

Westworld

Travel and Active Living from **BCAA**

gone local

Newfoundland on a
back-porch pass

BACK ON TRACK

Why train travel rules

TIN-CAN TOURIST

A well-preserved look at
B.C.'s cannery industry

profile: Kathy McAree

Breaking bread with B.C.'s culinary queen



Notes toward a screenplay based on the life of Kathy McAree (think the book *Eat, Pray, Love*, as directed by Alfred Hitchcock): In 2001, while recuperating from surgery after a car accident, a 33-year-old woman spends a few weeks as a slow-food traveller in Europe. What happens while she's there – the tour of Spain's Basque region with the Texan chef, the armed man on the French night train, the 9/11 attacks, the Puglia cooking school in Italy – changes her life forever.

Fast forward almost a decade and McAree is head of Travel with Taste, B.C.'s first culinary tour operator – leading locals and international travellers into the West Coast food culture of Vancouver Island. Her specialties: walking tours in her home city of Victoria ("urban foraging," as she calls it) and longer treks to the farms, wineries and under-the-radar restaurants of Salt Spring Island and the Cowichan Valley. As founder of the Victoria Taste Festival and director of the B.C. Culinary Tourism Society, she is also helping give B.C.'s west coast its status among food lovers – one formerly reserved for Europe – as a gourmet wonderland of wine, cheese, meat and seafood. "Kathy's one of our pioneers," says Eric Pateman, founder of Edible B.C., the largest culinary



“
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”

tour operator in Canada. "She's definitely been one of the most visible forces in promoting culinary tourism and local food."

So how did a former Winnipegger and Kellogg's multinational employee land such a tasty career?

The idea for Travel with Taste came while McAree was using up her banked vacation on that trip across Europe. "It may have been a red-wine-induced moment," she admits with a laugh. But, inspired by the foodie joys of the Basque country, she sketched an itinerary of wineries, cheesemakers and restaurants back home on southern Vancouver Island and showed it to the tour leader. The Texas chef, however, scoffed at the notion of B.C. as a destination for travelling gourmets. "I'll never forget it. He took one look and handed it back, saying, 'You should just do this yourself.' I walked away thinking, 'Fine, I will.'"

After Spain, three more events convinced her to seize the day. The first was an encounter with an armed stranger on the night train to Nice, a man she thought was going to gun her down. Another was the 9/11 attacks, which cast a mood of solemn self-reflection over the entire world. Then in Italy she received news about the death of a friend "who was only in his early 40s. I remember climbing the steps on the Amalfi Coast, thinking, 'Wow. Life is really short.'" And after a week of cooking lessons on an Italian farm, she returned to B.C. in fall 2001 and ▶

"JULIA CHILD IS BACK IN PEOPLE'S MINDS because of the book and film *Julie and Julia*. And Child is a wonderful example of taking something you love, something you're good at, and making a career out of it." –Kathy McAree

saw it, as converts do, with new eyes: as a food-lover's paradise.

As most of us can attest, eating well while we travel—near or far—is on the rise. Research by the International Culinary Tourism Association (ICTA) confirms that sampling local wines, beers and cuisine is consistently one of travellers' top-three activities, with memorable meals topping best-experience lists. One Tourism B.C. report shows that over a two-year period, 11 million travellers to the province—half of them Canadian, half American—took part in some kind of gourmet experience, whether at a winery, restaurant or artisan farm.

"Eating regional foods is how we get to know a place, how we really experience local culture," explains McAree. When she uncorks the terroir of the West Coast for clients, for example, they meet local chefs and tour specialty farms while sampling everything from local Auxerrois Pinot Blanc and ash-ripened chèvre to fresh Fanny Bay oysters and seaweed salad. Victoria is second only to San Francisco in restaurants per capita, she notes. In an area roughly the size of Belgium, Vancouver Island has more than two dozen wineries, five artisan cheese-makers, two Old World ciderhouses, wild seafood galore and farm-raised everything: beef, chicken, duck, lamb, water buffalo, even emu. "I get to show this whole other world that most people never get to see, even people who live here, because they don't know it exists." □ —Tyee Bridge

GET MOBILIZED

Travel with Taste: Tours from \$89. 250-385-1527; travelwithtaste.com

- Walking tours of Victoria** (pâtés made from local ingredients at Choux Choux Charcuterie, teas blended with local lavender or, if you dare, seaweed).
- Daytrips to Salt Spring Island** (renowned for its organic lamb/other specialties).
- The Saanich Peninsula** (chat with the chef at Butchart Gardens) and the **Cowichan Valley** (guided vineyard tours, including a three-course lunch paired with local wines).

Victoria Taste: Kathy McAree's July festival of local foods (updates on 2010 tastings and events at victoriataste.com). □

For more **Island noshing**, plus 10 top B.C. foodie treks. MyWestworld.com/foodie

Edible BC **Granville Island Tour** giveaway for two. Details at MyWestworld.com/win

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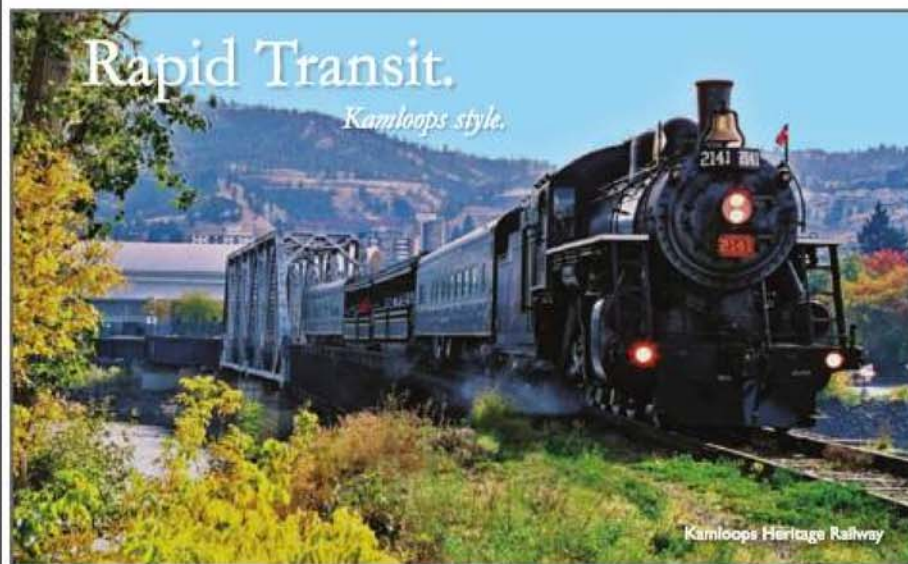
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