

Left: Inuit and Northwest Coast art is displayed at Spirit Wrestler Gallery. The Copper Top red cedar mask was created by Robert Davidson, a member of the Haida tribe.

Right: One of about 60 restaurants in the Yaletown neighbourhood, the Blue Water Café excels at ocean-fresh sushi, while offering a variety of exquisitely prepared creations and decadent desserts.

Far Right: Inform Interiors features the latest in contemporary furniture, lighting, accessories and design books, and an occasional tasty glimpse of the new Chrysler Aspen.



NORTHERN LIGHT

VANCOUVER WILL DRAW THOUSANDS OF VISITORS FOR THE VANCOUVER 2010 OLYMPIC AND PARALYMPIC WINTER GAMES. BUT WHY WAIT? BEAT THE RUSH TO A MESMERIZING CITY WITH AN EMERGING STYLE AND CULTURE TO MATCH ITS STUNNING NATURAL WONDERS.



VANCOUVER SKYLINE Stanley Park preserves the city's wilderness roots amid its obvious urban growth. The all-new 2007 Chrysler Aspen is perfect for touring.



The charming Sequoia Grill restaurant serves up scrumptious seafood with stunning romantic views of the city as a backdrop.

Vancouver is priming and prepping for 2010, when hordes of skating, skiing and hockey fanatics will gather in British Columbia for the Vancouver 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games. But you don't have to enjoy watching chiseled athletes in colourful Spandex frolic in the snow and ice to feel this gorgeous city's magnetic pull. You don't have to wait until 2010, Vancouver is ready and waiting now.

For two decades, this gorgeous city has been reinvigorating itself in earnest, neighbourhood by neighbourhood. The result: pockets of high-octane chic and quaint cobblestone quarters. Movie stars and models long ago caught on to "Hollywood North," lured by its cosmopolitan flavour and social liberalism.

On a world map, Vancouver sits almost exactly halfway between western Europe and the Pacific Rim. Whether you're arriving from across the province or clear across the country, the all-new 2007 Chrysler Aspen will pamper you and your guests in a sumptuously appointed environment throughout the trip. You'll quickly acquire an appreciation for the confidence that comes with commanding the powerful HEMI® V8 with fuel saving MDS technology.

With its mild winters and spectacular views year-round, Vancouver provides a breathtaking backdrop for an endless array of activities. Mountains rim the city so closely that 9-to-5ers can hit the ski slopes at Cypress Provincial Park or Grouse Mountain within a half hour of leaving their desks. Ninety minutes to the north, on the scenic and aptly named Sea-to-Sky Highway, Whistler offers some of the best skiing in the world, with breathtaking, 2100-metre high alpine vistas.

PAMPER YOURSELF

The city is a pleasure-seeker's paradise, loaded with spas, gourmet shops and fine restaurants. The densest concentration is in Yaletown, a once-gritty neighbourhood of rail yards and warehouses turned chic. Dubbed "Little Soho," Yaletown was rescued from neglect by artists who moved in during the '90s, with studios, galleries and coffee houses quickly following.

Four years ago, the opening of Opus Hotel and its modish-style imprimatur signalled the area's ultimate arrival, and it is now thronged with visitors – both natives and travellers – people-watching madly. The hotel's gleaming-white lobby, which opens onto the French bistro and bar Elixir, is a prime spot, as is the dramatic Opus Bar, a see-and-be-seen stunner. Here, the tanned and beautiful lounge, technicolour drinks in hand.

Upstairs the mood changes in the hotel's 96 elegant, art-filled rooms decorated in one of five distinct styles and oozing with personal service, including suggested bedtime reading set out on the night table. (Mine was a slim volume of philosophy.)

A morning stroll through Yaletown means ambling along former loading-docks-turned-promenades lined with a half dozen sidewalk cafes. At Glowbal, weekend diners sip mimosas and wolf fresh banana bread (divine with the accompanying maple-lemon butter), snuggling into complimentary cashmere throws and basking under the outdoor heat lamps well into autumn.

By evening, the neighbourhood's nearly 60 restaurants, several of which are regulars on the city's best-of lists, explode with activity. Each has its selling point: Blue Water excels at ocean-fresh sushi, Cioppino's boasts



Above, from top to bottom: The Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Classical Chinese Garden re-creates a Ming Dynasty garden. The Regional Assembly of Text offers an eclectic collection of old school gifts and unique decorating ideas, all handmade with a healthy dash of typewriter-era irony. The Smoking Lily Boutique specializes in printed silk scarves, clothes and accessories, featuring natural context design of insects, flies, bugs and antique chairs.



Voted one of the region's top hotels by many national travel magazines, the renowned Opus Hotel offers guests the service and amenities of a luxury hotel in a chic, intimate environment.

venerable tradition, and at Coast, the culinarians chat and work around the butcher-block chef's table in the centre of the room, describing that morning's deep-sea diving excursion, and seasoning the results for guests.

Surrounded by stores such as Chocoatl Chocolatiers, which tempts with chili-cinnamon-spiced hot chocolate, and salon-spas such as Skoah that tout the benefits of eight-plant poly-peptide facials, it is difficult to do anything but surrender to decadent luxury in Yaletown. Consider getting a metabolism-boosting massage at Oasis (not a bad thing after several nights sampling Vancouver's restaurant culture) offered, naturally, on a cozy feather bed.

