

Menus give China province a dog-eat-dog anxiety

HUNCHUN, China (Reuter) A Chinese businessman emerged through the low door of Sisters' Dog-Meat Diner with a hang-dog look of disappointment on his face.

"Plenty of seats but no dog. They're sold out," he told four companions looking for a place for lunch in this frontier town bordering Russia and North Korea.

"Let's try someplace else," he said.

The group's luck changed at the next stop, Dog-Meat King's Big Restaurant. The dog came in fresh this morning, a waitress said, and there's a table free upstairs in the karaoke room.

Within minutes the table was piled high with copious portions of dog stew, dog ribs, dog tongue and dog skin.

There was even a platter of dog penis.

While local gourmets love to eat dog — known as "fragrant meat" — officials fear the sight of the delicacy could scare off the tourist business being sought by northeast China's remote Yanbian Ethnic Korean Autonomous Prefecture.

"China is trying to attract overseas investment to Yanbian but many foreigners, especially Americans and north Europeans, are revolted when they see people eating dog," said An Zhengshan, an official in the prefectural seat of Yanji.

"Even some of the business people and tourists coming in from South Korea say they don't like what they see here," said An, who like much of Yanbian's population is



YANJI, China — The owner of a dog-meat restaurant hands cash to a vendor in a public market. Officials in Jilin Province are concerned the traditional appetite of local ethnic Korean Chinese for dog ribs, dog tongue, dog skin and dog penis may hinder the remote border region's ability to attract foreign investors. REUTER PHOTO

ethnic Korean.

"Because of this kind of sensitivity the dog-meat market is beginning to move underground," he said.

It's hard to find evidence of such a shift.

Dog restaurants abound in Hunchun, a boom town where the promise of a U.N.-sponsored free port on Chinese, Russian and North Korean soil at the mouth of the Tumen River has lured fortune-seekers from across China and abroad.

For just 10 yuan (\$1.15) each, restaurateurs and local residents can have their dogs slaughtered, skinned and dressed at Hunchun's China Dog-Killing Workshop just a

block from city hall.

Locals say the tradition of cooking dogs dates back centuries to poorer times when food was scarce.

Dog meat, said to create a deep warmth in the body, has long been savored by Korean rice farmers who must wade in icy waters when sowing their crops in spring.

Today, dog meat is sold in Yanbian's main public markets and no effort is made to disguise the trade.

In Yanji's Eastern Municipal Market, carcasses with teeth bared and tongues dangling are piled on long tables under a sign reading "dog meat" in Chinese and Korean and depicting a dog's head

and a rack of ribs.

Koreans from China and South Korea and large numbers of non-Korean Chinese flock nightly to a Yanji eatery called Top Taste Under the Sky that serves nothing but dog-meat hot pot.

"The dog's skin is the most delicious part," a Chinese Korean named Kim said as he and his young daughter dredged a bubbling table-top stewpot for their favorite morsels.

"It's best eaten with cold beer or strong liquor," he said.

Business has actually surged since China and South Korea exchanged embassies in 1992, bringing in waves of

South Korean visitors eager to glimpse North Korea across the Tumen River or to climb Ever-White Mountain, which is sacred to Koreans.

Local dog-meat aficionados said many South Koreans use their time in Yanbian to savor a traditional Korean delicacy, the price of which has been skyrocketing in their homeland.

"My South Korean customers say dogs sell for about three times as much in Seoul," a private restaurant owner said as she paid 380 yuan (\$44) for two large white-skinned dogs.

"They say they like to eat dog here in China because it's delicious, nutritious and also a bargain," she said.

Some South Korean canine connoisseurs also say they want to avoid the censure of growing numbers of compatriots who regard eating dogs as politically incorrect.

"More and more South Koreans are among those who are complaining about the prevalence of dog-eating in Yanbian," said An, the Chinese official in Yanji.

A springtime stroll through Yanji's leafy, bustling street markets suggests that local tastes may be shifting slowly from dogs as meat to dogs as man's best friend.

One vendor laughed when asked if the caged puppies he was selling were destined for the dinner table.

"Sure you could eat these dogs but you couldn't afford to," he said. "This one is a Pekinese. It'll cost you 15,000 yuan (\$1,750). That's an expensive meal."