

COUNCIL OF TOURISM ASSOCIATIONS (COTA)
THEME: “PASSPORT TO SUCCESS”

The Honourable Olga Ilich, Minister of Tourism, Sport and the Arts

June 6, 2006

(Check against delivery.)

Today we're here to celebrate our industry and our accomplishments, and to kick off what we all hope will be the best summer tourist season ever in The Best Place on Earth.

Together, we've accomplished a great deal over the years.

It's thanks to you that we have grown from a \$4.5 billion industry just over a decade ago to \$9.8 billion today.

Our government has such confidence in this industry, its creativity and its capacity for growth, that it's set the goal of doubling tourism by 2015.

While our industry continues to energetically reach out to the U.S. market, we're also paying attention to growing interest from other international markets like Asia.

As well, we're working to grow our largest market – domestic travel – which accounts for more than half of our tourism revenues overall.

British Columbians traveling within the province represents nearly 28 per cent of total tourism revenues.

But as strong as our domestic market is, there's still room for growth.

I'd like screen for you our new “Best Place on Earth” TV ad.

It was developed by our ministry in partnership with Tourism BC to encourage domestic tourism within the province.

This campaign leverages the recognition of the “Best Place on Earth” ads we ran two years ago, while adding some new content that will resonate with our target demographic.

We’ve done a great job in the past of telling people about what a beautiful province we have, showing our many adventure tourism products, with spectacular beauty shots of B.C.

But we also need to tell people about our cultural destinations, the more than 423 museums, art galleries, and heritage sites, our boutiques, restaurants and spas.

This ad began its run June 2 and is supported with print and radio ads.

The TV spots will also run in movie theatres around the province.

This campaign really exemplifies what we’re all trying to do: build on our strengths and the existing awareness we enjoy, while continuing to encourage the development of growth areas like cultural tourism, wine and spa tourism.

I believe we’ve only just begun to scratch the surface in terms of the variety of tourism products we can offer visitors.

One major opportunity for our province is in Aboriginal tourism.

Brenda will be talking to you later this morning about Aboriginal tourism, so I don’t want to steal her thunder, but I believe it will be one of our key growth areas in the future.

An important focus for us as a ministry – and for you as an industry – is 2008, when we commemorate the 150th anniversary of the founding of the colony of British Columbia.

Beyond celebrating the progress we’ve made as a province, it will be a chance to show British Columbians some of the more than 2,400 events, festivals and multicultural experiences they can enjoy right here at home.

I believe arts and culture are going to play an increasingly important role in differentiating ourselves from other jurisdictions as we compete for the cultural tourism dollar.

One achievement worth mentioning on the subject of cultural tourism is the announcement made in April of this year when the Province and City of Vancouver committed \$10 million for the development of a major new cultural precinct in Vancouver.

This precinct will include a new Asia-Pacific Museum of Trade and Culture and a new National Gallery of Aboriginal Art.

I think of landmarks like Times Square, Russell Square in London or the Pompidou Centre in Paris – famous for the galleries, museums and restaurants that are all within a stone's throw of one another.

When complete, Vancouver's precinct will be a cultural centerpiece for the city.

Of course, creating new tourism products and destinations requires the infrastructure to support them.

And I can tell you that tourism-related construction in B.C. is booming.

At last tally, the value was in the neighbourhood of \$17 billion in projects proposed or under construction.

For example, just down the street, the Fairmont Pacific Rim Vancouver Hotel will see a total investment of approximately \$350 million.

The \$50 million construction of the Peak-to-Peak Gondola at Whistler-Blackcomb will link the two mountains 4 km above Whistler Village.

On the Island, the Oak Bay Beach Hotel replacement is going to cost \$25 million.

In the Interior, the Vintage Landing Resort in Kelowna will feature 1000 units, including a wellness centre, golf course, marina, and convention centre for \$477 million.

\$1 billion is a significant investment for the new Mount Mackenzie Resort in Revelstoke.

Red Mountain Ski Resort will expand from 1200 ha to 4000 ha, with a total investment of \$750 million.

And expansion projects at Sun Peaks, Big White and Silver Star amount to more than \$1 billion.

The Provincial Government is also doing its part.

From the new cruise ship terminal in Campbell River to the Highway #1 upgrade from Kamloops to Golden, to border crossing upgrades – we're laying a foundation that will support this sector's growth.

Last week, the Vancouver Convention Centre Expansion project completed its pile driving phase.

That expansion alone is expected to generate \$107 million annually in new delegate spending.

YVR is forecasting a record number of passengers passing through its terminals this year.

And their \$2 billion expansion will ensure they'll be ready to accommodate new traffic, with new routes opening up, the open skies agreement with U.S. and – hopefully soon – Approved Destination Status with China.

But, it's not just in the Lower Mainland where B.C. is paving the way for growth.

Last week, we announced \$900,000 in new funding for the north coast and Northern B.C. so that they can do even more to get the word out about all this region has to offer.

For our visitors traveling the province by car, our new gateway tourism centres will be instrumental in extending visitor stay and increasing per diem expenditures.

Last week the new Gateway Visitor Centre officially opened at Golden.

Plans are currently underway to replace or expand the existing Visitor Centres at the Peace Arch, Osoyoos and Coquihalla.

These are just a few of the reasons I'm optimistic as I look toward our goal of doubling tourism by 2015.

But even with all the fundamentals in place, it will take something else to meet this goal.

That something else is creativity, coordination and a spirit that says "we can do this!"

Nowhere was this spirit better illustrated for me than at the 2005 Cross-Country Ski Nationals in Prince George. Let me close with a story.

This sport hosting event was set to bring 700 athletes and support staff from all across Canada, and was expected to inject \$1 million into the city of Prince George.

The only problem... there was no snow.

Now, to some, that may seem insurmountable, but not to the people of Prince George.

They enlisted 100 volunteers who brought everything they could – snowmobiles, snowcats, sleds, trucks – and they spent a week laboriously moving snow – 700 tonnes of it – from Bear Lake, over 70 km away.

By opening day, there were 30 cm of clean snow, you'd never know there'd been a problem, and the event was a success.

That's the kind of spirit we have in British Columbia – that's our “passport to success.”

We are entering into a time of unprecedented opportunity – not just in the kind of attention we're going to get hosting the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games, but in the years leading up to, and beyond 2010 as well.

And while doubling tourism is an ambitious goal – it's one we've met before.

We can do it again.