

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 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. And, if it's up and running again by the time you read this, you can even take a monorail straight out of *The Jetsons* to get there (and pass right through the Frank Gehry–designed Experience Music Project en route).

EMP, as the Experience Music Project has come to be 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, where, in March 2000 the Kingdome stadium came crashing down, imploded to make way for the new, state-of-the-art Seahawks Stadium—home to Allen's Seattle Seahawks NFL football team. Together with the Seattle Mariners' Safeco Field, Seahawks Stadium has created a massive sports-arena district at the south end of downtown. Next up is the under-utilized yet very accessible area between downtown Seattle and Lake Union. Allen has plans for that neighborhood, too.

Allen projects aside, Seattle has become one of the nation's most talked-about and popular cities, and life here has undergone dramatic changes in recent years. An influx of urban residents has brought a new vibrancy to the downtown area, and 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 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—although both projects have repeatedly stalled and may end up being sidetracked completely.

It's clear that Seattle has not grown complacent. Sure, it's become a congested city, with traffic problems rivaling those 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

Though the times may be a-changing for Seattle, one thing has stayed the same: 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 and Stephens Pass 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. 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.

A CITY DRIVEN BY CAFFEINE

Despite Seattle's affinity for its nearby natural environment, this city is 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).

Seattle's popularity and rapid growth, however, have not been entirely smooth. The streets and highways have been unable to handle the increased traffic load, and commuting has become almost as nightmarish as it is in California, from whence so many of the city's recent transplants fled

(ironically, partly due to the traffic congestion). With roads growing ever more crowded and the cost of living continuing to rise, Seattle may not be

the Emerald City it once was, but it remains a metropolis in a singularly spectacular setting and a superb summertime vacation destination.

1 Frommer's Favorite Seattle Experiences

- **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.
- **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.
- **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 Bistro—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.
- **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).
- **Wandering Around Fremont.** This quirky neighborhood considers itself the center of the universe, but it's really a little bit left of center. Retro clothing and vintage-furniture stores, cafes, a couple of pubs, a great flea market, and the city's best public art make this the most eccentric neighborhood in Seattle.
- **Seeing a Show at the 5th Avenue Theatre.** This historic theater was designed to resemble the imperial throne room in Beijing's Forbidden City. Can you say "ornate"? Nothing else in Seattle compares, including the show onstage.
- **Attending the Spring Flower and Garden Show.** Each spring, gardening madness descends on the Washington State Convention and Trade Center in the form of one of the largest flower-and-garden shows in the country. This show has more than 5 acres of garden displays and hundreds of vendors.
- **Catching Concerts at Bumbershoot.** It isn't often that you get to agonize over which great music performance to attend next, but that's just what you have to do at the annual Labor Day music-and-arts extravaganza known as Bumbershoot. Whether your tastes run to Grieg or grunge, salsa or swing, you'll have plenty of choices.
- **Riding the Monorail.** Though the ride is short, covering a distance that could easily be walked in half an hour, the monorail provides a different perspective on the city. The retro-futurist transport, built for the Seattle World's Fair in 1962, ends at the foot of the Space

Needle and even passes right through the Experience Music Project. Although a fire shut down the monorail for much of 2004, it should be up and running again by the start of 2005.

- **Spending an Afternoon at 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.
- **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.
- **Enjoying a Day at the Woodland Park Zoo.** The cages are almost completely gone from this big zoo, replaced by spacious animal habitats that give the residents the feeling of being back at home in the wild. Zebras gallop, brown bears romp, river otters cavort, elephants stomp, and orangutans swing. The levels of activity here make it clear that the animals are happy with their surroundings.
- **Strolling through the Arboretum in Spring.** Winters in Seattle may not be long, but they do lack color. So, when spring hits, the sudden bursts of brightness it brings are reverently appreciated. There's no better place in the city to enjoy the spring floral displays than the Washington Park Arboretum.
- **Walking, Jogging, Biking, or Skating a Seattle Path.** There are several paved trails around the city that are ideal for pursuing any of these sports. The trail around Green Lake is the all-time favorite, but the Burke-Gilman/Sammamish River Trail along Lake Washington, the trail along Alki Beach, and the trail through Myrtle Edwards and Elliott Bay parks at the north end of the Seattle waterfront are equally good choices.
- **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.
- **Exploring a Waterfront Park.** Seattle abounds in waterfront parks where you can gaze out 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 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 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.

