

Welcome to Seattle

Blink and it's changed: Seattle can be that ephemeral. Welcome to a city that pushes the envelope, embraces new trends and plots a path toward the future.

Local Flavor

First time in Seattle? Cut to the chase and make a beeline for its proverbial pantry: Pike Place Market. Founded in 1907 to fortify locals with fresh Northwest produce, the market's long-held mantra of 'meet the producer' still echoes enthusiastically around a city where every restaurateur worth their salt knows the name of their fishmonger and the biography of the cow that made yesterday's burgers. It doesn't take long to realize that you've arrived in a maelstrom of educated palates and wildly experimental chefs who are willing to fuse American cuisine with just about anything – as long as it's local.

A United States of Neighborhoods

Visitors setting out to explore Seattle with a blank canvas should think of the city as a United States of Neighborhoods, or – to put it in more human terms – a family of affectionate but sometimes errant siblings. There's the aloof, elegant one (Queen Anne), the cool, edgy one (Capitol Hill), the weird, bearded one (Fremont), the independently minded Scandinavian one (Ballard), the grizzled old grandfather (Pioneer Square) and the precocious adolescent still carving out its identity (South Lake Union). You'll never fully understand Seattle until you've visited them all.

Micro-businesses

To outsiders, Seattle is an industrious creator of macro-brands. To insiders, it's a city of micro-businesses and boundary-pushing grassroots movements. For proof, dip into the third-wave coffee shops, the microbreweries with their casual tasting rooms, or the cozy informal bookstores that remain rock solid in a city that spawned Amazon. Then there are the latest national trends that Seattle has helped create: craft cider, pot shops, micro-distilleries, specialist pie-makers, homemade ice cream and fledgling nano-breweries. Walk the streets and scour the neighborhoods; there's far more to this city than Starbucks' vanilla lattes and Boeing airplanes.

A Walk on the Weird Side

Just because it nurtured tech giants Microsoft and Amazon, it doesn't mean that Seattle hasn't got an arty side. Cross its urban grid and you'll find all kinds of freakish apparitions: a rocket sticking out of a shoe shop; a museum resembling a smashed-up electric guitar; glass orbs in wooden canoes; a statue of Lenin; a mural made of used chewing gum; and a museum dedicated to antique pinball machines (which you can still play). No, you haven't over-indulged in some powerful (legal) marijuana. You've just worked out that Seattle is far more bohemian than beige.



Why I Love Seattle

By Brendan Sainsbury, Writer

My knowledge of Seattle pre-2000 can be summed up in one word: 'grunge.' A product of my generation, I grew up admiring the city from afar by connecting with its music, unaware of 95% of what it had to offer. A move from London, UK to BC, Canada in 2004 quickly changed the configuration. Regular sorties south of the 49th parallel taught me that there isn't just one Seattle, there are at least 10 of them – mini-cities personified in neighborhoods full of shifting moods and weird subcultures that satisfied pretty much every taste I had.

For more about our writers, see p256.