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The Best of Seattle

Imagine yourself sitting in a park on the Seattle waterfront, a double-tall latte and an almond croissant close at hand. The snowy peaks of the Olympic Mountains shimmer on the far side of Puget Sound, while the ferryboats come and go across Elliott Bay. It's a summer day, and the sun is shining. (Hey, as long as we're dreaming, why not dream big?) It just doesn't get much better than this, unless, of course, you swap the latte for a microbrew and catch a 9:30pm summer sunset. No wonder people love this town so much.

Okay, so the waterfront is as touristy as San Francisco's Fisherman's Wharf, but what a view! Seattle is a city of views, and for many visitors, the must-see vista is the panorama from the top of the Space Needle. With the 21st century in full swing, this image of the future may look decidedly 20th-century retro, but still, it's hard to resist an expensive elevator ride in any city. You can even take a monorail straight out of *The Jetsons* to get there (and, en route, pass right through the Frank Gehry-designed Experience Music Project).

EMP, as the Experience Music Project is known, is yet another of Seattle's handful of architectural oddities. Its swooping, multicolored, metal-skinned bulk rises at the foot of the Space Needle, proof that real 21st-century architecture looks nothing like the vision of the future people dreamed of when the Space Needle was built for the 1962 World's Fair. EMP was the brainchild of Microsoft cofounder Paul Allen, who built this rock 'n' roll cathedral to house his vast collection of Northwest rock memorabilia. After revenues from the rock museum failed to meet expectations, Allen even added a Science Fiction Museum and Hall of Fame (is this town a computer nerd's dream come true, or what?).

Paul Allen's money has also been hard at work changing the architectural face of the south end of downtown Seattle, which is where you'll find the state-of-the-art Qwest Field—home to Allen's Seattle Seahawks NFL football team. Together with the Seattle Mariners' Safeco Field, Qwest Field has created a massive sports-arena district at the south end of downtown. Next up for Allen is the under-utilized yet very accessible area between downtown Seattle and Lake Union.

Allen projects aside, Seattle is, and has been for many years now, one of the nation's most talked-about and popular cities, and life here recently has undergone dramatic changes. An influx of urban residents has brought a new vibrancy to the downtown area; as the city has grown wealthier and more sophisticated, it has built itself not just a new football stadium and a retractable-roof baseball stadium but also a new opera house, a new and architecturally avant-garde main library, a new symphony hall, glittering new hotels, and countless upscale restaurants and shops. Still in the works are a controversial light-rail system and an extension of Seattle's monorail.

It's clear that Seattle has not grown complacent. Sure, it has traffic congestion to rival that of L.A. And, yes, the weather really is lousy for most of the year. But

Seattleites manage to overcome these minor inconveniences, in large part by spilling out into the streets and parks whenever the sun shines. To visit Seattle in the summer is to witness an exodus; follow the lead of the locals and head for the great outdoors. Should you brave a visit in the rainy season, don't despair: There are compensations for such misfortune, including a roof on Pike Place Market and an espresso bar on every block.

WATER, WATER EVERYWHERE . . . & FORESTS & MOUNTAINS, TOO

Over the years, through Boeing's booms and busts, the rise and fall of grunge, the coming and going of Frazier, and the bursting of the high-tech bubble economy, one thing has stayed the same here in Seattle: the beautiful and wild landscape that surrounds the city. The sparkling waters of Elliott Bay, Lake Union, and Lake Washington wrap around this city of shimmering skyscrapers, and forests of evergreens crowd the city limits. Everywhere you look, another breathtaking vista unfolds. With endless boating opportunities, and beaches and mountains within a few hours' drive, Seattle is ideally situated for the outdoor pursuits that are so important to the fabric of life in the Northwest.

Few other cities in the United States are as immersed in the outdoor aesthetic as Seattle. The Cascade Range lies less than 50 miles to the east of downtown Seattle, and across Puget Sound stand the Olympic Mountains. In the spring, summer, and fall, the forests and mountains attract hikers, mountain bikers, anglers, and campers, while in winter, the ski areas of Snoqualmie Pass, Stephens Pass, and Crystal Mountain draw snowboarders and skiers.

Though impressive mountains line the city's eastern and western horizons, a glance to the southeast on a sunny day will reveal Seattle's most treasured sight—Mount Rainier, a 14,410-foot-tall dormant volcano that looms large, so unexpected that it demands your attention. When "the Mountain is out," as they say here in Seattle, Seattleites head for the hills.

However, as important as "the Mountain" is to Seattle, it is water that truly

defines the city's character. And I don't mean water falling from the sky. To the west lies Elliott Bay, an arm of Puget Sound; to the east is Lake Washington; and right in the middle of the city is Lake Union. With so much water all around, Seattle has become a city of boaters, who take to the water in everything from regally appointed yachts to slender sea kayaks. Consequently, the opening day of boating season has become one of Seattle's most popular annual festivals.

