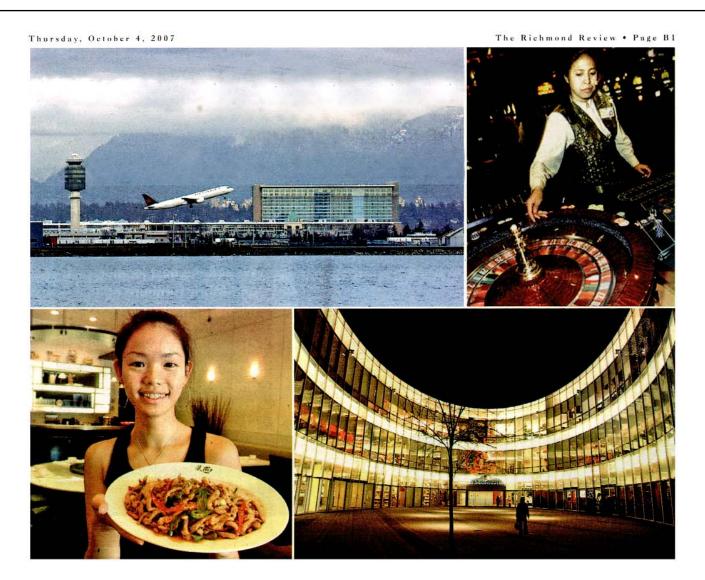


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Destination: Richmond

Richmond used to be a gateway city, where visitors would land at the airport and then head off elsewhere. But now Richmond is becoming a destination—a place where people come to stay. The city is home to province's largest casino, is an Olympic venue city and has cuisine from all four corners of China in a few square miles.

Destination: Richmond

Richmond: From gateway to destination

by Kristine Thiessen

ichmond is no longer a gateway city to bypass once the plane's wheels touch the tarmac. It has developed into a destination city, said Ted Townsend, the city's senior manager of communications.

"Richmond was really kind of a jumping off point to the rest of the region. As the community is growing and evolving, we're seeing Richmond become more of a destination unto itself."

This evolution happened over the past two years, and Tourism Richmond has taken notice. It's their job to put Richmond on the map at the regional, national and international levels with the goal of bringing in more tourism dollars to boost the local economy.

"There's definitely more prod-uct and better positioning of Richmond as a city to stay,' said Gayle Morris, Tourism Richmond's director of sales.

A recent campaign marketed Asian dining opportunities in

"I think we're pioneering that Asian dining experience, actually," said Morris.

As winter approaches, Tourism Richmond turns its attention to other indoor activities like shop-

Marketing director Ange Chew pointed out the uniqueness of

Aberdeen Centre. There, she said, you can shop at a store where everything is under two dollars and then buy a Ferrari.

Shopping and eating in Richmond is not all Tourism Richmond has to market. There's Steveston village, whale watching, dike trails, the Richmond night market, River Rock Casino Resort, various temples and annual festivals.

"And then there's sports tourism," said executive director Tracy Lakeman, "from the (Hugh Boyd) turf to soon the Oval.

Tourism Richmond directors talk of products becoming "market ready" and "mature"—attractions ready to handle tourists and willing to adapt to feedback. For instance, the Britannia Heritage Shipyard is updating its displays; the London Heritage Farm decided to add Japanese tea to its British tea repertoire.

This maturing of attractions and hotels (the city will soon have 25 name brand hotels, Morris pointed out) has resulted in a greater awareness of Richmond in other cities, said

Tourism is up from last summer, said Lakeman, and back to its pre-9/11 levels. In July, Richmond's hotels were 75.5 per cent booked, an increase of 12.5 per cent from July 2006. Tourism Richmond's August 2005 Economic Impact Report estimated that about 3.2 million people visited Richmond that year (for leisure, business meetings or conventions), with more than half staying at a local hotel.

Aberdeen Centre, a place where you spend \$2-or a lot, lot more on a Ferrari. The increase in tourism is

good for Richmond-overnight tourists spend \$210 million Lakeman said the jump in tourism is partly because the team is being more aggressive. Events like the popualr Richmond Night Market were picked up by national, American, and overseas media such as The Globe and Mail, The Seattle Times and BRC. They are also working

with city staff to re-brand

Richmond is a bit "ying and yang," with both urban and

the water plays a significant

location," said Lakeman.

Within that image, "obviously

factor, and our cultures and our

In addition to the re-branding

challenge, Tourism Richmond

and the city will soon work closer together on tourism strategy in general. The provin-

Richmond. Chew said

agricultural facets.

"Richmond was really kind of a jumping off point to the rest of the region. As the community is growing and evolving, we're seeing Richmond become more of a destination unto itself."

Ted Townsend



Chung Chow photo Steveston's village attracts many visitors.

cial government gave the city \$181,000 for staff to develop its own community and sport tourism strategy, to be released in early 2008.

"Essentially we're looking at what are the best ways we can market Richmond to tourists, and how we can work to really build on and complement the work Tourism Richmond is

Chung Chow photo

already doing," Townsend said. And of course, the coming winter Olympics impacts both Tourism Richmond and the city's strategies with the anticipation of more tourists and facilities. For instance, in addition to hosting events at the Richmond Oval, Townsend expects the neighbourhood around the Oval to be developed into a place where you take the visiting in-laws to spend a day.

This is our opportunity, with holding one of the key sporting events (speed skating), it's our time to shine," said Chew.

"We want to shine in our own right because we have the products and more to come. What Richmond is today isn't going to be in five, 10 years time.

