



Chinatown photos courtesy of Tourism Vancouver; Bottom photo by Philip M. Tong



Every first Sunday of the lunar year, the streets of Chinatown are packed with parades celebrating the Chinese New Year. Out of the 2.1 million residents of Vancouver, 381,500 are Chinese. Opposite page, top photo: Chinatown is one of Vancouver's first commercial districts. Bottom photo: To be celebrated on August 10 is the Chariot Festival. It is one of Vancouver's liveliest festivals, revealing the city's melting pot character. Filipinos account for the third largest visible minority.

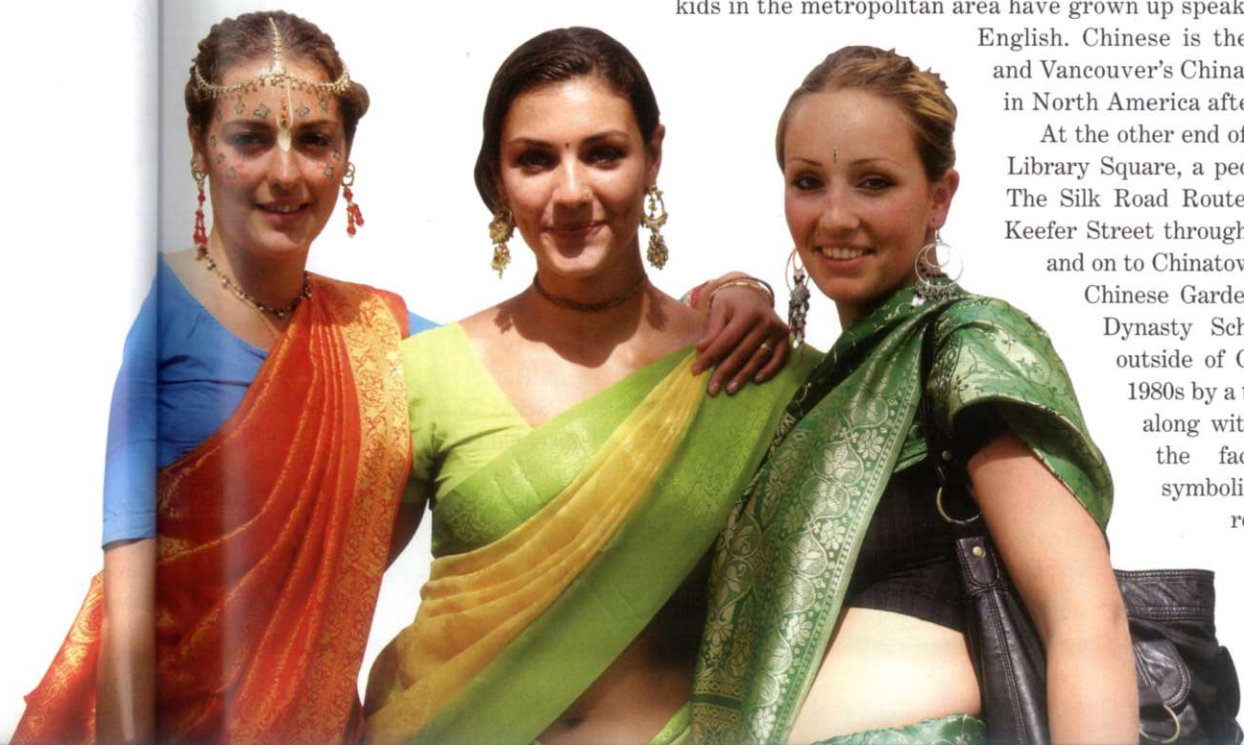
Vancouver's Asian Flavor

GARY SINGH walks the streets of a multiracial metropolis adjudged by Mercer's Quality of Living Survey as the world's fourth most livable city

I'M PERCHED AT A WINDOW SEAT UPSTAIRS IN A bar called Fogg n Suds, which overlooks the western end of Robson Street, Vancouver's main shopping drag. While the rest of Robson caters to the ultra-fashion-conscious, this end is quickly becoming a local stomping ground for Asian youths. In fact, most of the people inhabiting the bar are young Japanese, either just off work from nearby noodle houses and sushi joints, or fresh from language-school classes. Outside, Japanese travel agencies and Korean cybercafes dot the landscape, and almost directly below me sits the legendary Hon's Wun Tun House, one of four in Vancouver that offers 90 different kinds of soups and the only vegetarian dim sum anywhere in these parts. My perch is therefore a perfect spot to begin exploring Vancouver's Asian flavor.

Depending on which statistician you ask, anywhere between 28 and 35 percent of Vancouver's population is Asian, and more than half of all school-age kids in the metropolitan area have grown up speaking a language other than English. Chinese is the largest ethnic minority, and Vancouver's Chinatown is the second largest in North America after San Francisco's.

