

East by Northwest

Vancouver prepares to put its Asian-accented charms on display for the 2010 Olympic Winter Games

BY MATT HENDRICKSON

In the past, Vancouver has been an afterthought to Toronto and Montreal when it comes to great Canadian cities. No longer. The British Columbia metropolis is readying for its world close-up as the host of the Olympic Winter Games, which begin February 12. Tickets to most Olympic events are long gone, but many of the venues are open or will remain open for public use. Home to a huge, vibrant Asian population and sporting a laid-back, freewheeling vibe reminiscent of San Francisco, Vancouver is a dynamic city worth visiting any time of year.



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WORLD CLASS Nearby Whistler is home to the Olympic Winter Games' alpine and Nordic events; left, Vancouver twinkles.



What to Do

Sandwiched between the Pacific Ocean and mountains to the north and east, the Vancouver area is an outdoor enthusiast's paradise. Just 15 minutes north of downtown is **Grouse Mountain** (grousemountain.com), where you can take the mile-long Skyride tram to the summit and skate on an 8,000-square-foot outdoor pond while the city lights twinkle below. Just to the west is **Cypress Mountain** (cypressmountain.com), the site of snowboarding and freestyle skiing events at the Olympic Winter Games. Grab some big air at the mountain's lift-served tubing park. Skiers will want to make the two-hour drive to **Whistler Blackcomb Mountain** (whistlerblackcomb.com), where the alpine and Nordic skiing and sliding events will take place. With more than a 5,000-foot vertical drop and more than 8,000 acres to explore, you can easily spend a day or three on the area's 200 trails and 12 bowls. No car? Whistler is easily accessible from Vancouver by bus or, better yet, by a gorgeous three-hour train ride ([\[mountaineer.com\]\(http://mountaineer.com\)\). *Note: During the Olympic Winter Games, only event ticket holders will be allowed to drive to Whistler, though shuttle buses will be available.*](http://whistler</p>
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Back at sea level, a stop at **Stanley Park** is a must. One of the premier urban landscapes in the world, the 1,000-acre spread is primarily a wild temperate rain forest surrounded almost completely by water. Nature nuts will relish the chance

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to explore trails that twist through towering cedars and lush vegetation as well as to admire the rose and rhododendron gardens. Water lovers can stroll along the seawall, marvel at the downtown skyscrapers just a stone's throw away—and if it's warm enough—take a dip in the ocean-side pool.

Vancouver is chock-full of interesting neighborhoods. **Robson Street**, the main downtown shopping area, is home to every retailer imaginable, including flagship outposts for Canadian clothiers Club Monaco and Roots. **Kitsilano** (Kits to the locals) is quirkier, with many specialty boutiques lining West Fourth Avenue. Be

sure to check out the **Moulé** design store, which sells everything from smart clothing to a high-end air-hockey game. Cross the bridge from downtown to **Granville Island's** renowned epicurean **Public Market**, a Canuck version of Seattle's Pike Place. Shopping for exotic produce can attract the hordes, so if it gets overwhelming, meander through the various studios hosting the work of local artists and artisans

around the market (granvilleislandartists.com).

In the mostly Chinese hamlet of **Richmond**, the **Yaohan Centre** (yaohancentre.com) is a sprawling mall where you can find cheap and delicious food stands serving everything from wontons to duck tongue. Stop at the neighboring **Osaka**

Supermarket to score hard-to-find products like Sichuan peppercorns and Asian pastries.

Where to Dine

Sushi is ubiquitous in Vancouver, and two of the best spots offer completely different experiences. The affordable **Toshi Sushi** (no Website; 604-874-5173) is a bare-bones shoe box of a joint, but locals swear by the tuna and the house roll (shrimp and cucumber with avocado on the outside). **The Eatery** (theeatery.ca) is sensory overload, a riot of Japanese anime, Godzilla and other pop-culture touchstones. The exhaustive menu matches the decor with funky twists on



