

Traveller

Seattle, USA travel tips and things to do: 20 highlights



Kylie McLaughlin | Mar 30 2016 at 4:00 PM

1. Take a foodie tour of Pike Place Market

Savor Seattle runs two-hour walking tours of Seattle's foremost tourist attraction, the Pike Place Market – which is also, at 108 years, the oldest farmer's market in the country. The tours are run by spritely, entertaining would-be actors and you'll feast your way through the market, as well as learning about the history of the place along the way. You're never going to have the time or the stomach to try all the great food this market has to offer on your own – so this is the best way to sample a bit of everything. While you're watching the famous fishmongers throw fish to one another to large photo-snapping crowds, sample three kinds of mouth-watering smoked salmon. Other foodie highlights include Beecher's Dungeness crab grilled cheese – a mac and cheese with a smokey, chipotle flavour; Chukar Cherries chocolates; Piroshky's russian pastries with smoked salmon; and Pike Place Chowder. savorseattletours.com

2. Wander the Experience Music Project museum

Where the words "music" and "museum" are normally mutually exclusive, Seattle's coolest museum dedicated to music, sci-fi and pop culture is housed inside a Frank Gehry building, which he designed after slicing up some electric guitars in order to better understand rock music. Its impressive Nirvana exhibition contains

a rare glimpse into the private lives of band members, with photos and letters donated from those close to the band. Elsewhere, a unique feature of this museum is a sound lab which lets you bring out you inner rock god to record your own vocals, guitar or keyboard and you can jam with others if you wish. Guitar stations (with headphones) allow you play along to music on your iPhone, and if you're really keen, you and your friends can jump "On Stage" and play in a "real live band", complete with fancy dress, hot lights and screaming fans (don't worry if you're not musically inclined; the instruments are programmed to play themselves). empmuseum.org

3. Do not mock the coffee

Don't try to tell Pacific north-west that coffee in Australia is superior, for Seattle takes its beans extremely seriously. Cafe culture is massive here, and it's influencing the rest of the country. At indie coffee shops you'll find beans from all over the Pacific north-west on high rotation on the menu, roasted on vintage equipment, artfully served by baristas from high end gadgets while music plays on vinyl in the background. Can't decide on a brew? Get a tasting flight of coffee. Avoid the coffee shop that touts itself as the home of the first Starbucks – and go black.



4. Eat Dungeness crab cakes

Dungeness crab is a species that lives at the bottom of the waters surrounding the west coast of America and its common name comes from the port of Dungeness, Washington, near Sequim on the Olympic Peninsula ... and it tastes delicious. It's the most commercially important crab in the Pacific north-west, and a delicacy. Delicate in flavour with a slightly sweet taste, the crab meat makes a monstrously delicious crab cake, which has been reinvented into burgers, thrown into mac'n'cheese, or added to fried egg sandwiches for breakfast. Try versions at Tom Douglas' Etta or Shucker's at Fairmont.

5. Take a seaplane to the San Juan Islands

It takes just under an hour to fly by seaplane to the SJI and you'll be rewarded with magnificent views (watch the sea closely and you'll see whales). Friday Harbour, an art lover's paradise, has twice the sun and half the rain of Seattle. Visit the respected art museum before cruising around the island on its scenic byways via moped, car, or hitch a ride. Check out beautiful Roche Harbour and Lime Kiln Point State Park, which is the best place to view whales from land, stopping at wineries, sculpture parks and lavender farms on the way. visitsanjuans.com; kenmoreair.com

6. Stay at Fairmont Olympic Hotel

It's hard to surpass the old school service and the grandeur of the Fairmont chain, and Seattle's branch is no exception. An executive suite is large, bright and comfortable, has a separate loungeroom with two seater couch and armchair, perfect for settling back after a long day's sightseeing. At the time of writing, the hotel was in

the middle of a massive \$25 million refurbishment, due to be completed by July 2016. The big changes will include new beds and mattresses, with fluffy duvets and soft pillows. Bathrooms will feature rainfall shower heads and contemporary artwork, and in the lounge room, mid-century modern furnishings will replace the existing couches. fairmont.com/seattle/