Despite Seattle's affinity for its nearby natural environment, this city is perhaps best known as the coffee capital of America. To understand Seattle's coffee addiction, it is necessary to study the city's geography and climate. Seattle lies at almost 50 degrees north latitude, which means that winter days are short. The sun comes up around 7:30am, goes down as early as 4:30pm, and is frequently hidden behind leaden skies. A strong stimulant is almost a necessity to get people out of bed through the gray days of winter. Seattleites love to argue over which espresso bar or cafe in town serves the best coffee (and the answer isn't always Starbucks, despite the famous coffee company's global expansion from its humble beginnings in Seattle's Pike Place Market).

So, pack your travel mug and your rain jacket, and, just for good measure, don't forget your sunglasses (who knows, you might get lucky). You can leave the suit and the Italian shoes at home; remember, this is a city that has turned casual Fridays into a way of life. Now, for a few more tips on how to get the most out of your visit to Seattle, peruse these listings of some of Seattle's best.

1 The Most Unforgettable Travel Experiences

- **Eating Your Way through Pike Place Market.** Breakfast at Le Panier, espresso at what was once the only Starbucks in the world, lunch at Café Campagne, a martini at The Pink Door, dinner at Chez Shea, Celtic music at Kells, and a nightcap at Il Bistrot—that's how you could spend a day at Pike Place. Between stops on this rigorous itinerary, you can people-watch, listen to street musicians, and shop for everything from fresh salmon to tropical fruits to magic tricks to art glass. See Chapter 7.
- **Joining the Underground:** Rome has its catacombs, Paris has its sewers, and Seattle has its underground. Now, some people, including my own brother, think I'm nuts for enjoying the Seattle Underground tour, but corny sewer jokes aside, this tour is fascinating and a great introduction to the seamier side of Seattle's early history. See p. 148.
- **Spending an Afternoon in the Ballard Neighborhood:** Watch the salmon climb the fish ladders and swim past viewing windows at the Hiram M. Chittenden Locks. Have a meal at Ray's Boathouse, keeping an eye out for bald eagles. Finish off this outing with a stroll along the beach at Golden Gardens Park. See chapter 8.
- **Taking a Cruise:** Seattle is best seen from a boat, and there are plenty of vessels that will take you out on the water. Personally, I prefer sailboat outings from the waterfront, but for a more informative and diverse excursion, take the Argosy Cruises tour from Lake Union to the waterfront. If you don't mind flaunting the fact that you're a tourist, there's the daffy Seattle Duck Tour. See p. 155, "Boat Tours," in chapter 8.
- **An Outing to Volunteer Park.** Whether the day is sunny or gray, this park on Capitol Hill is a great spot to spend an afternoon. You can relax in the grass, study Chinese snuff bottles in the Seattle Asian Art Museum, marvel at the orchids in the conservatory, or simply enjoy the great view of the city from the top of the park's water tower. See p. 144.
- **Riding the Water Taxi to Alki Beach.** The water taxi that operates between the Seattle waterfront and Alki Beach, on the far side of Elliott Bay, is practically the cheapest boat ride you can take in Seattle. Once you get to Alki Beach, you can dine with a killer view of the Seattle skyline and then go for a walk or bike ride on the beachfront path. See p. 63.
- **Sea Kayaking on Lake Union.** Lake Union is a very urban body of water, but it has a great view of the Seattle skyline, and you can paddle right up to several waterfront restaurants. For more natural surroundings, kayak over to the marshes at the north end of the Washington Park Arboretum. See p. 161.

2 The Best Splurge Hotels

- **The Edgewater,** Pier 67, 2411 Alaskan Way (☎ 800/624-0670): For a sense of being immersed in all things Seattle, there is no better hotel choice than the Edgewater, which is located on a pier on the Seattle waterfront. The hotel is also only 5 blocks from Pike Place Market and the Seattle Aquarium and 3 blocks from the restaurants of Belltown. See p. 74.
- **Fairmont Olympic Hotel,** 411 University St. (☎ 800/223-8772): Built

in 1924, this classic hotel is styled after an Italian Renaissance palace and is by far the most impressive of Seattle's handful of historic hotels. The grand lobby is unrivaled. See p. 75.

- **Grand Hyatt Seattle**, 721 Pine St. (☎ 800/233-1234): Stylish without being trendy, this luxury downtown tower hotel provides not only the finest room amenities but also the best service. See p. 75.
- **Hotel Åndra**, 2000 Fourth Ave. (☎ 877/448-8600): This is a city that likes to keep up with the trends, and the Hotel Åndra has given Seattle a boldly contemporary lodging to compete with the W Seattle. Best of all, it's on the edge of the trendy Belltown neighborhood, which makes

this an ideal base for club-crawling night owls. See p. 79.

