

The Best of Portland

When I first moved to Portland in 1990, I marveled at how much the city resembled the small cities of Europe. Compact, accessible, clean, friendly. All these descriptors still hold true today, and, in some ways, the city feels even more European than ever before. There's a streetcar that winds its way across town connecting neighborhoods with distinctly different characters. There are Amsterdam-style bike lanes, and morning and evening, a fleet of bicycle commuters pedals between jobs in downtown Portland and homes across the Willamette River. There are a surprising number of those adorable little Smart cars so popular in Europe. There are even food carts that sell waffles like the ones I used to get in Amsterdam and perfect Belgian *frites*.

In recent years, as Portland has become ever more urban and urbane, it has also become more youthful. Young, creative college graduates have been moving here in droves. They come because this city has a buzz going on. Compared to other West Coast cities, it's a cheap place to live. There's great beer, a burgeoning cocktail scene, plenty of great restaurants, and, of course, hundreds of food carts where you can get a great meal for under \$10. Best of all, you don't need a car. Those same attributes also make Portland a great place to visit. Cheap food, good beer, and no need to rent a car? Sign me up.

Situated at the confluence of the Willamette and Columbia rivers, Portland, Oregon, with a metropolitan population of roughly two million, is a city of discreet charms. That it claims a rose garden as one of its biggest attractions should give you an idea of just how laid-back this city is. Portlanders still take time to stop and smell the flowers. Spend much time here, and you, too, will likely feel the leisurely pace seeping into your bones.

Portland does not have any major tourist sites. Instead, it is a city of quiet charms that must be searched for and savored—the shade of the stately elms in the South Park Blocks, the tranquillity of the Japanese Garden, the view from the grounds of Pittock Mansion, the miles of hiking trails in Forest Park. Sure, there's a good art museum and a world-class science museum, but these are not nearly as important to Portlanders as the city's many parks and public gardens. Not only does Portland claim beautiful rose gardens, the most authentic

Japanese garden in North America, and the largest classical Chinese garden in the country, but it also has the world's smallest city park and one of the largest forested urban parks in the country.

The city is also the nation's microbrew capital. Espresso may be the beverage that gets this town going in the morning, but it is micro-brewed beer that helps the city maintain its mellow character. There are so many brewpubs here in Portland that the city has been called Beervana and Munich on the Willamette. Wine bars are also popular hangouts, which shouldn't come as a surprise, considering how close the city is to the Willamette Valley wine country. Recently, the city has also become a center for microdistilleries. Order a cocktail in Portland, and it just might be made with local rum, vodka, gin, or even absinthe.

Portland itself may be short on things for visitors to do, but the city's surroundings certainly are not. Within a 1½- to 2-hour drive from Portland, you can be strolling a Pacific Ocean beach, walking beside a waterfall in the Columbia Gorge, hiking on Mount Hood (a dormant volcano as picture-perfect as Mount Fuji), driving through the Mount St. Helens blast zone, or sampling world-class pinot noirs in the Oregon wine country. It is this proximity to the outdoors that makes Portland a great city to use as a base for exploring some of the best of the Northwest.

1 THE MOST UNFORGETTABLE TRAVEL EXPERIENCES

- **Strolling the Grounds of the Japanese Garden:** This is the best Japanese garden in the United States, perhaps the best anywhere outside of Japan. My favorite time to visit is in June when the Japanese irises are in bloom. The city has no better stress-reducer. See p. 81.
- **Beer Sampling at Brewpubs:** They may not have invented beer here in Portland, but they certainly have turned it into an art form. Whether you're looking for a cozy corner pub or an upscale taproom, you'll find a brewpub where you can feel comfortable sampling local brewmeisters' concoctions. See "Brewpubs," in chapter 9.
- **Driving and Hiking in the Gorge:** No matter what time of year, the drive up the Columbia Gorge is spectacular. Once you arrive, get out of your car and take one of the dozens of easily accessible hiking trails throughout the gorge. If you've got time to spare, take the scenic highway; if not, take I-84. On either route, be sure to pull off at Multnomah Falls. For an alternative point of view, drive

the Washington side of the river and stop to hike to the top of Beacon Rock. See chapter 10, “Side Trips from Portland.”

