

Understand the Pacific Northwest

THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST TODAY424

What are the hot-button issues in the Pacific Northwest? Sustainability, marijuana laws, football glory and more.

HISTORY426

From first inhabitants to explorers, settlers and later migrants, the region has always attracted those with a love of the great outdoors.

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Nature-loving hippies, outdoors nuts, latte lovers, beer geeks... all comers enjoy the Northwest's laid-back lifestyle.

MUSIC & THE ARTS437

There's creativity galore in this progressive and inspiring region, home to right-brain thinkers and mind-blowing art.

BEER & BEYOND443

Food-and-drink writer Lucy Burningham explores the region's microbreweries, coffee culture and burgeoning wine industry.

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Lucy Burningham eats from a bounty of local produce, and details the festivals and courses to enhance your food experience.

WILD THINGS450

The best places to spot bald eagles, orcas and the Northwest's signature animal, the Roosevelt elk.

SUSTAINABLE PACIFIC NORTHWEST455

The region is a leader in recycling, bike friendliness, public transportation, renewable-energy use and green architecture.

The Pacific Northwest Today

The Pacific Northwest is famously progressive and innovative, even as it makes a point of celebrating traditional cultures, natural resources and old ways of doing things. The region's cuisine has become famous, while its politics remain liberal, and though the economy has seen its ups and downs over the last few decades, new pioneers arrive every day.

Best on Film

One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest

(1975) Oscar-winning movie about a mental institution and its inhabitants, filmed in Salem, OR (the novel was based in Oregon).

Sleepless in Seattle (1993) Romantic comedy that highlighted Seattle's Space Needle, Pike Place Market and houseboat communities.

Twilight (2008) Highly popular vampire saga that catapulted sleepy Forks, WA, (as well as other Pacific Northwest locations) on to the world's center stage.

Best in Print

The Good Rain: Across Time and Terrain in the Pacific Northwest

(Timothy Egan) One man's narrative on the land he loves, with social, economic and political perspectives.

Sometimes a Great Notion (Ken Kesey) A logging family that refuses to give an inch – made into an excellent movie starring Paul Newman.

Geek Love (Katherine Dunn) A family of carnies and their human-oddities project.

Recent Times

After a bit of a rough start to the 2000s, partly thanks to the bursting of the high-tech bubble and then the housing crisis, the Pacific Northwest seems to be getting back on its feet. Unemployment numbers have drastically improved from a few years ago, and populations are growing – in fact, demand for housing has outstripped supply in many cities in the region.

One dark cloud on the horizon is the prospect of an enormous earthquake, followed by a tsunami, hitting Cascadia – it's predicted that it would be the largest natural disaster ever to occur in the USA. And while such a 'megaquake' has long been anticipated by experts, and in fact is now overdue, it's only recently that the general population has begun to take it seriously.

Not that anyone here is especially bothered about it, mind you. This region was largely populated by and has always attracted the bold and adventuresome. Today's adventurers might be driven by espresso rather than the desire to chart new territory, but there remains a culture founded on restless idealism and the sense that everything is going to be just fine.

Small Talk

Mention the Northwest to folks outside this area and you'll start a conversation on the region's lush forests, snow-dusted volcanic mountains and amazing waterways and coastlines. Then you might move on to the region's high real-estate prices, its high-profile culinary scene, and, last but not least, those drizzly skies and all that rain!

For the locals, politics is always a good topic (generally left-leaning on the west coast and right-leaning on the eastern side). How could anyone resist commenting on new laws legalizing gay marriage and recreational marijuana use? Or voicing an opinion on the current