FESTIVALS

Ribs, beer, garlic and mushrooms

CELEBRATE FOUR ESSENTIAL FOOD GROUPS THIS FALL

By Jessica Harding

WHAT, WHERE, WHEN	HIGHLIGHTS	SURPRISES
CANADA'S LARGEST RIBFEST Burlington, Ont. Sept. 2-5 www.canadaslargestribfest.com 	Last year, 139,000 people attended the "Super Bowl of ribfests," with 18 teams — half Canadian, half American — competing in a charity event that has raised more than $2.3 million for a range of local non-profits in its first 15 years. Also: live bands, a craft fair and activities for the kids while you wait four-plus hours for the ribs to smoke.	No eating off Styrofoam here, with biodegradable plates, bamboo cutlery and recycleable plastic cups resulting in 82 percent waste diversion in 2010. What's more, the four to five tonnes of leftover grease are bought by a farmer, who uses it for fuel.
FESTIVAL L'OKTOBERFEST DES QUÉBÉCOIS Mascouche, Que. Sept. 9-11 www.oktoberfestdesquebecois.com 	Billed as "Quebec content in Bavarian packaging," the fest features 25 local microbreweries and no major corporate brews on tap. Also: workshops on pairing beer with food and sessions on beer history in Quebec and Germany. Talk about cross-cultural connections.	Don your best leder-hosen and bop to Bavarian music from bands that used to play in Montréal's legendary Old Munich beer hall.
HILLS GARLIC FESTIVAL New Denver, B.C. Sept. 11 www.hillsgarlicfest.ca 	The 19th-annual edition of an event that canoe.ca calls "one of the world's top 10 garlic festivals" features roughly 165 vendors selling everything from smoked mesquite garlic and choco-late covered roasted garlic to Scott Miller's garlic syrup — a garlic, cider vinegar and honey concoction that he's been making since 1982.	Prizes awarded for the heaviest clove, biggest bulb and best poem. Last year, the Garlic Queen's rhyme was one of the winners: "I know that heaps of garlic / Will always be my thing / So if I eat it every day / I'll meet my Garlic King."
FUNGI FESTIVAL Sicamous, B.C. Sept. 18-25 www.fungifestival.com 	Hunt for edible wild mush-room with guru guides like Larry Evans, the "Indiana Jones of mushrooms," who will teach you how to identify and harvest chanterelles, morels and more. Also: enjoy mushroom-based potluck dinners, mushroom-themed vendors, slideshows, lectures and other mush-room "experiences."	Stay at the secluded adults-only Narrows Village on Shuswap Lake, which reminds guests "that the same rules that apply in Vegas also apply on the Shuswap."

RESTAURANTS

Sensuous dining

FEEL Every bite at O.Noir can be a surprise. You may have ordered the grilled octo-pus salad or perhaps the five-spice filet mignon, but absolute darkness prevents you from seeing what you're digging into. After ordering in a dimly-lit room, grab the left shoulder of the person in front of you as a visually-impaired server leads you into pitch blackness. With locations in Montréal and Toronto, O.Noir follows a trend that started in Zurich and shows that blind dining height-ens the smell, taste and even texture of food. www.onoir.com

SMELL Locals refer to the Old Country Market in Coombs, B.C., simply as "Goats on Roof" in honour of the family of grazers that make the grassy roof their home (TOP). Since opening as a highwayside fruit stand in 1973, the place has evolved into a sprawling mar-ket featuring local and international treats such as wild pacific smoked salmon, jumbo marshmallows from Mexico and 69 flavours of ice cream. But it is the smell of hand-made artisan cheese bread that will beckon you inside. www.oldcountrymarket.com

SOUND Let the melodies of flutes and penny whistles draw you into the world of the Vikings as you enter the sod-roofed restau-rant in St. Anthony, N.L. Inside this replica of the nearby 1,000-year-old Norse settle-ment, enjoy a buffet feast that includes local delicacies such as moose stew and cod tongues, displayed in a miniature longship, then end the night with a Viking dessert (partridgeberry flatbread with bakeapple juice and cream) and a yell-in during which the chieftain makes you an honourary Viking. www.fishingpoint.ca/feast.html

— *Claudia Goodine*

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