



# Mabuhay

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**VANCOUVER:  
CHARMING HOST CITY OF  
THE BIG WINTER GAMES**



# VANCOUVER: READY FOR THE BIG WINTER GAMES



In the midst of the 2010 Winter Olympic whirlwind, GARY SINGH marvels at how the city merges a major athletic event with the soul of Canadian aborigine art

With the 2010 Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games less than nine months away, Vancouver is awash in new infrastructure. The Vancouver Convention and Exhibition Center has tripled its size and new hotels and luxury accommodations are appearing everywhere.

In the suburb of Richmond, the brand new Olympic Oval venue will host the long track speed skating events, with the new Canada Line linking Richmond to downtown Vancouver in just 20 minutes. Two hours up the Sea to Sky Highway in Whistler, the Peak 2 Peak gondola, an unprecedented project, opened last December and now links Whistler and Blackcomb mountains together for a thoroughly staggering 2.75 mile gondola ride.

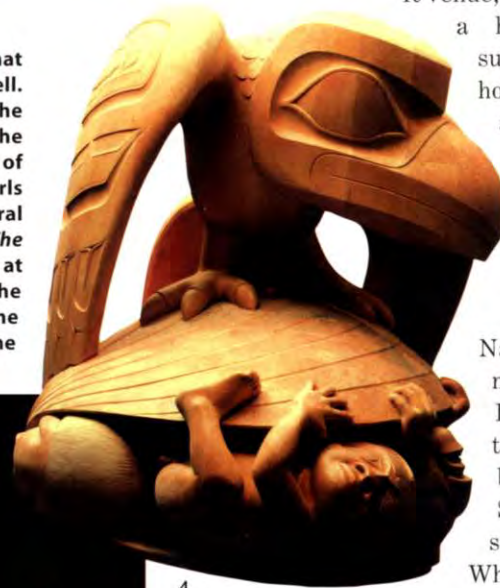
But what really makes the 2010 Games unique is the cooperation between the Vancouver Organizing Committee (VANOC) and the aboriginal peoples of British Columbia (BC), which boasts 198 First Nations (indigenous tribes), more than any other province in Canada. Because the Games overall

The Vancouver Convention Centre is just one of the infrastructures being renovated for the 2010 Winter Games that will be held on February 12 to 28, and March 12, 2010. It has tripled its size to a vast 1.1 million square feet (four city blocks). Its unique architecture allowed it to be built on both land and water, have floor-to-ceiling glass all throughout, a seawater heating and cooling feature, and even a fish habitat built into the foundation!





1. Bill Reid created a wolf pendant that is made from gold and haliotis shell.  
 2. Margaret Grenier, a member of the Dancers of Damelahamid performs at the University of British Columbia Museum of Anthropology. 3. Massive spindle whorls greet you at the Squamish Lil'wat Cultural Centre. 4. Another Bill Reid creation, *The Raven and the First Men*, is on display at the UBC MOA. 5. Carvings reflect the daily life of the Squamish people. The name *Squamish* means "mother of the



are being held within the traditional and shared territories of four nations—the Lil'Wat, the Musqueam, the Squamish and the Tsleil-Waututh—those nations collectively incorporated a nonprofit organization and were a major part of Vancouver's proposal to host the Games.

Vancouver was awarded the games in July of 2003, and in November of the following year, the four Chiefs and Councils of the Four Host First Nations (FHFN) entered into a historic Protocol Agreement where they agreed to put aside differences and coordinate their collective efforts to host and support the 2010 Winter Games. So, for the first time in Olympic History, the aboriginal people of an Olympic Host City have been involved from the very beginning of the bid process. The Four Host First Nations now have their own secretariat and are legal partners with VANOC.

As a result, the preservation and promotion of aboriginal art and culture are integral parts of the Games. First Nations across Canada are seeing an opportunity to come together and show the entire planet who they are. In fact, the FHFN are officially calling it the "world's biggest potlatch," referring to an indigenous feast centering on rites of passage, the redistribution of wealth, and exchange of goods. The potlatch was officially banned by the Canadian government from the late-nineteenth century until the 1950's as part of an attempt to destroy aboriginal culture, so the celebration is that much more significant.

