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LOCAL HOLIDAY SPREAD

Celebrating Food & Drink in British Columbia

In Part Two of our ongoing series on Seattle, we go outside of the city to visit a re-energized area plus make homage to Pike Place Market

A City's Cinderella Story

Tacoma is slipping on the glass slipper and shrugging off its status as Seattle's ugly stepsister with a revitalized museum district and some great dining. by Joseph Blake

For decades, Tacoma has been Seattle's forgotten, ugly stepsister. Left to rot and harboring a scary reputation for racial violence and drug wars, Tacoma began to redevelop its Historic District/Museum District in the 1990s. Shadows of the town's sprawling, first-century waterfront are receding to reveal another urban Cinderella like Vancouver's Yaletown or the Pearl in Portland—but this one has a glass slipper.

The stunning, Arthur Erickson-designed **Museum of Glass** is an international centre for contemporary art and the cultural cornerstone of Tacoma's \$150-million transformation along Thea Foss Waterway. The museum's centerpiece is the Hot Shop Amphitheater, where you can watch the museum's crew and visiting artists create works of art from molten glass. A state-of-the-art audiovisual system and expert commentary provide insight into the glassblowing process during theatre-like demonstrations of the craft.

During our visit, the team produced dozens of silver seabirds for the large pools that edge the sprawling, outdoor plazas surrounding Erickson's striking building. The 500-foot-long Chihuly Bridge of Glass, a pedestrian overpass linking the museum to downtown Tacoma, is a remarkable showcase for the work of famous Tacoma-bred artist Dale Chihuly and a breathtakingly beautiful entrance to the museum. With sunlight pouring through the roof's scenes of underwater marine life, you feel as if you are floating over the bridge.

A few feet away, the renovated Union Station, now a government building and also used for special events, is another showcase for displays of Chihuly's glassblowing genius. Across Pacific Avenue, rows of restored 19th-century brick warehouses house a 46-acre campus for the University of Washington. Near the Chihuly Bridge of Glass is the Washington State History Museum, the first of the new buildings in Tacoma's revitalization process and completed in 1996 by architects Charles Moore and Arthur Andersson.

A free light rail train runs on an eight-stop route from the Tacoma Dome to the city's still-emerging Theatre District. One of its stops is at Pacific Avenue in front of Union Station, and we rode it south one stop to the Tacoma Art Museum and then south another stop for an elegant lunch at **Pacific Grill**. We feasted on chef Aaron Valimont's Pacifica Cocktail of Dungeness crab, shrimp, clams and mussels with tomato gazpacho, lime, cilantro and Tabasco as well as another house specialty of crisp potato pancake with American sevruga caviar, crème fraîche and chives.

We had an even better meal at **Indochine**, an Asian fusion dining room near Union Station. Chef Ly Ngov's generous Thai seafood salad offered lightly poached prawns, scallops, calamari and clams marinated in lime, basil, cilantro and garlic served on a bed of fresh garden greens. We also enjoyed the Tangerine Shrimp with cucumber crème fraîche, Yin Yang Ahi and a toasted sesame chicken wrap. A couple of glasses of Willamette Valley Pinot Gris matched a light and sensually spiced meal.

Primo Grill is a neighbourhood favourite with furnishings playfully painted by Tacoma Community College students and a warm vibe that matches the Mediterranean menu. I always search out Mexican food when I visit the States, and my Tacoma discovery was **La Fodita**, where very fresh ingredients reinvented the standard, jalisco-state-inspired offerings. I

also visited **JazzBones**, a live music venue for local and visiting jazz and blues musicians with a special tapas menu on Thursday nights to accompany the offer of free Latin dance lessons.

Porter's Place is a funky southern barbecue joint where the smoky, sweet meats literally fall off the bone of their ribs. This is the real deal, and so is **Southern Kitchen**, a soul food place for catfish, cornbread and grits. Live, local jazz is served up here as well.

Wine lovers might want to check out **Enoteca**, a tiny room next to the **Tacoma Wine Merchants** store near the Tacoma Dome (another stop on the free light rail) for Washington state wines, local artisan cheese and fresh chocolate treats. Beer drinkers must visit the **Ram** on the scenic waterfront. With seven local microbrews including Butterface Amber Ale on tap, a nine-foot screen and 15 smaller television sets scattered around the room, try this bar on game day. Another cool brewpub is **Engine House No. 9** (locals call it E9), a neighbourhood hang in a converted historic firehouse. **The Spar**, the site of Tacoma's oldest saloon, is another joint with lots of waterfront ghosts and a seaworthy crowd.

For the munchies, try **Hello, Cupcake** on the UW campus. I recommend the Red Velvet frosted with cream cheese. You'll find lots of locally produced food products at the Thursday Farmer's Market on Broadway in the Theatre District (9 a.m. to 2 p.m., May-October) and at the Tacoma Dome Market Tuesdays from 3 p.m. to 7 p.m. (June-September). Taste of Tacoma is an annual culinary showcase at Point Defiance Park and this year is scheduled for June 27-29.

Our recent stay in downtown Tacoma was made much more comfortable and exciting by the amenities at **Hotel Murano**, a newly opened reincarnation of the former Tacoma Sheraton. Taking its name from the Venetian island where glass is famously made, the Murano's lobby, atrium and hallways feature the work of 40 international glass artists. The hotel's modern, European elegance is also enhanced by blown-glass bed lamps, multiple-choice pillow menu, a spiritual menu (in addition to the King James and New American bibles, they'll send up a copy of the Bhagavad Gita, the Torah, the Koran, the Book of Mormon or the Tao Te Ching), and an iPod in-room port or loaner iPod programmed with rock, jazz, reggae, blues or classical music. A short walk from the Museum District, the new Murano is a dreamy place to spend a couple of days discovering a transformed Tacoma. —Joseph Blake

When You Go

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| Hotel Murano ,
1320 Broadway, 888-862-3255 | Porter's Place , 2615 E. N St., 253-383-7603 |
| Pacific Grill ,
1502 Pacific Ave., 253-627-3535 | Southern Kitchen ,
1716 6th Ave., 253-627-4282 |
| Indochine , 1924 Pacific Ave., 253-272-8200 | Enoteca , 21 N. Tacoma Ave., 253-779-8258 |
| Primo Grill ,
601 S. Pine St. #102, 253-383-7000 | The Ram , 3001 N. Rustin Way, 253-756-7886 |
| La Fodita , 2620 N. Proctor St., 253-752-2878 | Engine House No. 9 ,
609 N. Pine St., 253-383-7707 |
| JazzBones , 2803 6th Ave., 253-396-9169 | The Spar , 2221 N. 30th St., 253-627-8215 |
| | Hello, Cupcake , 1740 Pacific Ave., 253 |