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Culinary Matchmaking

By Karan Smith

It offers the excitement of speed dating, without the inevitable letdown. After all, who can be disappointed with the aroma of fresh roasting Hawaiian coffee beans or the crisp flavour of a sea-shucked oyster? (So much better than a sparkless dinner date.) So, whatever your taste, find your culinary travel match here:

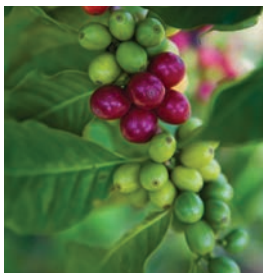
For the Aspiring Chef



Brush up on modern Mexican cuisine with lessons at *Mer-cadito (mercaditorestaurants.com)* in **Chicago**, a popular River North eatery that

draws celebs and tequila fans, alike. Monthly cooking demos vary from an ode to the avocado to a remake of Americana barbecue classics. Or, in **Calgary**, learn to dice like a chef—and sharpen your own blade—at *Knifewear (knifewear.com)*, a top shop for blades run by Japanese steel addict Kevin Kent. Chopping classes run Saturday mornings and sharpening on Thursday nights. (*Knifewear's* Kelowna and Ottawa shops also offer these classes.)

For the Java Addict



It's a thrill to go to the source of something we rely on so deeply—hello, first cup of the day. Five islands in **Hawaii** produce coffee, including the

famed Kona marquee. But the volcanic soils of the Big Island are also home to the Ka'u region, which, in recent years, has produced coffees that have climbed into the big leagues with their delicate, tropical flavour. There are plenty of coffee farms, festivals and roadside stands, but, to check out this up-and-coming region, visit the Ka'u Coffee Mill (*kaucoffeemill.com*), situated near the town of Pahala. There you can see how coffee cherries are sun dried, milled and roasted before completing their journey to your cup.

For Tour Types



It's a walking tour that offers both bragging rights and the sampling of a family secret in the form of goat stew at *Birreria De Don Boni*. Melting Pot Food

Tour's (*meltingpottours.com*) weekly East L.A. Latin Flavors avoids established foodie trails and heads



into the Latin core of **Los Angeles**. Highlights include tasting stops at the oldest tortilla factory in L.A. and Homegirl Café & Catering, a successful gang-diversion enterprise. For an immersion of a different kind, join the BBQ and Brewery Tour in **Dallas**. In a city where everyone claims ownership of their favourite slow-cookin' shacks, *Dallas Bites! (dallasbitesfoodtours.com)* lets you make the call, be it with the most hyped brisket, smoked pecan ribs or jalapeno-stuffed bacon-wrapped quail.

For the Inner Critics



Dreaming of finally starting your own culinary blog? In **Ottawa**, chef Andrée Riffou of *C'est Bon Cooking (cestboncooking.ca)* and local food critic Anne DesBrisay

pair up to offer *Eat, Speak, Critique*. Your new dinner companions will share their perspectives on the meal and then help you articulate how to rate yours. No word on whether you'll be dining incognito.

For the Adventurous



Wild wakame. Red laver. Bull kelp. Get to know greens of a wilder kind with a seaweed tour off **Vancouver Island**. *Dakini Tidal Wilds (dakinitidalwilds.com)*

offers seasonal workshops in the Sooke area that include identifying and gathering edible seaweed for lunch. Or don rubber boots and climb aboard a dory to tong for Rocky Bay oysters about 40 minutes from **Charlottetown**. The longtime oystermen, through *Experience PEI (experiencepei.ca)*, will row you out to Salutation Cove, show you how to grasp the oysters, measure them and then shuck the salty, sweet and crisp gems right then and there as you bob in the waves. **VE**

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