

MOVING TO SEATTLE

If the Emerald City's charms have won you over and you're considering a move here, you're not alone. In July 2007 the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* reported that Seattle had seen more population growth that year than it had in the previous 40 years. Seattle is a popular destination these days, and for good reason: it's been ranked one of the best cities in the US in which to locate a business, and it has a strong high-tech community, a healthy outdoor lifestyle, and a socially and politically open-minded, well-read population. Seattle, in short, is quite a catch. It's no wonder people are storming the gates to get in.

The resulting influx of people has a huge impact on city life, of course, and not all of it is positive. Housing prices and especially property taxes in the Seattle area have rocketed skyward. In some cases, property taxes have risen 40% to 50% in recent years. This tends to skew the average income of city residents upward, which many longtime residents see as a threat to the city's grungy, arty vibe. Population growth also means heavier traffic, something everyone who's ever driven in the city surely dreads.

Still, most economists will tell you that a growing city means a better economy. So let's not rain on the parade. In this section, we cover the fundamentals of moving to Seattle: information on renting versus buying, which areas are the best bet for housing, resources to help get you settled in and some comments from people who have recently moved to town. If you've moved to Seattle recently, go to www.lonelyplanet.com/contact to let us know what worked for you.

WHERE TO LIVE?

Lifestyle is a crucial factor when deciding where to look for a home in a new city, particularly one with neighborhoods as distinct as Seattle's. Do you have kids? Pets? Are you a one-person household, or a couple, or a larger family? Will you own a car? What part of town will you be working in? Do you want a quiet, residential neighborhood with lots of parks and trees, or is a high-density urban area more your style? A house or a condo? And, of course, the ultimate question: how much can you afford?

BUYING & RENTING

Buying property in Seattle may have been cheap once upon a time, but it sure isn't anymore. The median home price is \$489,200. Home appreciation for 2006 (the latest figure available at the time of research) was about 12.8%.

The *Seattle Times* has a chart that calculates, among other things, the annual income you'd need in order to afford to buy the median home in a given neighborhood – and it starts at an income of \$60,000 to \$90,000. For the central area around Capitol Hill, the chart suggests an annual income of about \$115,000. Less than that, and you'd better be either very lucky or prepared to rent. To view the chart as well as a number of other useful online housing calculators, go to seattletimes.nwsource.com/homevalues/2007/income/income-houses-king.html.

You can also get a sense of each of Seattle's neighborhoods from the descriptions in the Neighborhoods chapter of this book (p44).

Price is probably the ultimate decision-maker in terms of figuring out where to live. There's a huge range, from \$254,900 in Everett (\$184 per sq ft) to \$1 million in Madison Park (\$476 per sq ft). The following are some sample housing price comparisons for 2006:

Neighborhood	Median price (\$)
Central Bellvue (Eastside)	622,500 (296 per sq ft)
Central Capitol Hill	475,000 (324 per sq ft)
East Ballard	455,000 (364 per sq ft)
Everett	254,900 (184 per sq ft)
Fremont/Phinney Ridge	494,525 (352 per sq ft)
Green Lake	550,000 (350 per sq ft)
Madison Park	1 million (476 per sq ft)
North Capitol Hill/Montlake	772,000 (387 per sq ft)
Queen Anne	657,000 (415 per sq ft)
Ravenna	479,950 (298 per sq ft)
U District	504,301 (337 per sq ft)
Vashon Island	435,000 (295 per sq ft)
Wallingford	562,500 (360 per sq ft)
West Ballard	441,250 (330 per sq ft)

There's also a fairly tight rental market. In the more popular areas of the city, vacancy rates are approximately 4% to 10%. There's more space on the Eastside and rents are slightly cheaper, but it's a less desirable place to live.

Most of the rental units in Seattle are found in buildings with less than 50 units, and many of the apartments are found in buildings 10 units and smaller.

About 2% of the apartment buildings in Seattle allow dogs, and 40% allow cats. Some put a size or weight limit on dogs. Expect to pay additional deposits or fees.

Following are some typical monthly rent charges at the time of writing (in dollars):

	Seattle	Eastside
studio (approx 400-650 sq ft)	850-1200	800-1000
1 bedroom (approx 550-850 sq ft)	1000-1500	850-1200
2 bedroom (approx 700-1100 sq ft)	1400-2000	1100-1600
rental house (Seattle, approx 900-2800 sq ft; Eastside, approx 1100-3600 sq ft)	1800-3500	1650-3500

The landlord-tenant laws and regulations in Seattle are relatively tenant-friendly. For example, rent increases of 10% or more in any 12-month period require a 60-day notice to the tenant. If a landlord fails to make repairs that are required by law, a tenant may make the repairs and deduct the cost from the rent.

