

Understand Seattle

SEATTLE TODAY 198

Blink and you'll miss something. The evolution of Seattle in the 2010s continues at a blinding pace.

HISTORY200

A short, action-packed story of yo-yoing fortunes on the way from rambunctious lumber town to high-tech city of the future.

WAY OF LIFE204

A city of latte lunches, cutting-edge culture and outdoor fashion that has modestly produced numerous global brands.

MUSIC208

Seattle's greatest hits could fill a best-selling album, with Ray Charles, Quincy Jones, Jimi Hendrix, Nirvana, Macklemore and more.

Seattle Today

The most unchanging thing about Seattle is that it keeps on changing. Fueled by an Amazon-led building frenzy and inspired by a new generation of technological wizards, it remains, economically speaking, one of the fastest-growing cities in the US. Stoking further regional pride, local NFL team, the Seahawks, won its first ever Super Bowl in 2014, while soccer's Sounders has developed a similar addiction to silverware. But, problems with inequality and worries about the culture-stifling effects of gentrification still create furrowed brows among locals.

Best on Film

Sleepless in Seattle (1993) Meg Ryan and Tom Hanks are irresistibly adorable in this riff on *An Affair to Remember*.

Singles (1992) Attractive slackers deal with apartment life and love.

Disclosure (1994) Semi-erotic thriller that juxtaposes steamy sex scenes with shots of Seattle's best sights.

Hype! (1996) An excellent time capsule of the grunge years.

Best in Print

Another Roadside Attraction (Tom Robbins; 1971) Robbins' wacky word carnival imagines Jesus alongside a flea circus at a pit stop.

Waxwings (Jonathan Raban; 2003) Travel writer Raban illuminates Seattle's recent high-tech boom in a novel that tells the parallel stories of two immigrants.

The Terrible Girls (Rebecca Brown; 1992) Experimental collection of short stories about lesbian relationships.

Heavier than Heaven (Charles R Cross; 2001) Moving portrait of Nirvana's Kurt Cobain.

The Sweet Smell of Success

In many ways, Seattle is like a prosperous sports team that manages to remain successful with the passing of time. When faced with the need to evolve and stay competitive, it just replaces one great squad of players with another. In the 1990s, the city nurtured international game-changers, Microsoft, grunge band Nirvana, and the innovative concept of microbrewed beer. In the 2010s, it has produced Amazon, Macklemore and a tech-savvy posse of craft spirit-makers. Amazon's massive Seattle campus in South Lake Union has created a whole new neighborhood, which has had an important ripple effect throughout the local economy; Macklemore has woken up the rest of America to a strain of socially conscious hip-hop that has long been popular in the Northwest; while the micro-distillery craze has applied Seattle's beer and coffee expertise to a whole new alcoholic genre (the city contains the highest percentage of micro-distilleries in the US).

Tackling Inequalities

Landmark legislation on marijuana and same-sex marriage has proved that Seattle doesn't lack progressive credentials. But, while the economy has boomed for some, it has remained a struggle for others. In an attempt to stall widening inequalities, the city council approved a radical new law in 2014, raising the minimum wage to \$15 an hour, the highest rate in the US. With a roll-out spread over seven years, the full impact of the law won't be felt until 2021. Meanwhile, homelessness is still a worrying feature in downtown Seattle, a phenomenon that contrasts sharply with the sparkling new tech towers of South Lake Union (SLU) and the adjacent Denny Triangle. Dominated by the Amazon campus, SLU has added 50 new buildings and seen its working population grow by 50%