

NBC's Today Show visits Victoria; segment to air Friday

Hosts have tea at Empress and lunch at Red Fish Blue Fish

BY MICHAEL D. REID, TIMES COLONIST FEBRUARY 23, 2010 6:20 AM



The crew from the Today Show visited Victoria to film a segment. From left: Heather McGillivray (Director of Sales, Tourism Victoria); Matt Lauer, Cathy Ray (Travel Media Relations Manager, Tourism Victoria); Al Roker; Ann Curry; Meredith Vieira.

Photograph by: Tourism Victoria, Times Colonist

Okay, Victoria, are you ready for your close-up?

Two familiar faces from NBC's Today show thought so when they flew into town on Saturday -- enough to ensure that viewers will get a side of Victoria with their main course of Olympics action on Friday's edition of the morning show.

News anchor Ann Curry, weather guy Al Roker and executive producer Jim Bell were so impressed with what they saw when they visited incognito on their day off they came back yesterday with co-anchors Matt Lauer and Meredith Vieira.

The four Today hosts flew in at 10 a.m. on West Coast Air. They stayed long enough to get the red-carpet treatment over tea at the Fairmont Empress and have lunch at Red Fish Blue Fish before flying back to Vancouver.

Today show crews also captured footage at Church and State Winery for references to Vancouver Island's wine country.

"It's a huge deal for us," Tourism Victoria CEO Robert Gialloreto said. "If we can get two minutes on the Today show with such a huge following ... it's an amazing piece of business."

Today show spokeswoman Megan Kopf said its stars and staffers loved their brief visit. "Everyone they met was welcoming and gracious," she said.

The Today show was "the pinnacle of our major strategy to bring in international media," Gialloreto said.

"It puts Victoria on the map within the Olympics context," he said. "We could have gone to Vancouver where you've got the audience to see the Olympics, but it's such a crowded marketplace. It's a tough sell."

Gialloreto was also interviewed by an NBC affiliate in Atlanta for a show to be broadcast in 12 cities and online.

"They sat down with me at the Inn at Laurel Point. I got to do a pure tourism sell wearing a short-sleeved shirt in February."

Red Fish Blue Fish co-owner Kunal Ghose was thrilled to hear how his seafood cafe was chosen.

"They were just regular customers," said Ghose, recalling how Roker and Curry waited in line during a busy Saturday. Realizing they'd missed their flight back, the Today stars returned and waited in line again.

Yesterday, the Today crew dined on tempura salmon, halibut, seared Qualicum Bay scallops, and curry chips.

Another Olympics side benefit has been interest from filmmakers avoiding Vancouver during the 2010 Games.

"We've been asked if we're as busy as Vancouver during the Olympics," said Victoria film commissioner Jo Anne Walton, noting producers of a major commercial and an episodic television show are eyeing potential locations here.

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