FOODIE MECCA

No way around it: Vancouver is a place where shopping for the culinary prized and obscure serves as entertainment. Directly across Yaletown's yacht-dotted harbour sits the Granville Public Market where gourmards browse for Kobe beef and pick over hand ground curries. It's a popular site among tourists and working stiff alike, all of whom come to ogle the mounds of produce, fish and exotic cheeses for sale. Spend some time perusing, then grab a selection of gourmet-to-go items such as the salmon pastry or triple berry cobbler at Laurelle's Fine Foods. You can sit outside and munch your treasures

on the wide wooden deck.

JAW-DROPPING SCENERY

For all its high-gloss chic, Vancouver started as a loggers' outpost in the middle of the wilderness. To many, the city's natural setting remains its most appealing attribute. Views in every direction are framed by glittering glaciers or shimmering seas. Take Stanley Park as a prime example: This 400-hectare swath of old-growth forest and winding trails sits near the end of the Robson Street fashion district, yet is amazingly free of noise, garbage and urban chaos. Families come for leisurely bike rides along the gently curving 8.8-kilometre seawall that borders English Bay, and couples coo over romantic meals, overlooking the water from a perch on the veranda of Sequoia Grill, which serves deliciously piquant fried calamari.

Another delight about Vancouver you'll notice is that the pan-Asian influence is profound and lasting. Chinese languages are the city's second-most-spoken, but it's typical to hear Mandarin, Japanese and Vietnamese in a single afternoon.

GARDENS OF THE EAST

Few North American cities boast two world-class Asian gardens. The Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Classical Chinese Garden, sitting in a cloistered enclave adjacent to historic Gastown, was the first full-scale classical plot ever



Located at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver (part of its Botanical Garden and Centre for Plant Research), the Nitobe Memorial Garden is considered one of the most authentic Japanese Tea and Stroll Gardens in North America.

built outside of China, and it faithfully reproduces a private Ming Dynasty garden from the 14th century. Every element of the natural landscape – mountains, rivers, lakes, trees, valleys, hills – fills the space with the idea of concentrating the natural life force, or qi, within. In the midst of the city's hustle, this provides a surprising and welcome bit of respite.

Across town, on the campus of the University of British Columbia, the Nitobe Memorial Garden is designed to encourage contemplation of the stages of life. Follow a circular route and see how the natural patterns mirror the passage of time with a beginning, choice of paths, and end. The complete circuit, followed contemplatively, takes about 45 minutes.

Nitobe, which also hosts traditional tea ceremonies, is routinely ranked among the top classical Japanese gardens in the world. Here, blossoming trees mark springtime, irises cluster during summer months, and maples (imported from Japan) blaze through fall. "I am in Japan," the Crown Prince (now Emperor) of Japan murmured as he strolled through the garden.

You may feel you, are somewhere else during a visit to Vancouver, imagining yourself in China or the Alps or Amsterdam. The real joy is in discovering, at journey's end, just how close you are to home.



GET MORE

OUTDOORS

- Cypress Provincial Park
cypressmountain.com
- Grouse Mountain
grousemountain.com
- Nitobe Memorial Garden
www.nitobe.org
- Whistler
whistlerblackcomb.com
- Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Classical Chinese Garden
vancouverchinesegarden.com

RESTAURANTS, ETC.

- Blue Water
bluewatercafe.net
- Cioppino's Mediterranean Grill
cioppinosyaletown.com
- Coast
coastrestaurant.ca
- Elixir
elixirvancouver.ca
- Glowbal
glowbalgrill.com
- Opus Hotel
opushotel.com
- Sequoia Grill
vancouverdine.com/sgrill
- SHOPPING AND SPA SERVICES
- Granville Public Market
granvilleisland.com
- Oasis
oasisspa.ca
- Skoah
skoah.com

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- 1 Granville Island
- 2 Opus Hotel and Yaletown
- 3 Stanley Park
- 4 Stanley Park
- 5 UBC Museum of Anthropology
- 6 UBC Nitobe Memorial Garden
- 7 Water Street and Gastown



HOT LIST



MUSEUM OF ANTHROPOLOGY & SPIRIT WRESTLER GALLERY

Art by First Nations peoples – particularly the Inuit – is everywhere. The Olympic Committee plans to use the Inuit Inukshuk as its emblem, but you can view real indigenous works at The Museum of Anthropology, above. moa.ubc.ca Or buy some at Spirit Wrestler Gallery. spiritwrestler.com



GASTOWN & CAPILANO BRIDGE

Stroll through Gastown or shimmy and shake on the high-wire Capilano Suspension Bridge. Gastown is loaded with cafes, galleries and gift shops, such as ModernKid, above. seegastown.com The suspension bridge, 70 metres above a surging river, provides vertiginous thrills for kids and astounding views for their parents. capbridge.com



CHOCOATL CHOCOLATIERS

In addition to yummy chocolates made on-site with fresh ingredients, this Yaletown shop serves up coffee and some of the best hot chocolate anywhere. It can be made with one of their 16 kinds of chocolate.



SMOKING LILY & OCEANDRIVE LEATHER

Smoking Lily, also run by artists, offers hand-stenciled chiffon scarves. smokinglily.com Oceandrive Leather, which boasts celebrity clients specializes in cut-to-order leather suits, above. oceandriveleather.com



TOJO'S & C RESTAURANT

Sushi is practically fast-food here, and Tojo's, above, has long been the hands-down favourite. tojos.com But the brightest new star on the seafood scene is C Restaurant, where a one-ton boulder serves as the reception desk and the bracingly fresh cuisine combines earth consciousness with creativity. crestaurant.com