

Colourful local characters and the very scent of the air are just two reasons local resident **Pam Mandel** calls Seattle home

Why I love...Seattle

THERE IS ALWAYS THIS MOMENT. I STEP OUT OF THE CAR AND BREATHE DEEP THE AIR OF MY NEIGHBOURHOOD. I live in West Seattle, about a mile from the shores of Puget Sound. When I have been away, the first thing I notice is the smell of home. It is the ocean and trees and mulch and rain, the smell of a place that is growing and full of life.

I live in a 1940s grid street neighbourhood that was once all modest houses like mine. Built for Boeing engineers and shipyard workers, it is evolving into a place for young families who, like me, can't afford my former neighbourhood, Capitol Hill. We left the heart of the city reluctantly, but we are not sorry. We have the city's best bakery, Bakery Nouveau, and a farmer's market where you can buy fresh salmon in season and local honey. We have Husky Deli, where they make their own ice cream and Jack, the owner, knows everyone's face and almost everyone's name.

We have Easy Street, a real record store that sells music on vinyl. There's live music sometimes; Pearl Jam recorded here, and Elvis Costello. Under the same roof, there's a diner where tattooed waitresses serve up a great breakfast. We have the beach too, with volleyball tournaments during our short but perfect summer, with soft sand and a remarkable view of the Olympic Mountains.

It's a 15 minute drive (or bus ride) into downtown Seattle. If the skies are clear when you cross the West Seattle Bridge,

you can see the hulking mass of Mount Rainier, the 4,393 metre peak we call The Mountain. If the weather is winning, I take the Elliott Bay Water Taxi, a 20-minute ferry ride to the waterfront, just for the views. From the pier, it's a short walk (and a steep stair climb) to Pike Place Market.

Pike Place Market is shoulder-to-shoulder crowds during the cruise ship season; in the off season it's more accessible, but there is never a bad time to be here. Yes, it's touristy, but it is also bright flowers and immaculately stacked produce and the chatter of fish mongers as a soundtrack. Years in the city mean that I know the ukulele player who busks here; Howlin' Hobbit, he's called. He's a handlebar moustache-wearing man who likes to play Tin Pan Alley and classic jazz tunes. "Hey, darlin'," he says, and kisses my cheek. "I have a new song, let me play it for you!" Last time, it was *Let's Get Away From It All*. I was with out-of-town friends; they were enchanted, as was I.

Seattle has been trying to urbanise, to become chic and fashionable, Tech money brought loft apartments and foodies, but our long-term celebrity chef, Tom Douglas, still dresses like he could be a gardener. Our newest music icon, Macklemore, made it big on *Thrift Shop*, a track about second hand stores. Time has made Seattle bigger, shinier, but we can't shake the fact that we're tied to nature. We can't help but stay grounded. It's in the very air that makes Seattle smell like home. 🍷



TOP Pike Place Market

ABOVE The city skyline; the scenic ferry ride