- **Inn at the Market**, 86 Pine St. (☎ 800/446-4484): Though Seattle has quite a few hotels that do well for a romantic weekend, the Inn at the Market, with its Elliott Bay views, European atmosphere, and proximity to many excellent (and romantic) restaurants, is sure to set the stage for lasting memories. See p. 81.
- **Woodmark Hotel on Lake Washington**, 1200 Carillon Point, Kirkland (☎ 800/822-3700): If you're here on Microsoft business, head for this waterfront hotel not far from Bill Gates's Xanadu. Most rooms have water views. See p. 92.

3 The Best Moderately Priced Hotels

- **Summerfield Suites by Wyndham**, 1011 Pike St. (☎ 800/996-3426): This modern hotel, with rooms that are more than big enough for you, your spouse, and your luggage, is only a couple of blocks from the city's huge convention center and many of its priciest hotels. Why so cheap? Well, it's on the wrong side of the freeway for one thing, and it's a steep walk back to the hotel from the waterfront. But, if you're willing to walk, you can save a bundle. See p. 79.
- **Comfort Suites Downtown/Seattle Center**, 601 Roy St. (☎ 800/517-4000): Located only about four blocks from Seattle Center and the Space Needle, this modern budget hotel offers spacious rooms and a convenient location. Throw in some good restaurants within walking distance and you have a little gem in a well-hidden corner of the city. See p. 83.
- **Silver Cloud Inn—Lake Union**, 1150 Fairview Ave. N. (☎ 800/330-5812): Situated across the street from Lake

Union and close to Seattle Center, this hotel is just far enough from downtown to be affordable—and, best of all, it has a great location overlooking the lake. There are indoor and outdoor pools and several restaurants right across the street. See p. 87.

- **Gaslight Inn**, 1727 15th Ave. (☎ 206/325-3654): Set in the Capitol Hill neighborhood, this B&B is in a lovingly restored and maintained Craftsman bungalow filled with original Stickley furniture. Lots of public spaces, very tasteful decor, and a swimming pool in the backyard all add up to unexpected luxury for a Seattle B&B. See p. 88.
- **Best Western University Tower Hotel**, 4507 Brooklyn Ave. NE (☎ 800/899-0251): This hotel is surprisingly reasonably priced for what you get—it's one of the most stylish contemporary accommodations in Seattle. Ask for a room on an upper floor and you'll also get good views. See p. 90.

4 The Most Unforgettable Dining Experiences

- **Cascadia Restaurant**, 2328 First Ave. (☎ 206/448-8884): Chef Kerry Sear can do wondrous things with local produce and fresh Northwest ingredients. Throw in martinis made with Douglas fir sorbet, a variety of tasting menus, and, in summer, beautiful light filtering in through the restaurant's front wall of glass and you have the quintessential Seattle eatery. See p. 107.
- **Salumi**, 309 Third Ave. S. (☎ 206/621-8772): Squeeze your way into this Pioneer Square hole-in-the-wall, stand in line, and then savor the finest, freshest artisan-made salami in the Northwest. The fact that this place is owned by celeb-chef Mario Batali's father guarantees that the lines are always long. See p. 116.
- **Rover's**, 2808 E. Madison St. (☎ 206/325-7442): Want to feel like you've just discovered the best little hidden gem of a restaurant in Seattle? Book a table at chef Thierry Rautureau's Madison Valley neighborhood restaurant. Rautureau combines his love of local ingredients with his classic French training to produce his own distinctive take on Northwest cuisine. See p. 122.
- **Elliott's**, Pier 56, 1201 Alaskan Way (☎ 206/623-4340): The Northwest produces an astonishing variety of oysters, and locals are almost as obsessive about their bivalves as they are about coffee and beer. Elliott's almost always has the biggest and best selection of oysters in the city. Just remember that local oysters are less available in the summer than in other months. See p. 101.
- **Dahlia Lounge**, 2001 Fourth Ave. (☎ 206/682-4142): You can't say that you've "done" Seattle if you haven't eaten at one of Tom Douglas's restaurants, and for my money, the Dahlia Lounge is the place to go if you're only going to dine at one of Tom's places. A dinner of crab cakes followed by coconut cream pie captures the absolute essence of this place. See p. 107.
- **The Herbfarm Restaurant**, 14590 NE 145th St., Woodinville (☎ 425/485-5300): The Herbfarm is actually 30 minutes north of Seattle, but it is so famous and serves such unforgettable meals that people plan Seattle vacations around dinner here. This place is an absolute must for foodies, but be sure to make your reservation months in advance. See p. 253.