2 Best Hotel Bets

- **Best Historic Hotel:** Built in 1924, the **Fairmont Olympic Hotel**, 411 University St. (☎ 800/223-8772 or 206/621-1700; www.fairmont.com/seattle), 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. 70.
- **Best for Business Travelers:** If your company has sent you to Seattle to close a big deal, insist on the best. Stay at the **Grand Hyatt Seattle**, 721 Pine St. (☎ 800/233-1234 or 206/774-1234; www.grandseattle.hyatt.com), and you can avail yourself of all kinds of high-tech amenities. If you're here on Microsoft business, head for the **Woodmark Hotel on Lake Washington**, 1200 Carillon Point, Kirkland (☎ 800/822-3700 or 425/822-3700; www.thewoodmark.com). Rooms are not only set up for taking care of business, but most also have water views. See p. 71 and 87.
- **Best for a Romantic Getaway:** Though Seattle has quite a few hotels that do well for a romantic weekend, the **Inn at the Market**, 86 Pine St. (☎ 800/446-4484 or 206/443-3600; www.innatthemarket.com), 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. 76.
- **Best for Hipsters:** This is a city that likes to keep up with the trends, and the new **Hotel Āndra**, 2000 Fourth Ave. (☎ 877/448-8600 or 206/448-8600; www.hotelandra.com), has given Seattle a boldly contemporary lodging. 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. 75.
- **Best for Families:** Situated just across the street from Lake Union, the **Silver Cloud Inns Seattle-Lake Union**, 1150 Fairview Ave. N. (☎ 800/330-5812 or 206/447-9500; www.silvercloud.com), is far enough from downtown to be affordable—and yet is not far from Seattle Center and has a great location overlooking the lake. There are indoor and outdoor pools and several restaurants right across the street. See p. 81.
- **Best Moderately Priced Hotel:** The **Best Western University Tower Hotel**, 4507 Brooklyn Ave. NE (☎ 800/899-0251 or 206/634-2000; www.universitytowerhotel.com), 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. 84.
- **Best Budget Hotel:** It may be a bit out of the way and a little old, but the **Mercer Island Travelodge**, 7645 Sunset Hwy., Mercer Island (☎ 800/578-7878 or 206/232-8000; www.mercerislandhotel.com), has a lot to recommend it. You drive across a floating bridge to get here, it's right on a walking/biking path, and there's a very pleasant neighborhood a few blocks away. See p. 88.
- **Best B&B:** Set in the Capitol Hill neighborhood, the **Gaslight Inn**, 1727 15th Ave. (☎ 206/325-3654; www.gaslight-inn.com), is 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. 82.