At the other end of Robson Street, at Central Library Square, a pedestrian walk aptly named The Silk Road Route led me on a stroll down Keefer Street through the International Village, and on to Chinatown and the Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Chinese Garden, which is the first Ming Dynasty Scholar's Garden ever built outside of China. Crafted in the mid-1980s by a team of 52 Chinese masters along with their local counterparts, the facility features imported symbolic plants, weather-beaten rocks, intricate building design, and elements of Taoist philosophy. The garden is a must-see for visitors to Vancouver.





Top left: The Sikh Motorcycle Club is the only one of its kind in Canada. It aims to foster awareness of Sikhism, the world's fifth largest religion. The Sikhs' long hair wrapped in turban serves as a reminder to them to behave like their ancient gurus. Top right: The Chinatown Weekend Market is anticipated every summer because of its various well-crafted products sold at bargain prices. Visit the stalls located at 100 and 200 Keefer St.

VANCOUVER AT A GLANCE
Land Area: 114 sq km.
Population: 600,000
Gross Domestic Product: US\$4 billion



WHAT'S NEW

➤ **The LISTEL HOTEL** (tel. no. +604 684 8461; www.thelistelhotel.com) became Vancouver's first solar hotel; it put up a renewable energy system to reduce its carbon gas emissions by 170 tons annually.

➤ **TIMBRE RESTAURANT** (tel. no. +604 215 7515; www.timbrerestaurant.com) offers casual Canadian food with a "Northern" style, complete with warm woods and original oil paintings.

➤ **YEW RESTAURANT AND BAR** in the **FOUR SEASONS VANCOUVER** (tel. no. +604 689 9333; www.fourseasons.com/vancouver) features a menu created by executive chef Rafael Gonzalez; it is the first stage of a \$5.3 million renovation of the hotel property.

➤ **PINKYS** (tel. no. +604 637 3135; www.pinkyssteakhouse.com) offers a menu built around Sterling Silver beef and their signature oversized martini cocktails.

➤ **GROUSE MOUNTAIN** (tel. no. +604 980 9311; www.grousemountain.com/Summer) now features Vancouver's only ziplining circuit.

➤ Through September 7, the **VANCOUVER ART GALLERY** (tel. no. +604 662 4719; www.vanartgallery.bc.ca) brings together anime, comics, cartoons, video games, manga, graphic novels, and contemporary art in one exhibition: **KRAZY! The Delirious World of Anime + Comics + Video Games + Art.**

From there, a few rites of passage on Vancouver's public transportation system brought me into Little India, a predominantly Punjabi enclave on Main Street between East 49th and 51st Avenues. Over 100,000 Punjabis live in the greater Vancouver area, especially in the suburb of Surrey. But in Vancouver proper, this particular stretch of Main Street is the city's principal East Indian core—the only neighborhood in North America with Punjabi street signs. You can find spices, fabric shops, jewelry stores, markets, and Indian restaurants all within a few blocks. Although Surrey also has a similar Punjabi bazaar along a stretch of 120th Street, this "Little India" remains the most widely known south Asian sector in Vancouver.

And speaking of the suburbs, Richmond in the lower mainland has exploded in recent years, luring many Asians away from Vancouver proper. While older generation Asian tourists flock to Vancouver's Chinatown, the younger folks make their way to Richmond's Golden Village neighborhood, located just across the water from Vancouver International Airport. The Golden Village is a heavily Asian-centric locale filled with restaurants, groceries, shops, Chinese Buddhist temples, karaoke bars, Asian arts, medicine, reflexology, acupuncture, and more. As with many other ethnic enclaves, the Golden Village must be experienced on foot, since everything is within strolling distance. Aromas of steam

and noodles dominate. Traffic sounds fill the sonic landscape. Neon signage abounds. It seems almost every Pacific-Asian ethnicity is represented somewhere in between the cracks here, and Richmond more than just feels like a miniature Hong Kong.

Staffed mostly by Chinese, Radisson President Plaza is reputedly the only hotel in the west with a Buddhist temple inside it. The Fo Kuang Shan Temple is a tranquil sanctuary on the sixth floor, where the Vancouver International Buddhist Progress Society holds classes on meditation, Chinese knots, calligraphy, dancing, yoga, and almost anything remotely related to Buddhism. I left some incense and a secret wish in the temple before walking the halls to get a few peeks through classroom windows. Wherever I gazed, Chinese children sifted through Buddhist tomes.

Around the corner sits the ultrachic Aberdeen Centre, where I found North America's first Daiso, a Japanese megastore where every item is two dollars. The company has outlets all over Asia, but the Richmond, BC outlet was the first one on this side of the Pacific. Daiso is a delight to walk around in, with its toys, household supplies, clothes, jewelry, and just about everything you can think of.

Since Vancouver fits every definition of a "cosmopolis," my journey only scratched the surface. Each Asian neighborhood has its own stories and its own flavor. I shall return. ■

Left photo by Phillip M. Tong; Right photo courtesy of Tourism Vancouver

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