5 The Best Things to Do for Free (or Almost)

- **Taking in the Sunset from the Waterfront.** On a clear summer day, the setting sun silhouettes the Olympic Mountains on the far side of Puget Sound and makes the view from the Seattle waterfront truly memorable. Try the rooftop park at the Bell Street Pier, Myrtle Edwards Park at the north end of the waterfront, or the lounge at the Edgewater Hotel. See "The Waterfront" in Chapter 8.
- **Riding a Ferry Across Puget Sound.** Sure, you could spend \$20 or \$30 for a narrated tour of the Seattle waterfront, but for a fraction of that, you can take a ferry to Bremerton or Bainbridge Island and see not just Elliott Bay but plenty more of Puget Sound. Keep an eye out for porpoises and bald eagles. See "Getting Around" in Chapter 5.
- **Relaxing Over a Latte.** If the rain and gray skies start to get to you, there is no

better pick-me-up (short of a ticket to the tropics) than a frothy latte in a cozy cafe. Grab a magazine and just hang out until the rain stops (maybe sometime in July). See “Coffee, Tea, Bakeries & Pastry Shops” in Chapter 7.

- **Exploring a Waterfront Park.** Seattle abounds with waterfront parks where you can gaze at distant shores, wiggle your toes in the sand, or walk through a remnant patch of old-growth forest. Some of my favorites include Discovery Park, Seward Park, Lincoln Park, and Golden Gardens Park.
- **Museum Hopping on First Thursday.** On the first Thursday of each

month, almost all of Seattle’s museums are open late and most offer free admission for all or part of the day. Get an early start and be sure to check the opening and closing times of the museums. Talk about a great way to save bucks on your vacation!

- **Taking a Free Boat Ride on Lake Union.** For a couple of hours each Sunday afternoon, the Center for Wooden Boats, which is located on Lake Union, offers free boat rides in classic wooden sailboats. You can watch noisy floatplanes landing and taking off as you sail silently across the waves. See p. 138.

6 The Best Outdoor Activities

- **Cycling the Burke-Gilman Trail:** Seattle area cyclists are blessed with a plethora of great cycling paths and the granddaddy of them all is the Burke-Gilman Trail, which stretches for more than 14 miles from the Ballard neighborhood to the north end of Lake Washington. The Sammamish River Trail extends the trail for another dozen miles or so. See p. 159.
- **Going to an Outdoor Summer Movie or Concert:** When the summer sun shines, Seattleites spend as much time outdoors as they can, and among the city’s favorite outdoor activities is attending outdoor concerts and movies. Whether in parks or parking lots, these outdoor performances bring out the lawn chairs and blankets. See “The Performing Arts” and “Movies,” in Chapter 11.
- **Hiking Up Mount Si:** There’s no getting around the fact that this hike

is a real killer, but, ooh, the view from the top! Mount Si is located less than 45 minutes east of Seattle and rises straight up from the valley of the Snoqualmie River. The trail also goes straight up, so if you aren’t in good shape, don’t even think of trying this hike. See p. 160.

- **Day Tripping to Mount Rainier National Park:** With growling glaciers, meadows full of colorful wildflowers, and thousand-year-old trees, Mount Rainier National Park always gets my vote for best day trip from Seattle. In summer, the opportunities for hiking are absolutely breathtaking, and in winter, cross-country skiing and snowshoeing provide opportunities for exploring a snowy landscape. See “Mount Rainier National Park,” in Chapter 12.

7 The Best Offbeat Experiences

- **Adding Your Contribution to the Gum Wall.** Hey, when your gum has lost its flavor, don’t just spit it out on the sidewalk; instead, turn it into al

fresco art by adding it to the “Gum Wall,” Pike Place Market’s self-adhesive display of ABC (already been chewed) art. See p. 137.

- **Making Music Even if You Can't Carry a Tune in a Bucket.** Even the musically challenged can make beautiful music (well, sort of) at a couple of unusual Seattle attractions. At the Experience Music Project, you can let your inner rock 'n' roller go wild on simulated musical instruments, while at the Soundbridge Seattle Symphony Music Discovery Center, fans of classical music can play a cello or conduct an orchestra. See p. 138.
- **Counting Salmon at Ballard's Chittenden Locks.** If you find yourself sleepless in Seattle, forget about counting sheep. Try counting salmon. In fact, even if you aren't suffering from insomnia, during the summer, the fish ladder and underwater viewing windows at the Hiram M. Chittenden Locks are great places to count salmon. See p. 146.
- **Believing It or Not at Ye Olde Curiosity Shop.** Two-headed calves, the Lord's Prayer on a grain of rice, a human mummy. These are just some of the unbelievable items on display at Ye Olde Curiosity Shop, Seattle's waterfront temple of the bizarre. See p. 186.
- **Buying a Flying Fish at Pike Place Market.** At Pike Place Market, the pigs may not fly, but the fish do. If you purchase a fresh salmon from the Pike Place Fish stall, you'll get to watch it go sailing over the counter as the overall-clad fishmongers put on one of the best floor shows in the market. See p. 135.