- **Best Service:** The **Alexis Hotel**, 1007 First Ave. (☎ 800/426-7033 or 206/624-4844; www.alexishotel.com), a downtown boutique property, is small enough to offer that personal touch. See p. 67.
- **Best Location:** Located on a pier right on the Seattle waterfront, **The Edgewater**, Pier 67, 2411 Alaskan Way (☎ 800/624-0670 or 206/728-7000; www.edgewaterhotel.com), is only 5 blocks from Pike Place Market and the Seattle Aquarium and 3 blocks from the restaurants of Belltown. The Waterfront Streetcar, which goes to Pioneer Square and the International District, stops right in front of the hotel; ferries to Victoria, British Columbia, leave from the adjacent pier. See p. 66.
- **Best Views:** If you're not back in your room by sunset at the **Westin Seattle**, 1900 Fifth Ave. (☎ 800/WESTIN-1 or 206/728-1000; www.westin.com/seattle), you may not turn into a pumpkin, but you will miss a spectacular light show. Because this is the tallest hotel in the city, the Westin boasts fabulous views from its upper floors, especially those facing northwest. See p. 73.
- **Best Health Club:** So you're on the road again, but you don't want to give up your circuit training. Don't worry: Bring your gym gear and book a room at the **Bellevue Club Hotel**, 11200 SE Sixth St., Bellevue (☎ 800/579-1110 or 425/454-4424; www.bellevueclub.com), where you'll have access to a huge private health club complete with an indoor pool and tennis courts. See p. 87.
- **Best Pool:** Most hotels in the city center stick their swimming pool (if they have one at all) down in the basement or on some hidden-away terrace, but at the **Sheraton Seattle Hotel and Towers**, 1400 Sixth Ave. (☎ 800/325-3535 or 206/621-9000; www.sheraton.com/seattle), you can do laps up on the top floor with the lights of the city twinkling all around you. See p. 72.
- **Best Room Decor:** If you plan to spend a lot of time in your room, then the **Bellevue Club Hotel**, 11200 SE Sixth St., Bellevue (☎ 800/579-1110 or 425/454-4424; www.bellevueclub.com), is the place to be. The rooms here are plush enough to please the most demanding of hedonists. See p. 87.
- **Best for Pets:** If you'll be traveling to Seattle with your pooch and don't mind shelling out big bucks for a top-end hotel, then the **Alexis Hotel**, 1007 First Ave. (☎ 800/426-7033 or 206/624-4844; www.alexishotel.com), should be your home away from home. Special pet amenities includes designer doggie beds, dog treats, a dog bowl with distilled water, pet-sitting services, and even in-room dining for your pooch. See p. 67.

3 Best Dining Bets

- **Best for Romance:** Tucked away in a quiet corner of Pike Place Market, **Chez Shea**, Corner Market Building, 94 Pike St., Suite 34 (☎ 206/467-9990; www.chezshea.com), has candlelit tables, subdued lighting, views of ferries crossing the bay, and superb meals—all adding up to the perfect combination for a romantic dinner. See p. 103.
- **Best Waterfront Dining:** While the Seattle waterfront has plenty of touristy, in-your-face restaurants, you'll find the best waterfront dining experience in The

- Edgewater hotel. **Six-Seven Restaurant & Lounge**, Pier 67, 2411 Alaskan Way (☎ 206/269-4575), can claim not only superb food, but also a very cool decor, a fabulous little deck, and one of the best views from any restaurant in the city. See p. 93.
- **Best View:** There's no question here. **SkyCity at the Needle**, Seattle Center, 400 Broad St. (☎ 800/937-9582 or 206/905-2100; www.spaceneedle.com), has the best views in Seattle—360 degrees worth of them. Sure it's expensive, but there's no place in town with views to rival these. See p. 110.
 - **Best Outdoor Dining with a View:** Located across Elliott Bay from downtown Seattle, **Salty's on Alki Beach**, 1936 Harbor Ave. SW (☎ 206/937-1600; www.saltys.com), has a gorgeous view of the Seattle skyline. You can even get here by water taxi. See p. 119.
 - **Best Budget Eatery with a View:** Of course, you could shell out big bucks to dine at Salty's, but you can get the same view at a fraction of the cost at the adjacent **Alki Crab & Fish**, 1660 Harbor Ave. SW (☎ 206/938-0975). Okay, so the menu is pretty limited and none too memorable, but that view—wow! See p. 120.
 - **Best Wine List:** **Canlis**, 2576 Aurora Ave. N. (☎ 206/283-3313; www.canlis.com), has been around for almost 50 years, so the folks here have had plenty of time to develop an extensive and well-thought-out wine list. See p. 110.
 - **Best Hole in the Wall:** **Matt's in the Market**, 94 Pike St. (☎ 206/467-7909), is so small that you have to wonder how the customers and the staff manage to fit in this closet-size restaurant. The kitchen, in full view, is just as small. Rest assured, however, that the meals here are big on flavor. See p. 105.
 - **Best Value:** While Wild Ginger usually gets all the accolades for its Pan-Asian cuisine, Belltown's little **Noodle Ranch**, 2228 Second Ave. (☎ 206/728-0463; www.thenoodleranch.com), is every bit as good, despite a more limited menu. See p. 103.
 - **Best Service:** **Canlis**, 2576 Aurora Ave. N. (☎ 206/283-3313; www.canlis.com), is a Seattle tradition, the perfect place to close a big deal or celebrate a very special occasion. When you want to feel pampered, this is the place to dine. See p. 110.
 - **Best French Cuisine:** Hidden away in a quiet courtyard in a secluded corner of Pike Place Market, **Campagne**, Inn at the Market, 86 Pine St. (☎ 206/728-2800; www.campagnerestaurant.com), is a casually elegant little restaurant that makes the most of fresh market produce, meats, and fish. There are even views of Elliott Bay. See p. 103.
 - **Best Northwest Cuisine:** Chef Thierry Rautureau at **Rover's**, 2808 E. Madison St. (☎ 206/325-7442; www.rovers-seattle.com), combines his love of local ingredients with his classic French training to produce his own distinctive take on Northwest cuisine. See p. 115.
 - **Best Seafood:** Chef Tom Douglas seems to be able to do no wrong, and at **Etta's Seafood**, 2020 Western Ave. (☎ 206/443-6000; www.tomdouglas.com), he focuses his culinary talents on more than just his famed crab cakes. See p. 104.
 - **Best Place to Slurp Down Raw Oysters:** The Northwest produces an astonishing variety of oysters, and locals are almost as obsessive about their bivalves as they are

