

## Portland, Oregon: Relaxing the Pacific Northwest

by Andee Zomeran, PassPorter Guest Contributor

"Stumptown." "Bridgetown." "City of Roses."

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□ Whatever people call this Pacific Northwest city, one descriptive word is unanimous of Portland, Oregon, "Relaxed."

While the TV show, "Portlandia," may be a tad extreme in its depiction of its namesake, the theme song lyrics aren't far off when they state, "The dream of the '90s is alive in Portland." As the show suggests, there are some who only work a couple of hours in a coffee shop and are starting bands. And everyone is interested in saving the planet. Portlanders ride bikes, unicycles, light rail, and skateboards. And they really want to know exactly where their food comes from. But that all contributes to the relaxed atmosphere and if you're visiting Portland you can be assured that you'll feel welcome.

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□ We all recently heard the exciting news that the Disney Wonder will sail its Alaskan route from Seattle in the summer of 2012. With Portland sitting a mere three hours south of the Emerald City, it is a great side excursion if you have two or more extra days in your vacation. With Portland's visitor-friendly downtown and neighborhoods, it is an experience in itself. With large hotels, boutique hotels, and bed and breakfasts, everyone should find accommodations to their liking. And the food? It's rumored that Portland has more restaurants per capita than any west coast city. Is it true? I'm not sure, but you will never be far from something to eat.

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□ Let's talk about food. In Portland, you can visit a 5-star restaurant or a food cart, and they might be right next to each other. Portland is gaining notoriety for their fabulous food trailers. The food is more than just the hot dog you may find on a New York street corner. Whether you're craving Mexican, Thai, Japanese, cheese steaks, or fondue, there is a food cart that will appeal to your gourmet taste buds. Luckily, [www.foodcartsportland.com](http://www.foodcartsportland.com) will help you locate what fits your mood. Just looking for a quick snack? Food Network junkies will recognize [Voodoo Doughnut](#) as having some of the best (and craziest) doughnuts in all the land.

The top-notch restaurants are just as plentiful. It doesn't matter if you are in Downtown, Northwest, Southwest, Southeast, Northeast, or North Portland, [this site](#) can find your 4 course meal, your fast food meal, and everything in between. My gluten-free friends will be ecstatic

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in Portland restaurants. Everyone here seems gluten-aware, and most restaurants have gluten-free menus. My favorite is [Andina](#). It's a Peruvian delight and with their GF menu, you will never guess you are missing anything.

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□Portland has great food, but their drinks rival that. Portland is surrounded on the east, the west, and the south with wineries offering many fine wines, the star varietal being Pinot Noir. But Portland proper is known for its coffee and beer. Sure, Seattle had the first Starbucks, and like the rest of America you can find three of those in any given strip mall. But the local shops still grind their beans with love, and you can taste that in your latte. Try [Stumptown Coffee Roasters](#) and you'll see what I mean.

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□Not one for caffeine? Have a microbrew. Portland has [Widmere](#) and [Bridgeport](#), to list a couple of the bigger names. But closer to my heart is [McMenamins](#). This Portland microbrewer not only has brew pubs in every neighborhood, but also hotels, movie theaters, and a concert hall. Maybe you'd like someone to drive on your microbrew tour? Call one of the many tour companies, like the [Portland BrewBus](#), and they'd be happy to show you around.

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□Even if you're not on a beer tour, you don't have to drive in Portland. Once your car is parked, it can stay that way. Portland is known for being bike-friendly and has one of the best public transportation systems in the country. Tri-Met's MAX is the light rail system and has north/south and east/west routes. The streetcar will take you from downtown to the Northwest neighborhoods. If your accommodations are downtown, you can travel in that area for free. Tri-Met offers a "Free Rail Zone" and downtown destinations are free via MAX or streetcar. Visit [Tri-Met's website](#) for specific route information.

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□Traveling by public transportation will give you the opportunity to view art throughout the city. Trompe l'oeil murals depict the Lewis and Clark expedition to Oregon. Sculptures populate the city blocks and the statue, Portlandia, looks down on city workers outside the municipal building. Maybe you find art in architecture? Portland takes pride in the beauty of its bridges. More than just a means to get from here to there, the numerous bridges that cross the Willamette and Columbia rivers are works of art in themselves. Most have walking paths so visitors can take time to view each bridge's unique qualities and take in the awesome Portland skyline.

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□If horticulture is where your inner artist blooms, Portland has gardens galore. This is the "City of Roses" and the [International Test Rose Garden](#) is the oldest of its kind in this country. If Asian gardens bring

you that feeling of Zen, visit the [Portland Chinese Garden](#) downtown or the [Japanese Garden](#) in Washington Park. If your visit brings you in early June, make sure you visit the Rose Festival and grab a seat on the curb for the [Grand Floral Parade](#).

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□Wandering around Portland in the summertime, you are sure to find a farmer's market offering the organic produce you've been looking for. But the [Saturday Market](#) is where you can purchase crafty souvenirs. Open weekends from March to December, you can find photographs, ceramics, t-shirts, and kettle corn. Not sure what to buy? Grab an elephant ear and watch the many street performers surrounding the market.

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□There is never a lack of things to do when in Portland. In Washington Park you'll find the [Oregon Zoo](#), the [Children's Museum](#), and [Hoyt Arboretum](#). You can cruise the Willamette or the Columbia on the [Portland Spirit](#). On the east side of town is the [Oregon Museum of Science and Industry](#) (OMSI). More than a complete interactive museum, OMSI has the latest IMAX movies in their Omnimax theatre and tours offered of the USS Blueback, the submarine featured in "The Hunt for Red October."

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□Maybe you're ready for an in depth history tour of the city? You can take a tour by [foot](#) or on [two wheels](#). Do you just want to get away from it all and get back to nature? [Forest Park](#) is on the edge of town and has over 40 miles of hiking trails that allow you to escape the urban life below.

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□I've spent the last four decades living up and down Interstate 5, from San Diego to Seattle. As a current Portlander, there are times I miss the Southern California weather and frequent access to a Disney Resort. I sometimes miss the ferry rides and novelties of the Puget Sound. But to live in a place where waterfalls and Mt. Hood are 40 minutes away, where I can tap multitudes of microbrews, and have hiking trails close to my own backyard? That, to me, is a good place to call home.

*About The Author:*

□*Andee Zomerman lives in the Pacific Northwest and is wife and mother to a family that loves all things Disney. They seem to be constantly planning their next Disney vacation -- even while experiencing the current one.*

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