- **Concerts at the Schnitz:** The Arlene Schnitzer Concert Hall, home to the Oregon Symphony, is a restored 1920s movie palace and is the city’s most impressive place to attend a performance. Even if the show doesn’t meet your expectations, you can enjoy the classic architectural details. See p. 106.
- **Summertime Concerts at the Oregon Zoo:** Summertime in Portland means partying with the pachyderms. Throughout the summer, you can catch live music at the zoo’s amphitheater. Musical styles include blues, rock, bluegrass, folk, Celtic, and jazz. Often, for just the price of zoo admission, you can catch the concert and tour the zoo (if you arrive early enough). Picnics are encouraged, but no alcohol is allowed into the zoo (however, beer and wine are on sale during concerts). See p. 108.
- **Summer Festivals at Waterfront Park:** Each summer, Waterfront Park, which stretches along the Willamette River in downtown Portland, becomes the staging ground for everything from Rose Festival events to the Oregon Brewers Festival. Some festivals are free and some have small cover charges, but all are lots of fun. See p. 13.
- **Wine Tasting in the Nearby Wine Country:** Within less than an hour’s drive of Portland are dozens of wineries that are open to the public on a regular basis. Most of these wineries specialize in pinot noir and pinot gris, and many produce wines of superior quality. The chance to spend an afternoon wine tasting is one of the best reasons to visit Portland. See chapter 10, “Side Trips from Portland.”

2 THE BEST SPLURGE HOTELS

- **Hotel Fifty** (50 SW Morrison St.; ☎ 877/237-6775 or 503/221-0711; www.hotelfifty.com): Although it is totally unassuming from the outside, the Hotel Fifty, with its contemporary interior decor, is a surprisingly stylish hotel. The property is only steps from the Willamette River (although not actually on the water), and is also close to businesses, fine restaurants, and shopping. See p. 37.
- **Hotel Monaco** (506 SW Washington St.; ☎ 888/207-2201 or 503/222-0001; www.monaco-portland.com): With a delightfully theatrical room decor, a good restaurant, free evening wine, and an artistic aesthetic, this hotel has everything necessary to make a visit to Portland unforgettable. See p. 38.
- **Hotel Vintage Plaza** (422 SW Broadway; ☎ 800/243-0555 or 503/228-1212; www.vintageplaza.com): If you’re looking for the

most romantic room in town, book a starlight room at the Vintage Plaza. Located on one of the hotel's upper floors, these rooms are basically solariums with curving walls of glass that let you lie in bed and gaze up at the stars. Just be sure to come in the summer when the sky is clear. See p. 40.

- **Inn @ Northrup Station** (2025 NW Northrup St.; ☎ 800/224-1180 or 503/224-0543; www.northrupstation.com): If you want to stay someplace that reflects your taste for contemporary styling, then the Inn @ Northrup Station should be your first choice in town. Not only is this place cool and colorful, but several good restaurants and bars are within just a few blocks. See p. 42.
- **The Nines** (525 SW Morrison St.; ☎ 877/229-9995; http://thenines.com): Located on the upper floors of a historic department store building in downtown Portland, this luxurious hotel is as eclectic as Portland, yet it is utterly sophisticated. There's a farm-to-table restaurant in the atrium lobby, a library with a pool table, and a rooftop restaurant and lounge popular with Portland's pretty people. See p. 36.
- **RiverPlace Hotel** (1510 SW Harbor Way; ☎ 800/227-1333 or 503/228-3233; www.riverplacehotel.com): Although it's only a few blocks from downtown businesses, this boutique hotel wedged between the Willamette River and Waterfront Park feels a world away from the city. In summer the park hosts countless festivals, and if you book the right room, you can have a box seat for a concert in the park. See p. 39.

3 THE BEST MODERATELY PRICED HOTELS

- **Ace Hotel** (1022 SW Stark St.; ☎ 503/228-2277; www.acehotel.com). You don't actually have to be young and hip to stay at this hotel, but a youthful attitude certainly helps. The funky industrial-salvage decor makes this the most distinctive hotel in Portland, and if you opt for a room with a shared bathroom, the rates are the best in downtown. See p. 41.
- **Avalon Hotel & Spa** (0455 SW Hamilton Court; ☎ 888/556-4402 or 503/802-5800; www.avalonhotelandspa.com): Located just south of downtown Portland, along a wooded section of the Willamette River waterfront, the Avalon is not only one of the most affordably luxurious hotels in the city, but it also has its own spa and boasts stylishly modern decor. See p. 39.
- **The Benson** (309 SW Broadway; ☎ 800/663-1144 or 503/228-2000; www.bensonhotel.com): With its walnut paneling, Italian

marble, and crystal chandeliers, The Benson is the pinnacle of 19th-century elegance. Order a snifter of brandy, sink into one of the chairs by the fireplace, and conjure up your past life as a railroad baron. In your room, you'll sleep on a Tempur-Pedic bed. See p. 40.

