



Washington By Leslie Forsberg

I grew up in Washington, and even though I love exploring the world, I feel rooted here almost as firmly as the old-growth cedar forest that forms a living cathedral at my family's heritage farm beside the Olympic Peninsula's Elwha River. The natural beauty and sheer diversity of landscapes we enjoy in the Evergreen State are magnificent: from the glaciated mountaintops of the Cascades to the sheep-dotted islands in the Salish Sea, to the moss-draped rain forests of the coast, and the carved canyons and buttes of the Columbia Basin. Several professional sports teams also make the Evergreen State a great place to live and visit, as do excellent golf courses—from Chambers Bay just southwest of Tacoma, the site of the 2015 U.S. Open, to the Palouse Ridge course in Pullman. In addition, the cultural attractions and arts in Bellingham, Seattle, Spokane and other lively cities add to Washington's appeal.



LEFT, MARY LIZ AUSTIN; TOP, JAMIE & JUDY WILD / DANITADELMONT.COM; RIGHT, IMAGEBROKER / ALAMY



Ride a ferry

Seattle offers a wealth of urban treasures, including the famed Pike Place Market, sophisticated shops, the Seattle Art Museum and numerous other cultural attractions. One of the city's most popular attractions is the waterfront, home of the Seattle Aquarium, many fine seafood restaurants and unique local businesses such as Ye Olde Curiosity Shop.

The waterfront is also a port of call for the Washington State Ferries system. One of my favorite day trips from Seattle is the 35-minute ferry ride to Bainbridge Island. As the ferry departs the city, the massive propellers churn the deep-blue water into a frothy wake, and seagulls glide

alongside the vessel as the urban skyline grows ever smaller, until the Space Needle in the distance looks like a 3-inch-tall desktop replica.

From the Bainbridge Island ferry terminal, a short stroll brings you downtown. Many adven-

Opposite: During warmer months, abundant wildflowers bloom at Mount Rainier National Park.

Top: Bavaria-themed Leavenworth is adorned with thousands of lights during the holiday season.

Right: The short ferry ride from Seattle to Bainbridge Island offers panoramic views of the Emerald City.

ture-seekers head to Exotic Aquatics, where they can arrange to explore the area by kayak and where certified divers can arrange to scuba-dive. Mora Ice Cream Company and Blackbird Bakery offer house-made treats to enjoy after browsing art galleries, boutiques and a local bookstore. If you time the return trip right, you'll be treated to a stunning view of the cityscape at sunset.

Celebrate winter in Leavenworth

The Bavaria-inspired mountain town of Leavenworth, 118 miles east of Seattle, is transformed into a living snow globe each winter. Residents and guests gather in the quaint village during the season's short days and long nights to enjoy the town's cheerful holiday festivals.

Storefronts, rooflines, trees and the central gazebo are lit by thousands of lights during the Christmas Lighting Ceremony, taking place the first three weekends of December. During the celebration, carolers stroll and St. Nicholas drops by. Adding to the holiday spirit are stores stocked with seasonal goods, ranging from nutcrackers to ski outfits; restaurants offering hearty specials; and families participating in outdoor activities, including sleigh rides, sledding and Nordic skiing.

A few weeks later, January 14 and 15, the Bavarian Ice Festival attracts outdoor enthusiasts and people of all ages who simply love to play in the snow. Contests range from a dogsled competition to silly spectacles such as a tug-of-war.

Explore Spokane

Washington's second-largest city offers many fabulous outdoor adventures, including skiing at Mt. Spokane Ski & Snowboard Park, white-



WASHINGTON BY THE NUMBERS >>

1 million plus.

Number of annual visitors to the Space Needle, one of the Northwest's top tourist attractions.

14,411 feet. Height of Mount Rainier, the tallest dormant volcano and fifth-highest peak in the contiguous United States.

1,700. Approximate number of apple farmers in Washington, the leading producer of apples in the nation.

25. Number of major glaciers on Mount Rainier. Washington is the second-most glaciated state, after Alaska.

27,876. Number of participants in the 2011 Spokane Hoopfest, billed as the largest three-on-three basketball tournament in the world. Next year's Hoopfest will be held on June 30 and July 1.

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water rafting down the Spokane River, biking on the Centennial Trail and golfing challenging courses. Visitors can also learn about Native American art at the Northwest Museum of Arts & Culture, shop at favorite department stores and interesting boutiques, and go to local wineries to sample regional wines.

New Year's Eve is a great time to visit Spokane. The family-oriented First Night arts-and-entertainment celebration features more than 150 events, including concerts, theater performances, dances and films. The festivities culminate at midnight with a fireworks show at Riverfront Park.

May 6 brings the 12-kilometer Lilac Bloomsday Run, one of the largest running events in the nation, with 50,000 participants. Courseside entertainers and cheers from onlookers create a lively atmosphere.

