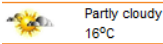




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**BC facing a brain drain**

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Nizam Ibrahim, caught in the skyrocketing living cost of Vancouver, says he's saving money commuting to Calgary for work. (SUBMITTED PHOTO)

By ERICA BULMAN, 24 HOURS

Nizam Ibrahim lives in Vancouver but commutes to Calgary, where he rents a two-bedroom apartment in a nice part of town.

Despite added monthly expenses of more than \$3,000, he still averages \$15 an hour more than any job he could get in Vancouver.

"It's a bit tiring, but to enjoy any kind of lifestyle in Vancouver it's a compromise I need to make," said the IBM IT consultant. "I've saved more in the last two years working in Alberta and traveling back and forth than I ever did working in Vancouver."

Recruitment experts predict with its high living costs, skyrocketing real estate and grossly inadequate salaries, more Vancouverites will flee to where salaries are higher and commensurate with their skills and inflation.

"We're facing an exodus," said Feras Elkhaili of the WPCG recruitment firm. "We don't want a brain drain out of Vancouver. We don't want to lose talented people. If you want good talent, you need to pay for it."

He added Toronto salaries are at least 15 per cent higher, and 20 per cent greater in Calgary and Edmonton where taxes and real estate prices are lower.

According to a Leger Marketing survey, Vancouver may be Canada's "nicest" city, but in terms of living cost, 57 per cent of respondents rated the city as "poor," compared to 40 per cent in Toronto, and 38.5 per cent in Calgary and Edmonton.

Elkhaili said job creation in Vancouver rose 20 per cent in the second quarter of 2011 compared to Q2 in 2010, but the candidates' pool has shrunk.

"Employers are not keeping up," he warned. "I fear they're turning a blind eye, saying it doesn't apply to them and we'll have people frustrated at the cost of living and (foreign investment) driving up costs of real estate."

"Young families will say 'let's sell what we have here, get a better mortgage and make more money somewhere else.'"

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