

Vancouver rises to new heights

The city is listed ninth in the world with its total of 663 highrises

BY EVAN DUGGAN, VANCOUVER SUN JULY 23, 2014



Shangri-La, centre, and the Private Residences in the Hotel Georgia, far right, rise above the Vancouver skyline.

Photograph by: Arlen Redekop, Vancouver Sun

VANCOUVER — Vancouver in recent years has risen to the top tier of the world's cities with the largest number of skyscrapers.

According to skyscraperpage.com, Vancouver is listed ninth in the world with a total of 663 highrises. That number becomes more intriguing, however, when you compare the populations of the cities on the list, which include the likes of New York City (No. 1 with 5,894 highrises and a population of 8.17 million), and Toronto (No. 2 with 2,005 highrises and a population of 2.61 million).

A highrise is considered to be a multi-floored building of at least 12 stories, or 35 metres (115 feet) in height.

Our city is an outlier on the list as Vancouver's population is listed at 616,537, making it the only one in the top 10 with fewer than 1.6 million residents. (Shanghai, Tokyo, Chicago, Kiev, Hong Kong, Mexico City and Montreal rounded out the list).

Dominating Vancouver's skyline is the Shangri-La on West Georgia Street. The hotel and private residence stands 201 metres with 62 floors, making it the tallest building in the city. The Private Residences at Hotel Georgia, completed in 2012, is the second tallest building in the city at 157 metres and 49 floors, while the One Wall Centre, completed in 2001, rounds out the top three at 150 metres and 48 floors.

Working in Vancouver's tallest building carries with it certain bragging rights, but Mathieu Rapp, Shangri-La Hotel's director of rooms, says exercising those rights is rather unbecoming in their business.

"Yes, of course, we are proud, but [being the largest] is not essential," Rapp said. "What we try to provide is way more

important, in terms of service," he said, highlighting the Shangri-La's environmentally-friendly design and operations as what makes him most proud.

"Obviously, as professionals, Shangri-La is very much oriented to core values, which are very important to us, like ... being humble and respectful."

The Shangri-La Hotel, which comprises 119 rooms from the ground level to the 15th floor, opened in January 2009. The building features the Xi-Shi Lounge, as well as Market by Jean-Georges and other amenities such as a spa, fitness centre and an outdoor pool.

The residential component climbs from the 16th floor to the 62nd and includes 234 "Live Work" units, as well as larger, far more expensive "Estate Units" on the top levels.

Rapp said the ride from the lobby to the top floor is very swift.

"We have the fastest elevators in the city," he said, recalling a recent conversation with an elevator maintenance worker. "The worker explained to me just how fast they are, and you can tell," he said, estimating that the ride takes about 20 seconds.

Vancouver's second-tallest building, the Private Residences at the Hotel Georgia, began as just one hotel and the parking lot, said Bruce Langeris, President of Delta Land Development, which redeveloped the building.

"It's now home to the five-star Rosewood Hotel Georgia, the offices for — primarily — the college of physicians and surgeons and us, and then 156 residences," he said.

The building also has an amenity area at the base of the tower, outfitted with a spa, pool and gym. There is a lounge on the fourth floor, which, according to Langeris, "has one of the city's top patios."

Langeris, who was born and raised in Vancouver, said from his office at the base of the building he can see people admiring the tower from the street. "To have a hand at creating an iconic building that will be here long after I'm gone, I mean, for me that's extreme pride, for the whole team it is," he said.

The building also has a design feature that few people know about, he said. "The flair on the southeast corner of the building points toward West Georgia and Granville, and most people don't know this, but that flare is a homage to the old city centre."

Charles Gauthier, the President and CEO of the Downtown Business Improvement Association, said the downtown core's tall buildings and high density are something his organization has supported over the years.

He said it's not about "being big for the sake of big, but basically trying to capitalize on the limited land space that we have available in the downtown core."

The denser the downtown is, the more jobs will be created in the area, he said. "There is a good trickle-down effect."

He said that while there are a few more skyscrapers coming online, including the Trump Tower at 1133 West Georgia and Vancouver House in Downtown South, people shouldn't expect to see many buildings, if any, climb higher than the Shangri-La.

"There won't be that many [higher buildings], and the only thing that might change that is if the city decides to reopen the whole issue of having higher buildings in the downtown," he said, referring to the city's policy of managing building heights and protecting view corridors.

"But if I was putting money on this, I wouldn't bet that guideline is going to change any time soon," he said.

Maintaining the view corridors is “the right approach because it is going to set us apart from other cities around the world that really don’t have that natural beauty that you can capitalize on,” he said.

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Top 10 cities by number of highrises

City Highrises Population

1. New York City 5,894 8.2 million
2. Toronto 2,005 2.6 million
3. Shanghai 1,202 13.5 million
4. Tokyo 1,185 8.6 million
5. Chicago 1,150 2.8 million
6. Kiev 1,092 2.7 million
7. Hong Kong 970 7 million
8. Mexico 762 8.7 million
9. Vancouver 663 0.6 million
10. Montreal 619 1.6 million

Vancouver has highest number of highrises per capita



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