- **Homewood Suites by Hilton Vancouver/Portland** (701 SE Columbia Shores Blvd., Vancouver; ☎ 800/225-5466 or 360/750-1100; www.homewoodsuites.com): Although it is located in Vancouver, Washington, 20 minutes from downtown Portland, this hotel is a good bet for families. Guest rooms are more like apartments, and rates include breakfast and a big spread of evening appetizers. A 5-mile-long paved riverside trail is conveniently located across the street. See p. 46.
- **Jupiter Hotel** (800 E. Burnside St.; ☎ 877/800-0004 or 503/230-9200; www.jupiterhotel.com): This renovated motel in inner southeast Portland is one of the city's hotels of choice for cash-strapped art-school hipsters when they come to Portland to check out the nightlife. To make the scene at one of the city's hippest nightclubs, hotel guests need only walk across the courtyard to the Doug Fir Lounge. See p. 45.
- **The Lakeshore Inn** (210 N. State St., Lake Oswego; ☎ 800/215-6431 or 503/636-9679; www.thelakeshoreinn.com): How about a waterfront motel in Portland's most prestigious suburb for under \$100? Try the Lakeshore Inn, a small motel right on Lake Oswego with a swimming pool on a dock. The catch is that the hotel is 7 miles from downtown Portland. See p. 48.
- **McMenamins Edgefield** (2126 SW Halsey St., Troutdale; ☎ 800/669-8610 or 503/669-8610; www.mcmenamins.com): What can you say about a hotel that's located in a renovated poor farm and has a brewery, winery, distillery, movie theater, and golf course? Cheers! At McMenamins Edgefield, on the eastern edge of the Portland metro area, a local brewpub empire has created one of the most unusual lodgings in the state. See p. 48. The affiliated **McMenamins Kennedy School**, 5736 NE 33rd Ave. (☎ 888/249-3983 or 503/249-3983; www.mcmenamins.com), is very similar and closer to downtown Portland. See p. 45.

4 THE MOST UNFORGETTABLE DINING EXPERIENCES

- **Andina** (1314 NW Glisan St.; ☎ 503/228-9535; www.andina-restaurant.com): Portland takes food very seriously, so it shouldn't come as a surprise that one of the city's best restaurants serves a

- type of cuisine you likely have never tried before. Andina serves modern Peruvian food, and the flavors are some of the most exciting you will encounter. See p. 54.
- **Bijou Café** (132 SW Third Ave.; ☎ 503/222-3187): Organic coffee, eggs from free-range chickens, buckwheat pancakes, oyster hash, and brioche French toast are the sort of menu offerings that have made this downtown breakfast place a perennial favorite of Portlanders. See p. 53.
 - **Chart House** (5700 SW Terwilliger Blvd.; ☎ 503/246-6963; www.chart-house.com): The Chart House may be part of an upscale restaurant chain, but the view from the hillside setting south of downtown Portland just can't be beat. Down at the foot of the hill is the Willamette River, and over the rooftops and tree-tops of Portland are Mount Hood and Mount St. Helens. See p. 58.
 - **fenouil** (900 NW 11th Ave.; ☎ 503/525-2225; www.fenouilthepearl.com): This Pearl District French restaurant may be one of Portland's most expensive places to eat, but the palatial surroundings make dinner (or lunch) here such an enjoyable experience that you hardly notice that big bill on your credit card. See p. 54.
 - **Higgins** (1239 SW Broadway; ☎ 503/222-9070; www.higgins.ypguides.net): Chef Greg Higgins pushes the envelope of contemporary cuisine here at his eponymous restaurant, but he also sprinkles the menu with plenty of familiar comfort foods. Sample some of Portland's best food in the formal dining room or in the casual back-room bar area. See p. 50.
 - **Jake's Famous Crawfish** (401 SW 12th Ave.; ☎ 503/226-1419; www.jakesfamouscrawfish.com): Get 'em while they're hot at Jake's, where crawfish are the stars of the menu. This classic seafood restaurant has been around for almost a century and serves truckloads of crawfish every year. Plenty of other good seafood dishes are on the menu as well. See p. 52.
 - **Pok Pok** (3226 SE Division St.; ☎ 503/232-1387; www.pokpokpdx.com): Over the years, I've spent a lot of time in Thailand, and I have never found a more authentic Thai restaurant this side of the Gulf of Siam. This is just the sort of place I've frequented on beaches all over Thailand. See p. 63.
 - **Toro Bravo** (120 NE Russell St.; ☎ 503/281-4464; www.torobravopdx.com): Wow! That's how I felt the first time I ate at this casual Spanish tapas restaurant. So impressed were my dinner companions that they began applauding the many laudable flavors that had passed across our table in the course of an evening. See p. 60.

