



PHOTOS BY MANSOOR LADHA

A homeless man with his "residence" on Robson Street in Vancouver.

Robson Street a study in contrasts

Two major cities of Canada – Toronto and Vancouver – offer an interesting study in contrasts for tourists and visitors. Travel writer Mansoor Ladha visited both cities recently; here he highlights interesting tourist attractions in Vancouver. His view of Toronto will appear in an upcoming issue.

Poverty grows amid prosperity

By Mansoor Ladha
Robson Street in Vancouver, B.C., is a major street with a world-class downtown shopping district which lights up at holiday time. No matter what the weather is like, Robson Street is packed with people — local residents and tourists — searching for bargains in the big departmental stores and the luxury brand internationally-known stores.

Robson Street, a major southeast-northwest thoroughfare in downtown and the West End of Vancouver, is packed with stores and restaurants, from Granville Street to Jervis Street. It's home to over 100 shops and the epicenter of Downtown Vancouver's shopping district.

In the midst of such prosperity and affluence lie islands of abysmal poverty, depicting the realities of a city which has become the most expensive in Canada.

The basic necessity of having a roof above one's head is fast becoming out of reach for some who can neither get a job or own a home.

Tourists and local shoppers

have to walk the streets, sometimes virtually tripping on people sleeping on the sidewalk or another one begging for money, boldly displaying a sign that he's hungry. A man was soundly asleep in his makeshift "residence" on the pavement, unaware of the blaring horns and fast-moving vehicles going by or people hurriedly going about their business.

Diners and shoppers continue to enjoy their mid-day lunches or snacks in the numerous restaurants and fast food outlets, turning a blind eye to the poverty depicted just a few yards away. A nearby restaurant packed with diners on its open-air patio continue devouring their meals, pretending to be unaware of the misery just yards away. Within a short walking distance of Robson one can find department stores like The Bay, Nordstrom, Holt Renfrew and the only mall in Downtown Vancouver, the indoor Pacific Centre Mall (at Robson and Granville). Go one block north of Robson Street — and running parallel to it — is Alberni Street, home to high-end luxury brands like Gucci and Christian Dior (sometimes referred to as Vancouver's "Luxury Zone").

Altogether, Robson Street, Alberni Street, and the Downtown Vancouver shopping district.

Boasting a truly diverse array of shops, Robson Street and the stores around it offers fashions for everyone and every budget. Looking for inexpensive shoes? There's an Aldo on Robson Street. Looking for shoes to make you drool? There's a Ferragamo on Hornby and Robson.

This fashionable area is also home to several modest to high



People in open-air restaurants nearby enjoy their meals unconcerned by homeless people a few yards away.

end accommodations. Robson provides accommodations to suit everyone's pockets. You will find high end hotels like the Hyatt Regency to all-suite hotel, Tropicana Suite Hotel, which provides fully-furnished accommodation like home away from home.

Suitable for families with children, the Tropicana is conveniently located within 15-minute walk to the Pacific Centre

Shopping Mall and other tourist attractions.

The hotel's 74 guest rooms feature kitchens with full-sized refrigerator, microwaves and coffeemakers. The hotel also provides flat-screen televisions with cable providing entertainment for the whole family and complimentary internet access.

Adjoining the hotel is a Greek restaurant, considered to offer

the best Greek food in Vancouver. High-end hotels like Shangri-La Hotel and Trump International Hotel & Tower are also close by. All these amenities on Robson make it a suitable destination for business or personal travel.

Mansoor Ladha is a journalist, travel writer and author of "Memoirs of a Muhindi: Fleeing East Africa for the West" and "A Portrait in Pluralism: Aga Khan's Shia Ismaili Muslims."