

TOURISM

No rain, no gain: Teacher cashes in on Victoria's sunshine pledge

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VICTORIA -- When an Edmonton schoolteacher landed in Victoria for an Easter holiday, she never forecast that a Sunday downpour would shower her with money.

Jennifer Harbin booked the spring visit for herself and her 11-year-old daughter, Jill, through Tourism Victoria, paying extra for its "sunshine guarantee."

The tourism agency has promised to pay clients \$500 if more than 1.25 centimetres of rain fell in a single day in Victoria during April and May.

On Easter Sunday, 1.28 cm fell at Victoria International Airport's weather station, the official measurement site, only the 34th time since 1941 that daily rainfall has surpassed the 1.25-cm mark.

"When I booked, I thought, 'what are the chances it will do this?' It surprised me," said Ms. Harbin, who last visited Victoria for one day, 30 years ago.

Ms. Harbin and visitors from Vancouver and 100 Mile House, B.C., were the first three to cash in on the guarantee, which requires clients to book with Tourism Victoria at least 10 days before arrival and stay for at least two nights.

Only 12 days into the promotion, Tourism Victoria's CEO and president was also caught off guard.

"I was sitting in my living room Sunday thinking, uh-oh, we might have to pay this out," Robert Gialloreto said.

Tourism Victoria paid a flat fee of less than \$5,000 to San Francisco-based WeatherBill, which provides insurance against the weather, Mr. Gialloreto said.

Similar promotions surface from time to time.

Mr. Gialloreto recalled an Alberta campaign that promised a certain amount of snow at a ski hill by a fixed date, and a Mexican resort guaranteeing sunshine every day.

"You don't want to pitch a promotion that doesn't have a chance of paying out," said Mr. Gialloreto, who started his Tourism Victoria job a year ago after leaving a similar position in Calgary.

Already, the sunshine guarantee is drawing people to the Victoria region, which has a \$1.2-billion tourism industry.

Geared to domestic visitors, the promotion has tourists booking stays of five to seven nights rather than the typical two to three, Mr. Gialloreto said.

Ms. Harbin spent about \$1,500 during her five-night holiday. The \$500 will come in handy.

"I may need to spend some on new shoes," said Ms. Harbin, who brought walking shoes, and three pairs of sandals she never wore.

"We wandered around Butchart Gardens. Between the two of us, we were wearing four coats. I wish I brought my gloves," she said.

They also rented a car and travelled north of Victoria to see the famous building murals in Chemainus, but hail drove them back around Goldstream Park. "My family and friends won't believe how horrible it was. We couldn't see anything," Ms. Harbin said.

However, the soggy sojourn hasn't dampened the family's desire to see sights they missed.

"We'll have to come back," Ms. Harbin said.