

Downtown with uptown taste

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Given that I eat and drink for a living, it takes a lot to impress me. I am proud to call Victoria home and am thrilled to live just steps from downtown so I can take advantage of all that is interesting and delicious. Downtown Victoria is a growing culinary centre between iconic Victoria merchants such as Rogers' Chocolates and the Dutch Bakery and hip new cafés, including Café Mela at the Belvedere.

As a proud supporter of local business and local products, I never miss a Thursday at the Island Chef's Collaborative Market in Bastion Square. It's such a pleasure to arrive on Langley Street just after the 10 a.m. opening to see the chef-run market bustling with activity. Word is out about the fabulous products that the ICC purchases from local farmers and it always draws a crowd. As I saw a chef pull away on his motor bike with all sorts of produce piled on the back, it took me back to shopping at the markets in Tuscany. Victoria has that same magic! Reselling freshly picked produce, jams and fresh flowers purchased from the farmers, the market is run all day Thursdays with volunteers who are chef members of the ICC. Spearheaded by ICC president David Mincey of Camille's and staffed by a cavalry of volunteers, the market raises funds for the ICC, whose profits go back to the local farmers they are supporting.

Only a few blocks away on Government Street is my new favourite for lunch, Café Vieux Montréal. Try their own cold-smoked lox in a shrimp and salmon croissant baked fresh each day or their authentic Montréal smoked meat on their own rye bread. It's a happening spot with music on Friday nights and a great place to practise your French.

When cravings take over, it's Pig I need! Tucked in near the View Street Parkade, this tiny spot often has line-ups out the door for its pulled-pork sandwiches, beef brisket or chicken. Jeff Hetherington slow roasts his meats and uses his own special Pig sauce.

If you're looking for an interesting wine experience, drop in to the Artisan Wine Shop on Government Street for a tasting any day of the week and reserve a spot for the special structured tastings on Monday nights. Be led through a variety of the Mission Hill family of wines from the Okanagan and learn about wine as you sip, sniff and swirl.

Get a literal taste of downtown into the fall on my Travel With Taste Culinary Walking Tours. The three- to four-hour urban forage by foot starts on Saturday mornings at Silk Road Tea with a structured tea tasting and includes a cornucopia of tastes along the way. Reserve on www.travelwithtaste.com or call 385-1527.

Wear comfortable shoes and bring an empty stomach. There is so much to discover and taste in downtown Victoria!

A foodie from a young age, Kathryn McAree's passions for exploration, food expertise and a splash or two of wine have mixed well to create an exciting culinary tourism career. Happiest when travelling the world or up to her elbows in gastronomic wizardry in anyone's kitchen, she loves to come home to Victoria where she leads cuisine and wine tours of Victoria, Sooke, Saanich, the Cowichan Valley and Salt Spring Island.