

# The Spice of Life

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Long check-out line ups, impersonal high-tech talking cash registers and typical super market produce can make grocery shopping less than a thrilling experience. If this gets you down, take heart (and your shopping basket) and venture to the small, ethnic grocery stores that are scattered throughout the city. Shopping in these stores can be a truly culturally enriching experience. They are owned and run by people who are knowledgeable about the unusual products they sell and ethnic communities they serve.

If you have an interest in things Indian, or even if you don't, there are two stores in Halifax well worth a visit.

Popat's Grocery, 2669 Dublin St., open daily 8:30-10:00. Jayesh Popat works in this store his family has run since 1982. He is an authority on Indian cooking; he teaches cooking classes and is presently compiling a cookbook. In this well-organized store you can find over three hundred types of spices, over seventy types of lentils, twenty types of flours, many of which are non-wheat, five or six varieties of rice and other dried goods. All sorts of Indian chutneys, pickles, jams and ready to eat canned dishes are available along with a weekly supply of fresh fruits and vegetables from Fiji, Brazil and India. Homemade Indian snacks are in easy reach on the counter for those who can't wait to get home to try this cuisine. Samosas are a savory vegetable filled pastry. Delicious sweets like barfi, a milk based fudge, and laddoo, made with chick pea flour and flavoured with cardamon, are sold by the pound (about 30¢-60¢ a piece). Other snacks can be purchased frozen to eat at home.

While there are so many things here to tantalize your palate, you need not ignore your other senses; there are natural medications, incense, Indian movie videos, music cassettes and saris (an Indian garment) are available for viewing on request.



Iqbal's Grocery

**Iqbal's Grocery 2731 Robie St., Open 10:00-6:00 Monday to Saturday, Fridays until 7:30**

Iqbal's carries a similar assortment of canned and bottled Indian goods along with a selection of West Indian items, and an array of spices, flours, beans and fresh produce including beetle melons, okra, and kaddu, and Indian gourd. Many things can be purchased frozen; samosas, pakoras, Indian flat bread and goat meat. Fresh samosas (55¢), barfi, laddoo and balushahi (another Indian sweet) once again tempt the unsuspecting customer. For 50¢, you can experience a Sweet Paan. This is a rather interesting concoction of sweet spices wrapped in a beetle leaf, which you are supposed to chew for several minutes in the side of your mouth, to aid digestion after a meal.



Chickpeas to Chutney; bagging lentils at Popat's Grocery: photo by Heather MacCrimmon

On Fridays and Saturdays complete meals, usually a curry dish, are served from 1:30-6:00PM. At present, these meals ranging from two to three dollars, are served from the back of the store. But within the next few months cook Steven Mal plans to turn this into a small cafe with a kitchen and seating area.

Again, incense, Indian movies and music cassettes share the shelves with the food. And if you find the prospect of preparing this exotic food too daunting, both Iqbal's and Popat's cater for all types of events.

There are also stores in Halifax for tastes that run further east on the Asian continent.

**Vinam Asian Grocery and Tailor Shop 5570 Cornwallis St., open everyday 10:00-6:00**

When you enter you'll probably find Mrs. Hoa Du busily at work in the back room where she makes Chinese and Vietnamese style clothing, mainly embroidered suits for children (\$20) and women's dresses. Out front you'll find imported goods from Vietnam and China; tea, soya sauce, noodles, rice, dried bean curd, seaweed, canned fruits frozen fish and fresh tofu (three cubes for a dollar). Tiger balm is also sold to cure any possible ailment you might have.



Vinam Asian Grocery and Tailor Shop

**Rose Marie Oriental Gourmet Ltd. 1532 Queen st., open 10:30-6:00 weekdays, Saturday 11:00-5:30**

As the name implies, this store deals in Oriental foods. On weekdays from 11:30-

2:00, Mrs. Liu (a native of Taiwan), serves a hot lunch for three dollars. The meal differs from day to day, but always available are egg rolls (60¢) and fortune cookies (15¢). Besides a large array of groceries from frozen dimsum to rice paper, tofu to lychee nuts, Rose Marie's also carries rice pattern dishes, chopsticks, cooking utensils, Chinese movie videos and natural Oriental medications.



Rose Marie Oriental Gourmet Ltd.

**Regent Pastry 2594 Agricola St., open daily 8:00-6:30, closed Sundays**

At first glance this would appear to be a standard bakery. True they do make such North American favorites as chocolate eclairs and fruit tarts, but what really makes this bakery unique (in fact the first of its type west of Montreal) are the Chinese pastries. Owner Alfred Tang studied commerce at St. Mary's before opening this shop in late April of this year. He specializes in pastries typical of his native Hong Kong. From the scrupulously clean counters you can choose from barbecued pork or curried beef buns, sugar free curry or chicken puffs, egg tarts, coconut tarts, red bean cakes (a sweet pastry filled with red bean paste) plus an assortment of Chinese cookies and other snacks, all of which range from 55¢-80¢. Regent will also cater for parties and events.

**Phoenicia Foods 2595 Agricola St., open Monday to Saturday 10:00-6:00, Thursday and Friday until 7:00**

This store specializes in Middle Eastern food. Pita bread is baked fresh on the premises everyday and sold in the store. A bewildering array of bottles and cans on the shelves reveal pickled vine leaves, cooking oils, vinegars, tahini, rose water and middle eastern dips like hummous (made from chickpeas) and baba ganouge (made from eggplant). There is an assortment of dried beans and mixes like falafel to prepare at home. A glass case contains feta and other cheeses, fresh dates and homemade spinach or meat pies. The large collection of music cassettes cannot go without mention. It contains both contemporary and traditional Arabic music, even belly dancing tunes.

Even if you still prefer a typical North American diet, a visit to these stores can be an enjoyable experience. They are often frequented by people from the countries they represent. They provide a sort of mini-community centre, importing goods familiar in the homeland and providing information on cultural events relevant to their communities here in Halifax. All of which provides greater variety and diversity for the disillusioned super market shopper.



Regent Pastry