In a rental house, tenants can expect to find basic appliances like a washer and a dryer, refrigerator and a stove. The latter two also apply to apartments, which frequently have laundry facilities in the basement. Fully furnished apartments are less common and would normally include basics like a bed, kitchen table, chairs, a coffee table and a dresser as well.

In a tight rental market like Seattle's, it pays to be prepared. Have cash or a check ready for a deposit when you go to look at an apartment or a house, and have your list of references and previous-address information collected and ready to hand over. (Make sure your references know they are your references.) Some landlords and property management companies will demand to see pay stubs, so consider bringing those along when you check out the apartment. You'll generally have to pay a small fee for a credit check, too.

For details on landlord-tenant regulations specific to Seattle, download the Department of Planning and Development's information sheet at www.ci.seattle.wa.us/dclu/Publications/cam/cam604.pdf.

Extended Stays

A number of resources exist for people who need to relocate to Seattle for a shorter amount of time. Check [Craigslist](http://www.seattle.craigslist.org) (www.seattle.craigslist.org) under 'housing - sublets/temporary' for short-term rentals, furnished apartments and corporate housing.

Short-term Suites (www.shorttermsuites.com) has lists of available short-term rentals in a number of buildings across town, from upscale condos to comfy houses. The minimum stay is one month and a deposit is required to reserve a suite. Offering a similar service is **Short Term Stay Seattle** (☎ 888-363-5004; www.shorttermrentalsseattle.com).

Chambered Nautilus (☎ 800-545-8459; p182) is an excellent B&B in the U District that also operates a building of apartment-like suites with kitchen facilities. The suites are available for extended stays from October through April, with weekly or monthly rates, with or without breakfast and limited housekeeping.

There are also plenty of chains like **Extended StayAmerica** (☎ 206-365-8100) and **Residence Inn by Marriott** (☎ 206-624-6000). For an updated list of short-term options with an online booking engine, try www.extendedstaynetwork.com.

JOBS

The easiest jobs to get are in food service and retail, particularly if you have any experience in those areas. These are likely to be part time though and don't do much for your ability to live comfortably in an increasingly expensive city (see p18). Check Craigslist.org for a wide variety of job openings.

The aerospace industry is still an important source of employment in the area. Seattle has the highest concentration of aerospace companies in the world. The state is the highest per capita aerospace employer in the country, at 44 jobs per 1000 workers. Aerospace accounts for nearly 25% of Washington's manufacturing employment. Boeing employs 68,993 people in the Seattle and Washington state area.

The University of Washington, with 28,000 employees, is the largest employer in the city. The health-care industry, including hospitals, health-care products and services, training and research, accounts for 96,000 jobs.

The information-technology sector in the Seattle area comprises about 6000 companies and employs 68,000 people, accounting for \$10 billion in annual wages. As of 2006 Microsoft employed some 33,220 people in the greater Seattle area and 71,170 worldwide.

WHY I MOVED TO SEATTLE *Matthew Stearns*

I moved to Seattle to go to graduate school at UW. I was shooting for a master's in comparative literature, but soon realized that getting an MA in comp lit would not only look bad on paper and make my family ashamed of me, it was just a bonehead idea all around. So I promptly extricated myself from the situation and started renegotiating with reality.

I find that Seattle can be particularly resistant to reality – the city, especially recently, seems to operate within a bubble of Caucasian-quasi-liberal-privileged-monied professionalism. That the town is engulfed on all fronts by spectacular natural beauty seems to only reinforce this homogeneous, head-in-the-clouds/up-the-ass sensibility.

I remained in Seattle, after bailing on grad school, for the city's vibrant cultural life and the aforementioned natural beauty, but it got a bit hard when I discovered the brutal flipside of Seattle's emerald dreaminess – that is, its skyrocketing, ludicrous housing costs. Renting a room or buying a home here is not for the faint of wallet. If one is considering doing so, one must come armed to the teeth with currency, rare jewels and precious metals.

Not surprisingly, the upshot of this crippling costliness is an influx of yet more mind-bendingly conventional, lame, square white professionals and a rapid decrease in already negligible levels of brown/black people and penniless-but-genuinely-creative bohemians.