The Spokane Lilac Festival, held during the third week of May, is another popular event. A highlight is the Lilac Festival Torchlight Parade, taking place on May 19. Thousands will watch as colorful floats, marching bands and military units pass by. Several additional events—including luncheons to honor the festival's royal court, as well as civic leaders and members of the military—will take place throughout the week at the elegant, historic Davenport Hotel.

Ski at Washington's many resorts

Glacier-covered Mount Rainier is a regal sight from Seattle, Bellevue and many other Northwest communities when the "mountain is out." On crisp winter days, the peak's siren call beckons to skiers across Western Washington, many

The eight-passenger Mt. Rainier Gondola transports visitors to the summit of Crystal Mountain, where they can dine at the Summit House restaurant (right).

of whom head to Crystal Mountain Resort, 80 miles southeast of Seattle. Located at Mount Rainier National Park's northeast boundary, Crystal—the largest ski resort in the state—boasts more than 50 runs across a half-dozen peaks and basins, with plenty of glades for skiing.

The snowfall at Crystal last season was an astounding 612 inches, but skiers have much more than powder to look forward to with the resort's Mt. Rainier Gondola, which whisks passengers nearly 2,500 vertical feet in just 10 minutes, providing close-up, spectacular views of Mount Rainier. The ski gondola—the state's first—gives even nonskiers easy access to the summit of Crystal Mountain and the Summit House, the state's highest restaurant, at 6,872 feet.

Just southeast of Mount Rainier National Park is the family-friendly White Pass Ski Area, which doubled in size in 2010 by adding 767 acres of tree-studded alpine meadows and wide-open spaces with phenomenal views of Mount Rainier. With two new quad chairs and a new midmountain lodge, skiers have more choices than ever.

In the North Cascades, the Mt. Baker Ski Area—known for heavy snowfalls—is opening a Cascadia-style midmountain lodge this season. Two ski areas in the Central Cascades, Stevens Pass and The Summit at Snoqualmie, offer easy mountain access for Seattle-area skiers.

Storm-watch at the beach

The Long Beach Peninsula—a 28-mile-long stretch of Pacific beach—is ideal for recreation

And don't miss ...

The Irrigation Festival. Sequim, the state's lavender capital, 70 miles northwest of Seattle, has hosted this family-focused fest every year since 1896. Next year's celebration, May 4–13, includes a classic car show, parade, juried art exhibit, logging show and more.

Seattle Center. This park and arts-and-entertainment center, built for the 1962 World's Fair, will bustle with dance, music and theater performances during its 50th anniversary in 2012. During Winterfest, through December 31, visitors can enjoy celebrated choirs, a model-train exhibit, an ice-skating rink and New Year's Eve fireworks above the Space Needle.

Tacoma. Art and culture abound in this thriving city, home to the Museum of Glass, Tacoma Art Museum and Washington State History Museum. December 17–21, the city's performance series *The Christmas Revels* will celebrate the Winter Solstice through dance, drama and choral works.

Northern Quest Resort & Casino. Guests can enjoy gaming, dining, entertainment, comfortable accommodations and the luxurious 14,000-square-foot Current Spa & Salon at this resort in Airway Heights, just 10 minutes west of downtown Spokane.

The Wings Over Water Birding Festival. Blaine, 20 miles northwest of Bellingham, hosts this annual event focusing on the variety of migratory birds that visit the region in spring. The 10th-annual festival, March 17, will offer wildlife demonstrations, viewing stations and wildlife cruises.

Wine-tasting in Eastern Washington. As one of the top wine-producing states, Washington is home to many acclaimed vineyards and wineries, most located in the eastern part of the state. The Tri-Cities, Walla Walla, Wenatchee and Yakima are all popular areas for wine-tasting.

Winthrop. Western-themed Winthrop, 100 miles north of Wenatchee, boasts one of the best Nordic ski regions in the nation, with more than 124 miles of groomed, interconnecting trails through pine forests and alongside the rushing Methow River.



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RON NIEBRUGGE / ALAMY

The Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center sits on a bluff overlooking the Pacific.

of many varieties. During warmer months, families come to fly kites, ride horses, walk the one-third-mile boardwalk and lounge at the seashore. Winter on the peninsula—when howling winds shear the tops off steely, 15-foot wave crests and send spray flying as waves crash ashore during seasonal storms—seems custom-made for storm-watching.

One of the most dramatic places to experience storms is the bluff-top Cape Disappointment State Park, where the swift currents of the Columbia River meet the surging waters of the Pacific, forming immense waves. Inside the Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center, visitors can enjoy a birds-eye view of storms through a panoramic window, while staying cozy. The small museum is made up of exhibits detailing the explorers' trek to the Pacific Ocean. Another popular pastime in the park (weather permitting) is hiking to the nearby 19th century Cape Disappointment and North Head lighthouses.

At the cheery World Kite Museum in the town of Long Beach, visitors can learn about the art, science and history of kites, while admiring many dazzling varieties. Afterward, a bowl of seafood chowder in front of a fireplace at a local inn will warm you inside and out. ■

Leslie Forsberg writes from Seattle.

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