7. Visit Snoqualmie Falls

Scene of the opening credits to cult television show Twin Peaks, this huge, spectacular waterfall is the No.1 sight to see in the whole of Washington State. Twenty minutes from Seattle, you can spend an hour or a day hiking around the waterfall, but don't forget to stop by the magnificent Salish Lodge for a drink and take in the view from one of the best luxury lodges in the US. salishlodge.com; snoqualmiefalls.com

8. Gross out at the gum wall

Located near the Pike Place Market, follow the trail of tourists to find Seattle's most notorious attraction. A fresh new canvas has been created for the second most germy attraction in the world – the first belonging to Ireland's Blarney Stone. The wall was blasted of gum late last year to make room for cleaner attractions such as public art. Visitors are still allowed to place gum on the walls – they just have to be more targeted with their placement. [facebook.com/TheGumWall/](https://www.facebook.com/TheGumWall/)

9. Take a trip back in time to Cicely, Alaska

Spend an afternoon at Roslyn, the unique, tiny, beautiful town that's 10 degrees warmer than Seattle in the summer and snowed in during winter. This town remains virtually unchanged from its

heyday as the filming site of television's *Northern Exposure* and known as Cicely. Fans of the show will recognise Dr Joel's office (now a souvenir store full of memorabilia), the mural on the side of Roslyn's Cafe, radio DJ Chris' studio, which remains intact, and you can stop for a drink at The Brick, a favourite drinking hole formerly known as Holling's Bar – a breezy, large friendly space popular with bikers, campers and locals with an excellent greasy spoon that hosts live music on the weekends. You can grab a map to *Northern Exposure*'s filming locations from the tiny museum – which also contains a decent collection of items from the show. bricksaloon.com; roslynmuseum.com/northern-exposure

10. Hang out at a dive bar

Seattle loves a good dive bar, and no visit is complete without savouring a Pacific Northwestern brew from one of them. 5 Point Cafe in Belltown is a good place to start – halfway between Downtown Seattle and the Needle, and open 24 hours – playing loud music and serving a full menu (although they do stop serving alcohol for a few hours up until 6am, when you can enjoy cheap mimosas, baileys and coffee or bloody marys with happy hour prices alongside your breakfast).

Or you could head to the carnival-themed bar on Capitol Hill called Unicorn, where you can sip on cocktails of "unicorn jizz" and munch on "unicorn droppings" (fried peanut butter cookie dough) while playing arcade games or listening to karaoke. unicornseattle.com; the5pointcafe.com

11. Splurge at Shuckers

Set in an old haberdashery underneath the Fairmont Hotel, the booths that line the walls are former dressing rooms. The woodwork is original; it gives an old prohibition era feel to the place, which is constantly packed and guarantees top-notch, old-fashioned service. The food is incredible; as well as serving a wide range of raw and cooked oysters, seafood dominates with local Dungeness crab cocktails to mac'n'cheese, creamy chowders and freshly cooked salmon. You will barely have enough room for the dessert – the old-fashioned chocolate lava cake is about the same height as a three-storey building, so intend to share. fairmont.com/seattle/dining/shuckers/

12. Stay at Inn at the Market

The best views in all of Seattle can be had at Inn at the Market. The hotel is the only hotel to have a prime location within Pike Place Market – duck in and out as you please. Most rooms have floor to ceiling windows, giving you a greater than 180-degree view of Seattle's harbour and Puget Sound stretching to the Olympic Mountains, from modern, spacious surrounds. Head to the rooftop deck for the ultimate panoramic view of Pike Place Market, downtown Seattle, and Elliott Bay. innatthemarket.com/

13. Do not miss prizewinning Pike Place Chowder

Eating this chowder will forever change your opinion of fish soup, and little else will measure up to this stellar sample. Why is it so good? Larry Mellum, the owner and founder, won prizes up and down the west coast with his recipe, and decided to take it to the

east coast to the Great Chowder Cook-Off in Rhode Island, Newport – home of chowder, where he was told he would never win. But he did, three years running, thereby staking their claim as the best chowder in America. You'll have to taste it to believe it. pikeplacechowder.com