The 2010 Aboriginal Pavilion currently under construction in downtown Vancouver will serve as the focal point for all things indigenous. The US\$3.5 million, 8,000 sq ft venue, supported by VANOC and the FHFN, features a high-tech 65-foot-high multimedia sphere, surrounded by a Coast Salish Longhouse. The horseshoe-shaped building will be made of cedar and Douglas fir and the venue will showcase the diversity of Aboriginal art, business, culture and sport from across Canada. The sphere will be capable of projecting 720 degrees; one can watch from the inside the building or from outside on the street.

Since the Squamish Nation and Lil'wat Nation, in particular, have politely coexisted as neighbors for thousands of years, the Squamish Lil'wat Cultural Centre (4584 Blackcomb Way; tel. +1-866-441-7522; www.slcc.ca) was recently built in Whistler, right across from the Four Seasons and the Fairmont Hotels. The three-story, 30,000 square-foot complex overlooks Whistler and Blackcomb Mountains and can accommodate banquets, corporate meetings, film, theater, gallery shows, and a wide variety of educational and cultural exploits. They even have an indoor farmers' market during the winter. So for those whose après ski agendas include the need for artisanal breads and local

The Lil'wat nation is known for their stunning landscape; the Musqueam Nation resides beside the river and gets its name from the aboriginal name of the river grass; The Squamish nation believes that to connect to their ancestors, they must pay respect to animals and birds; Tsleil-Waututh Nation considers the wolf as their origin.

vegetables, the Squamish Lil'wat Cultural Centre can help!

In Vancouver proper, the boutique Listel Hotel (1300 Robson Street; tel. +1-604-684-8461; www.thelistelhotel.com) seems almost designed for the art-seeking tourist. Northwest Coast art are featured in every aspect of the hotel's design.

The original and limited edition First Nations art at the Listel exists due to its collaboration with the illustrious University of British Columbia Museum of Anthropology (MOA) (6393 N.W. Marine Drive; tel. +1-604-822-3825; www.moa.ubc.ca) which just reopened after extensive renovations. As a museum, MOA has existed in its current location since 1976 and, as an institution, since 1947. The facility contains a huge variety of original indigenous artifacts, everything from large totem poles to handcrafted boxes, masks, pottery, fabrics and sculptures.

The Bill Reid Gallery in Vancouver (639 Hornby Street; tel. +1-604-682-3455; www.billreidgallery.ca) is a must see, not just for an overarching encapsulation of the celebrated Canadian artist Bill Reid's entire life's work, but also for a snapshot into what the next generation of Haida artists are up to. It is not a huge facility, but given that it is the only gallery anywhere devoted to one Pacific Northwest Coast artist proves that aboriginal culture is making significant strides. Just wait until the Olympics, of course.


For the more active traveler interested in aboriginal history, Takaya Tours (4310 Gallant Ave; tel. +1-604-904-7410; www.takayatours.com) provides First

Nations canoe and kayak adventures. One can explore the history and culture of the Tsleil-Waututh First Nation through several casual guided adventures in the Burrard Inlet and the Indian Arm.

In the end, even the Vancouver International Airport (YVR) provides an immersive environment in which to view a swath of First Nations art, whether you're arriving or departing. Another monumental Bill Reid sculpture, *The Spirit of Haida Gwaii: The Jade Canoe*, holds court right smack in the center of the International Departures Terminal, Level 3. A day doesn't go by without throngs of travelers getting their photos taken in front of the jade and bronze work. Aboriginal art sculptures and environments are likewise spread throughout the entire airport, including streams, masks, totem poles and gigantic mythical discs.

The diversity of the Pacific Coast geography and climate is reflected in the variety of languages and cultures of its aboriginal tribes. There are over 200 First Nations in British Columbia alone, more so than in any other province, or anywhere in North America for that matter. From the coast to the mountains, one can travel through many different First Nations territories, each with its own language, heritage, culture and customs. For more information or suggested itineraries, visit: [www.aboriginalbc.com](http://www.aboriginalbc.com).



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