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B.C. enjoying gold-medal building boom

By Christopher Solomon
New York Times News Service

In anticipation of the 2010 Winter Olympics, new hotels — and many other things as well — are rising around Vancouver, B.C.

More than a half-dozen higher-end hotel projects will open in the next few years from Vancouver to the resort town of Whistler, about 80 miles to the north, where the Alpine and Nordic ski races will be held. Most hope to open before the Olympics.

It's all part of a larger construction boom around British Columbia, although much of the activity is centered on greater Vancouver: Between July and September 2007, there were 843 major capital projects planned or under way provincewide, worth a record 135 billion Canadian dollars, about the same in U.S. dollars, according to the province's Ministry of Economic Development.

Around Vancouver, Olympic event venues are being built or refitted for the Games — everything from the new speedskating oval in suburban Richmond, just south of Vancouver, to a new curling complex, the Hillcrest/Nat Bailey Stadium Park, adjacent to Queen Elizabeth Park near downtown.

But the construction hardly ends at stadiums and ski runs. Workers are pouring cement for pylons on a 16-station, north-south light-rail line that will connect downtown with Vancouver International Airport and Richmond. And a 65-mile stretch of the Sea-to-Sky Highway between West Vancouver and Whistler is being made straighter, wider and safer with a \$600 million effort. Vancouver's hotel market didn't need any urging. There are about 25,000 hotel rooms in Greater Vancouver. Occupancy rates for the city's hotels will be 73 percent in 2007 and 2008 — the second-highest rate among major Canadian cities, behind Calgary, according to forecasts by PKF Consulting, which advises the hospitality industry.



JONATHAN HAYWARD / AP

A ski jumper flies past the judges' tower at the newly built ski jump at Whistler Olympic Park in Whistler, B.C.

Information

Whistler/Blackcomb 2010 Olympics info:
www.whistlerblackcomb.com/olympics/

Tourism Vancouver: 877-826-1717 or
www.tourismvancouver.com

"We don't have an awful lot of luxury hotels now," said Beth Walters, director of PKF's Western Canada office. "Right now the Opus and the Wedgewood are two of our higher performing hotels — and they're boutique-style hotels," she said.

Adding rooms

The city's first newly built hotel in five years, Loden Vancouver, is nearing completion at the edge of the Coal Harbour residential neighborhood downtown, between Stanley Park and the main business district. It's also the first Canadian hotel by Kor Hotel Group (Maison 140 in Beverly Hills, Calif., the Tides South Beach, among others). The hotel, which will have 70 rooms, six suites and a "rock-star penthouse," according to the general manager, Edel Forristal, is expected to open early this year. Loden's residential component, a 236-unit residential tower, opened next to the hotel site last year.

The five-star Fairmont Pacific Rim Vancouver, the flagship of the soon-to-be six Fairmont hotels in British Columbia, is rising and will occupy 22 floors of a 48-story tower in Coal Harbour. Going against the trend, the Fairmont will be huge — 415 rooms — with retail stores, and condos atop the hotel. It is scheduled to open mid-2009.

The luxury hotelier Shangri-La Hotels and Resorts enters the North American market in January 2009 with the Shangri-La Hotel, Vancouver. The 119-room hotel will occupy the first 15 stories of a 61-story building — Vancouver's tallest — rising around the corner from Loden. Topping the hotel will be 293 condos and luxury residences. The high-rise has among its amenities a new 6,500-square-foot, Tibetan-theme spa and a sculpture galleria curated by the Vancouver Art Gallery.

The Hotel Georgia, a landmark 1928 Art Deco hotel that once played host to luminaries from the Prince of Wales to Marlene Dietrich, is undergoing a complete restoration and is scheduled to reopen in 2010. A Ritz-Carlton and accompanying residences are slated to open after the Olympics.

Whistler booming

In Whistler, which will be home to the Alpine and Nordic ski events, Nita Lake Lodge is the last new from-the-ground-up hotel to appear; with the lodge, the town has reached its cap on new commercial accommodations. The 77-unit condominium hotel, with three private rentable chalets, opened earlier this month, about 450 yards from the Creekside base area, where the downhill, giant slalom and other Alpine races will finish.

The lodge also incorporates Whistler's train station in its design; passengers on the Rocky Mountaineer or Whistler Mountaineer scenic trains can disembark and have porters take their luggage straight to their room. The trains run from May to October. The lodge's restaurant will be overseen by Andrew Springett, former executive chef at Vancouver Island's lauded Wickaninnish Inn. "We're looking to create a little bit of a throwback to the romance of the rail times," Duggan said. In Squamish, a town of 15,000 people that lies halfway between Vancouver and Whistler, four new hotels seem likely to appear by the time the Games begin — including two higher-end hotels.

The five-star Shannon Falls Spa & Resort will be situated between Howe Sound and Shannon Falls. The 36-acre resort will eventually have 250 rooms, plus 184 quarter-share town houses.

More immediately, Executive Suites Garibaldi Springs Golf Resort, a 110-suite hotel set between the ninth

and 18th holes of the Garibaldi Springs Golf Course, will open in the first quarter of 2008. The condo-hotel has a timber-and-stone lodge appearance and an indoor/outdoor swimming pool.

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