14. Queue up at Salumi

Line up, line up for what's touted as the best salami in the universe. Or at least, Seattle. Heard of Mario Battoli? This tiny shopfront on Pioneer Square was opened by his parents, Armandino and Marilyn, who then sold the business to his daughter Gina and her husband. Focusing on traditional Italian curing processes, people queue around the block for sandwiches filled with artisan salami and on Tuesdays Marilyn makes a much-lauded, killer gnocchi. Get in quick. salumicuredmeats.com

15. Go on a whale watching expedition

One of the best places in the world to see orcas is off the coast of the San Juan Islands. You'll be dressed in a bright orange boiler suit designed to weather inclement conditions before you head off in a small boat captained by naturalists who never fail to tire of the sight of these magnificent creatures, and aren't afraid to express their contagious enthusiasm. If you're lucky, like I was, you'll catch them hunting when they are at their most spectacular, jumping a full 360 degrees out of the water with a poor, unfortunate porpoise in their mouth, while humpback whales dive tail-up for food in the background. Tours take in other points of interest such as Spieden Island, the big abandoned game "hunting island", where exotic animals can be seen running over its empty hillsides. sanjuansafaris.com

16. Eat at as many Tom Douglas restaurants as possible

Tom Douglas? Again? The unstoppable culinary force has 19 restaurants and associated businesses in Seattle – yes you read right, 19 – in a city that has a population of 3.6 million (compared to Melbourne's 4 million) and not sampling several of them while in this city would be criminal. Four of them are Serious Pie, his pizza restaurant, where you will still have to wait to get a seat. During 1994, he was recognised as the best chef in the Pacific north-west, winning a James Beard Foundation award. tomdouglas.com

17. Feast on oysters at the Walrus and Carpenter

In Seattle's Ballard neighbourhood, this claims to be "where restaurant meets fishing pub". Punters swing by this bright oyster bar to slurp on delicious PNW oysters, a couple of sides, washed down with a round or two of drinks before heading to their next destination – perfect for the traveller wishing to sample another course at one of Seattle's other stellar restaurants. Better still, head there for happy hour between 4 and 6pm during the week for cut-price oysters, which get progressively more expensive the closer it gets to 6pm. thewalrusbar.com

18. Watch otters being fed at the Seattle Aquarium

Don't miss otter feeding time at the seaside aquarium – they are probably dining better than you tonight, fed on restaurant-quality food. These entertaining, crowd-pleasing creatures will play-fight, somersault and groom themselves; their luxurious pelts are what keep them warm, but it's also why they were hunted to near-extinction around 1900, when there were only 2000 left in the

world. The aquarium is the first to successfully breed an otter in captivity, named Sekiu. Like most in the US, it's now focusing on conservation and adopting rescued animals. seattleaquarium.org

19. Head to the Carlile Room for happy hour

Slink into the Carlile Room in the late afternoon and perch yourself at the bar for classic '70s-era lounge cocktails. The happy hour special – a filthy martini with vodka and pickle brine is seriously good, and the olive filled with melted cheese orgasmic. The crowd-pleasing, vegetable-heavy menu is served until midnight and the Hunter's Breakfast (like the man it was named after – Hunter S Thompson) not for the faint-hearted: "In the spirit of genuine excess, the food factor should always be massive". Amen to that. thecarlile.com

20. Sitka and Spruce

A unique dining experience that feels more like an upscale market than a restaurant, Sitka & Spruce is located inside Seattle's tiny artisan Melrose Market, where locals also grocery shop at Rain Shadow Meats or The Calf & Kid cheese. Grab a pre-dinner cocktail at Bar Ferd'nand, then choose to be seated in a dining room or the more casual bar, from where you can watch proceedings across the completely open kitchen. Chef and owner Matt Dillon is another James Beard Foundation award recipient for best chef in the northwest in 2012. The food, of course, is all locally sourced, seasonal farm-to-table.

sitkaandspruce.com

20. People watch at Etta's

Named after his daughter, you'll find this upper-crust seafood joint of Tom Douglas' at the edge of Pike Place Market, where you can be seated al fresco or people-watch through floor-to-ceiling windows inside. Don't miss his epic Dungeness crab cakes with tartare – a Seattle favourite, with a crispy shell and generous amounts of succulent crab meat. Etta's is open early on weekends for brunch, otherwise this more casual eatery is open from 11am til dinner.