about coffee and beer. For the best selection, head to **Elliott's**, Pier 56, 1201 Alaskan Way (☎ 206/623-4340). See p. 96.

- **Best Sushi:** If the sight of all that fresh fish in Pike Place Market has you craving sushi, then head up to the north end of Belltown to **Shiro's**, 2401 Second Ave. (☎ 206/443-9844). All the Japanese businessmen here should give you a clue that this place is the real deal. See p. 102.
- **Best Steaks: Metropolitan Grill**, 820 Second Ave. (☎ 206/624-3287; www.themetropolitangrill.com), in downtown Seattle, serves corn-fed, aged beef grilled over mesquite charcoal. Steaks just don't get any better than this. See p. 97.
- **Best Burgers:** We all have our own ideas of what constitutes the perfect burger, and here in Seattle there are plenty of worthy contenders. I split my vote between the burgers at **Two Bells Tavern**, 2313 Fourth Ave. (☎ 206/441-3050), and those at the **74th Street Ale House**, 7401 Greenwood Ave. N. (☎ 206/784-2955; www.seattlealehouses.com). See p. 103 and 119.
- **Best Desserts:** The **Dahlia Lounge**, 2001 Fourth Ave. (☎ 206/682-4142; www.tomdouglas.com), has long been one of the best restaurants in Seattle, and while the food is reliably tasty, the triple coconut cream pie is absolutely divine. The rest of the desserts are pretty good, too. See p. 101.
- **Best for Kids:** Located on the south shore of Lake Union, **Cucina! Cucina!**, Chandler's Cove, 901 Fairview Ave. N. (☎ 206/447-2782; www.cucina.cucina.com), is Seattle's most popular family restaurant because of all the things they do here to make dining out fun for the kids. Adults like it, too. See p. 115.
- **Best Late-Night Dining: Palace Kitchen**, 2030 Fifth Ave. (☎ 206/448-2001; www.tomdouglas.com), is an urbane palace of food that serves tasty specialties from the grill and rotisserie until 1am. The bar here is also a happening place. See p. 102.
- **Best Espresso:** Everyone in Seattle seems to have an opinion about where to get the best espresso drinks. My vote goes to **Caffe Vita**, 813 Fifth Ave. N. (☎ 206/352-5449), and 1005 E. Pike St. (☎ 206/709-4440). The lattes served here have beautiful little works of art drawn onto the foam with espresso. See p. 123.
- **Best Place to Order a Double Espresso Medium Rare:** While most people may prefer to have their espresso after having a steak dinner, at **Rippe's**, Pier 70, 2801 Alaskan Way (☎ 206/267-0236; www.rippesgrill.com), on the Seattle waterfront, you can get your steak rubbed with espresso for a truly eye-opening culinary experience. See p. 96.