All of that being said, I would pay a small fortune to rent space under a dumpster and dwell in cohabitation with miserable junkies, toothless hookers and moody rats if it meant I could live in continued proximity to the shrimp sandwiches at Paseo in Fremont.

Stearns is the author of Daydream Nation from the 33 and a Third series of books about albums, published in 2007 by Continuum, and is a regular contributor to Resonance magazine.

Biotech is also a major and growing source of employment. South Lake Union has become a biotech hub, thanks to the creation of a \$15-million biotech incubator, investment by Paul Allen's company Vulcan and proximity to the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center, among other factors.

Other big employers in the area include Costco Wholesalers, Washington Mutual, Weyerhaeuser and AT&T Wireless.

Visas

To work legally in the USA you generally need both a work permit and a working visa. To apply for the correct visa at the US embassy you are usually required to obtain a work permit from the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) first. Your prospective employer must file a petition with the INS for permission for you to work, so you will first need to find a company that wants to hire you and is willing to file all the necessary paperwork. You can find more detailed information at the website of the US Department of State (www.travel.state.gov) and in the Directory chapter, p213.

SCHOOLS & STUDY

Parents moving to Seattle will need to consider the quality of various schools when deciding where to live. The *Seattle Times* newspaper produces a guide to Seattle's

public and private schools, available online at community.seattletimes.nwsourc.com/schoolguide, or in book form at any Bartell Drugs store for \$9.95. It's an excellent and impartial resource.

To enroll your child in the Seattle Public School District, you must call or visit a Student Assignment Service Center for registration materials. The regular enrollment period is February for elementary school and March for middle and high school. Enrolling during these months ensures that your child has a better chance of getting into his or her first choice of school.

For enrollment information, contact one of the following:

Student Assignment Information (☎ 206-298-7410, recorded message)

Student Assignment Service Center (North) (☎ 206-729-3370; Room 106, John Marshall Bldg, 520 NE Ravenna Blvd)

Student Assignment Service Center (South) (☎ 206-760-4690; Sharples Bldg, 3928 S Graham St)

A lot of people move to Seattle to attend college or university. If you're one of them, visit the *Seattle Times'* online guide for college students at seattletimes.nwsourc.com/html/collegeguide. The school you are enrolling with should also have available orientation materials and resources for getting settled for students, either on their websites or available by mail.

WHY I MOVED TO SEATTLE *Mark Baumgarten*

Basically, I've chosen to live in Seattle because of the city's reputation as an epicenter of music and culture, where institutions like the Seattle Art Museum and the Seattle International Film Festival are shored up by a community of artists who fill the coffee shops with music, art and bodies.

As an editor, my main goal is to find a community that is both creating and consuming its own unique culture and then find a magazine where I can dig into that culture and help direct that culture. I got lucky.

Many would say that the greatest pain in the ass in Seattle is the rain. Pish-tosh, I say. The real pain in the ass is twofold: the antiquated public transit system makes not owning a car difficult, and the hills make riding a bike painful and reserved mainly for the hardcore.

Mark is the editor of Seattle Sound magazine (seattlesoundmag.com).

OTHER RESOURCES

The following resources on housing and related topics might be useful to those thinking of a move to Seattle:

Community Home Ownership Center (☎ 206-587-5641; www.choc-wa.org) Resources and down-payment assistance for low- and moderate-income households trying to buy a home.

Fremont Public Association (☎ 206-694-6767; www.fremontpublic.org) Provides information to tenants in Seattle and King County regarding their rights and responsibilities according to local landlord-tenant laws.

King County Dispute Resolution Center (☎ 206-443-9603; www.kcdrc.org) Helps settle tenant-landlord conflicts.

move.com US-wide real-estate listings for people thinking about renting or buying.

Raincityguide.com A chatty, blog-style guide to real estate in the Seattle area.

roomster.net

seattle.craigslist.org A free classifieds forum, listing everything from job openings and apartments for rent to unclassifiable personal requests.

seattlerentals.com

seattletimes.nwsourc.com/html/homevalues2007 A detailed state-of-Seattle-housing section produced by the *Seattle Times* newspaper, including neighborhood profiles and house-hunting tips.

www.apartmentinsider.com/index.htm

www.seattle.gov/html/citizen/housing.htm The government's relocation reference page.

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