5 THE BEST THINGS TO DO FOR FREE (OR ALMOST)

- **Sunset from Council Crest:** Portland is a city backed by hills that reach 1,000 feet high, and the view from atop Council Crest is the finest in the city. From here you can see Mounts Rainier, St. Helens, Adams, and Hood. The view is particularly memorable at sunset. Bring a picnic. See p. 80.
- **Hanging Out at Powell's:** They don't call Powell's the City of Books for nothing. This bookstore, which sells both new and used books, is so big you have to get a map at the front door. No matter how much time I spend here, it's never enough. A large cafe makes it easy to while away the hours. See p. 100.
- **Free Rides on the Vintage Trolleys:** MAX light-rail trolleys, and the Portland Streetcar are all free within a large area, mostly downtown, known as the Free Rail Zone. That alone should be enough to get you on some form of public transit while you're in town, but if you're really lucky, you might catch one of the vintage trolley cars. The trolleys don't climb any San Francisco-style hills, but they are still fun to ride. See p. 32.
- **People-Watching at Pioneer Courthouse Square:** This is the heart and soul of downtown Portland, and no matter what time of year or what the weather, people gather here. Grab a latte at the Starbucks and sit by the waterfall fountain. In summer, catch one of the frequent concerts here; at any time of year you might catch a rally, performance, or installation of some kind. Don't miss the Weather Machine show at noon. See chapter 6.
- **An Afternoon at the Portland Saturday Market:** This large arts-and-crafts market is an outdoor showcase for hundreds of the Northwest's creative artisans. You'll find fascinating one-of-a-kind clothes, jewelry, kitchenwares, musical instruments, and much, much more. The food stalls serve great fast food, too. See p. 104.
- **First Thursday Art Walk:** On the first Thursday of every month, Portland goes on an art binge. People get dressed up and go gallery-hopping from art opening to art opening. There are usually hors d'oeuvres and wine available, and lots of live music on the street. The galleries stay open until 9pm. See p. 99.
- **Stopping to Smell the Roses:** Portland is known as the City of Roses, and at the International Rose Test Garden in Washington Park, you can find out why. This is a test garden for new varieties of roses, so you'll probably have to wait a few years before you can buy any of the beautiful roses you see here. See p. 80.

6 THE BEST OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES

- **Kayaking Around Ross Island:** Seattle may be considered the sea-kayaking capital of the Northwest, but Portland's not a bad kayaking spot either. You can paddle on the Columbia or Willamette rivers, but my favorite easy paddle is around Ross Island in the Willamette River. You can even paddle past the submarine at the Oregon Museum of Science and Industry and pull out at Waterfront Park. See p. 90.
- **Mountain Biking Leif Erikson Drive:** Forest Park is one of the largest forested city parks in the country, and running its length is the unpaved Leif Erikson Drive. The road is closed to cars and extends for 12 miles. Along the way you will catch occasional views of the Columbia River. This is a fairly easy ride, without any strenuous climbs. See p. 88.
- **Hiking Forest Park's Wildwood Trail:** Within Forest Park's boundaries are also some 75 miles of hiking trails. The Wildwood Trail stretches for nearly 30 miles, from one end of the park to the other. While you probably won't have time to hike the entire trail, choose from any one of the shorter loops. See p. 89.
- **Hiking and Skiing on Mount Hood:** Less than an hour from Portland, Mount Hood offers year-round skiing and hiking. Timberline Lodge, high on this dormant volcano's slopes, was built by the WPA during the Great Depression and is a showcase of craftsmanship. See chapter 10, "Side Trips from Portland."
- **Picnicking at the Hoyt Arboretum:** Picnicking may not be a particularly strenuous outdoor activity, but an alfresco meal on a grassy hillside surrounded by rare and unusual trees sure is memorable. Before your picnic, you can work up an appetite by hiking some of the arboretum's 12 miles of trails. See p. 89.

7 THE BEST ACTIVITIES FOR FAMILIES

- **Going Below Decks in a Real Submarine:** At the Oregon Museum of Science and Industry (OMSI), you can poke around inside the USS *Blueback*, a retired Navy submarine that was used in the filming of *The Hunt for Red October*. The sub is now permanently docked in the Willamette River outside the museum's back door. See p. 76.

- **Virtual Parachuting:** At the World Forestry Center Discovery Museum, you and the kids can pretend to be smoke jumpers parachuting into the woods to put out a forest fire. The virtual parachute exhibit lets you strap into a harness and try to hit a video target on the floor. See p. 82.
- **Flying Over the Water:** Giant jet boats roar up the Willamette River from the Oregon Museum of Science and Industry to the thundering cascades of Willamette Falls in Oregon City. Along the way, you'll get a unique perspective on life in Portland. See p. 22.
- **Roller-Skating at Oaks Park:** At the quaintly old-fashioned Oaks Park Amusement Center, you can roller-skate to the tune of a Wurlitzer organ. The skating rink here is the largest wood-floored rink in the West. You and the kids can also try out the thrill rides and arcades. See p. 85.
- **Riding the Rails in Washington Park:** At the Oregon Zoo, you not only can ponder the pachyderms and gaze at grizzlies, but you also can go for a ride on a scaled-down train that runs between the zoo and the International Rose Test Garden and the Japanese Garden. Near the end of the line with the gardens, you'll also find the Rose Garden Children's Park, a big, colorful playground. See p. 85.