

Extension Takes Food Study Tour To China Town

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Lancaster Farming Staff PHILADELPHIA (Philadelphia Co.)—About 50 persons participated in the Chinese Food Study Tour sponsored by Berks County Cooperative Extension recently.

It was a time to savor new flavors and smells. A time to observe the work ethic of dedicated laborers in a big city. A time to learn about the culture and customs of an ancient society.

Nipa Hammond of Nipa's Asian Foods, Inc., in Reading led the day-long tour. As the bus load traveled from Reading to Philadelphia, Nipa passed around a jar of dried plums similar to bits of hard candy. The dried fruit, she said, keeps you from becoming thirsty if you suck it slowly.

Eager to share her love for Chinese food and customs, Nipa encouraged participants to taste food even if the name of it sounded repulsive to them. Chicken feet, she insisted, is a wonderful food.

The study included a full course meal at the Joy Tsin Lau Chinese Restaurant. With the help of Fay Strickler, Extension home economist, Nipa had preselected items from the menu that she believed would be most appealing to those unaccustomed to Chinese cuisine.

The meal was served family style. It started with an appetizer of Won Ton Soup. The dishes included Har Kow (steamed shrimp), Bean Curd Skin Roll (soy beans with filling) Spring Roll (bamboo shoot, dry shrimp, mushrooms, and chicken), Angel Hair Noodles served with both dry and fresh squid, imitation crab, and deep fried fish cake, Fried Dumplings (shrimp) Turnip Cake (Chinese chime with wild garlic). Many of the foods were wrapped in a potato or cornstarch wrapper.

"This is authentic Chinese food — not Americanized Chinese food," Nipa said.

The restaurant serves authentic Chinese food to its mostly Asian customers by day and Americanized-Chinese food to their mostly white clientele by evening.

"The food is much better and even costs much less during the day," Nipa said.

Indeed, many participants who are accustomed to eating in local Chinese restaurants agreed that authentic Chinese food is tastier than the Americanized version.

Americans, Nipa said, do not have a true comprehension of real Chinese food.

"Fortune cookies are an American idea," she said. "They have been made in America for 20 years. When a restaurant in China began to serve them recently, the people ask, 'What is this?'"

Nevertheless the Chinese are fascinated with the idea of fortune cookies and the cookies promise to be a hit in China as well as America.

A stop on the tour included a visit to the Reading Terminal Market, where unusual fruits, vegetables, and meats needed for Chinese dishes can be purchased. Items such as persimmons, ginger root, and fish sauce were popular purchases by those eager to duplicate Chinese dishes at home.

According to custom, desserts are not served with Chinese meals, but that doesn't mean Chinese do not eat baked sweets. They are commonly served as snacks with tea.

Later, in the day, the group toured a Chinese bakery where favorites included Moon Cake, Black Bean Cake, Pork Bun, and Sponge cakes of mocha, lemon, and other flavors.

While Black Bean Cake and Pork Bun may not sound appealing to most Americans, the food proved to be quite tasty and enjoyable.

Tours were taken of a noodle factory and a fortune cookie factory. These little factories were located in the heart of China Town. Started by entrepreneurial Chinese, the factories buzzed with activity as they filled orders for cities across the states.

In the noodle factory, the dough is mixed and rolled by machines. As the machine rolls out the dough in endless lengths similar to bolts of material, workers fold the dough in blanket folds. The stacks of the dough are sliced in various sizes of noodles and into won ton wrappers for packaging.

The tour group split up into smaller size groups to visit many of the Chinese groceries and store fronts in China Town. Participants found it fascinating to see the ethnic food sold in these shops so unlike the typical American supermarket. Some of the specialties were whole dried duck, with wings spread and the form intact.



Fay Strickler, Lebanon Extension home economist, right, tells Food Tour participants that the portabella mushroom is the latest rage in New York where it sells for \$16 a pound.



Examining the dried duck and sugar cane available in a Chinese grocery are Julia Kramer of Bethel, left, and Mary Ann Beldler, Rehrersburg.



Nipa Hammond, standing, identifies the Chinese cuisine to some of the 50 persons who participated in the Chinese food study tour offered by Berks County Extension.



Agnes Tong, formerly of Hawaii and now a dietitian at Reading Hospital, accompanies the tour to discover more about her heritage. Here, a fortune cookie factory fascinates her.



Noodle factory



Authentic Chinese food



Chinese pastries