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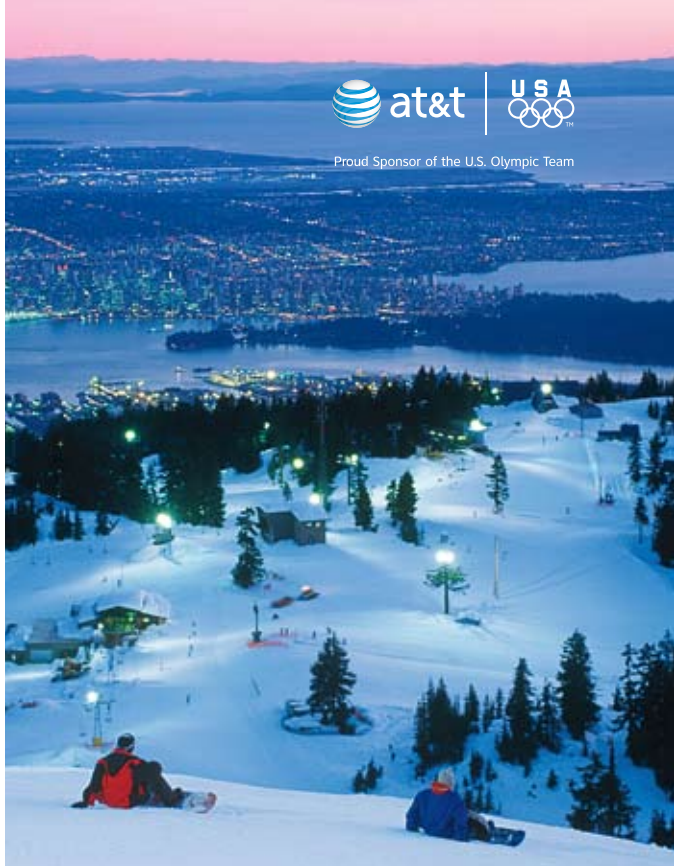
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sushi rolls. (The Miss Piggy is a bacon and scallop delight.)

If raw fish makes you squeamish, head to an *izakaya*. This Japanese version of a pub serves tapas-size dishes meant for sharing. At the raucous **Hapa Izakaya** (hapaizakaya.com), you'll probably be greeted with a robust "*Irasshaimase!*" (Welcome!) before you settle in to enjoy an order of Hapa Kamikaze chicken wings (meaning insanely spicy) or "pizzas" topped with beef and egg or *renkon* (lotus root). The atmosphere is more hushed at **Toratatsu** (toratatsutapas.com),

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NORTHWEST PASSAGES

Clockwise from left: Smart shopping on Granville Street; sunset over Stanley Park; sushi, Vancouver's premier delicacy; the view from Grouse Mountain; the Chinese Cultural Centre

an antique-filled wine bar that feels even more luxurious while you're enjoying short-rib lettuce wraps and the famous smoke-kissed duck.

Japan isn't the only well-represented Asian cuisine. **Vij's** (vajs.ca) is one of the top Indian restaurants in the world. Period. Local chef/impresario Vikram Vij fuses traditional Punjabi cuisine (minus the slop and grease) with modern touches. Vij's no-reservations policy can translate to lengthy lines. To handle the overflow, Vij has opened a more casual outpost, **Rangoli** (vjsran.goli.ca), next door that's every bit as scrumptious.

The owners of **Flying Wedge Pizza** (flyingwedge.com) are committed to using the freshest ingredients in their pies; with multiple locations around town, it's easy to pop in for a slice. In the resurgent **Yaletown** warehouse district is the **Yaletown**

Brewing Company (markjamesgroup.com), which, along with top-notch craft beers, serves delicious pub fare that ranges from the traditional (burgers and mac 'n' cheese) to the gussied up (duck confit, lamb tenderloin sandwich). *Twilight* fans, take note: Cast members have been known to pop in while filming.

Where to Stay

Most of Vancouver's hotels are centered around Robson Street, but the city is compact enough that all areas are within easy reach. **The Listel Hotel** (thelistelhotel.com) is a funky, elegant, art-obsessed boutique hotel that doesn't substitute comfort for aesthetics. Families or larger groups will love the **Sunset Inn & Suites** (sunsetinn.com), located on a leafy residential street that's a short walk to Robson Street, Stanley Park and Yaletown. •

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