avenue neighbourhood for coffee au lait and traditional French baked goods at St. Honore Boulangerie.

A champagne frittata of mushroom, chicken sausage and fresh herbs in a croissant with bechamel was delicious, as was the croissant filled with emmenthal bechamel sauce and sliced turkey breast.

Another northwest Portland breakfast favourite, Ken's Artisan Bakery makes perfect chocolate and almond flavoured croissants, quiche, fruit tarts, baguettes and French country breads. It's a popular neighbourhood hangout with rich Stumptown coffee and a lunch menu featuring house-roasted turkey breast sandwiches and pulled pork barbecue on a ciabatta roll. Paley's Place is another of this neighbourhood's culinary institutions. Chef and owner Vitaly Paley helped launch Portland's regional cuisine over a decade ago, creatively infusing classic French cooking with seasonal delicacies from nearby farms. Housed in a cosy, Victorian home, this dining room remains one of my favourites in a long list of fabulous Portland restaurants.

Castagna, across the Willamette River on Portland's bohemian east side, is another longtime favourite. During a recent meal I enjoyed chef Elias Cairo's sauteed Willapa Bay coho salmon, corn, chantarelles, crawfish and cream with fingerling potatoes. It was sumptuous, as was a taste of my wife's grilled Cattail Creek rack of lamb and lamb sausage with roasted red pepper and shell bean salad, grilled torpedo onion and garlicky romesco sauce. We always return to Castagna for the chef's seasonal and regional take on influences from France and Italy, well-chosen wine list and superb service.

Next door to the elegantly minimalist restaurant, they've opened Cafe Castagna serving an abbreviated menu in a more casual atmosphere.

One afternoon on the east side, we stopped at Foster & Dobbs Authentic Foods for lunch. The shop is dedicated to artisan foods from small producers, and they have an impressive offering of farmstead cheeses and cured meats. They served us sandwiches of Finnochiona salami with fennel and black pepper, fresh chevre, red onion confit and leafy greens. We tried some of the locally produced Hot Lips blackberry soda and bought a couple more bottles and also stocked up on Willamette Valley Pinot Noir before moving on to nearby Mississippi Avenue for some more shopping.

The emerging scene in this northeast Portland neighbourhood includes popular, funky restaurants like Porque No Taqueria and Miss Delta's playful take on deep-south classics like catfish and po-boy sandwiches.

The street is anchored by a Rebuilding Center that offers a huge inventory of recycled building materials and workshops in transforming discarded materials into new furniture, household objects, art and sculpture. Mississippi Avenue is also lined with a couple of blocks of shops sporting Portland's retro-fashion look.

I loved Porch Light's stock of old time houseware and wearables, but my wife enjoyed the Pearl's more upscale, modern design shops even more, particularly the sophisticated women's clothing at Babette and the glass art at Bullseye Gallery.

Cargo's bulging warehouse of African, Asian and Latin American folk art and furnishings were really fun too.

The outdoor Artists' Market under the Burnside Bridge on Saturday and Sunday was packed with work by local artisans too. Street musicians serenaded the crowds as they shopped and savoured a range of concessions from Portland's multicultural community. There were even bigger crowds at the Saturday Farmer's Market in the South Park blocks at Portland State University between southwest Harrison and Montgomery streets. It's a huge showcase of the regional food scene's bounty and a chance to sample locally produced pate, pickles, cheese and baked goods.

You can also buy many of these products and more at Elephant Delicatessen, another local culinary institution that has featured local food producers since 1978. The flagship, 22nd Avenue store includes a large selection of house-made baked goods, cheese and charcuterie, sandwiches, prepared dishes and frozen meals to take home. On a recent mid-day visit we tried the hot pastrami and Tuscan chicken sandwiches with a couple more bottles of Hot Lips soda, and they were lip-smacking delicious.

A special Chocolate Tea in the historic Tea Court in the Heathman Hotel was a collaboration between chef Philippe Boulot and the man *Gourmet Magazine* dubbed "The Picasso of Chocolate," San Francisco chocolatier Michael Recchiuti.

At high tea, pork pate, cucumber sandwiches, devilled egg and scones were matched with Recchiuti's assorted chocolate creations, cocoa macaroons, chocolate eclairs and cups of rich, drinking chocolate varieties from Columbia, Madagascar and Hawaii.

We left in near-diabetic shock and wandered back down Broadway to the Lucia for a well-earned rest before our next meal.