

August 22, 2003

JOURNEYS; 36 Hours | Seattle

By STUART EMMRICH

IT'S a brilliantly clear day and you are walking along the waterfront, the faint scent of salt in the air. A string of verdant islands is off in the distance. Sailboats and pleasure craft glide by, sunlight bouncing off their hulls as they make their way through the choppy waters. You turn your face toward the summer sun, taking in its warmth, and start looking for a place to grab a cold beer. Wait. Could this be Seattle -- the land of constant cloud cover, the city where the weather is so wet and so chilly that it's a shock the locals aren't permanently shrouded in anoraks? But when the skies break -- as they do more often than legend would have it -- Seattle reveals itself as one of the most beautiful cities in the country. It's also a city of serious foodies, passionate coffee drinkers, innovative cultural institutions like the Seattle Opera (with its widely praised new auditorium), as well as unexpected delights, like the scene on a recent evening of a group of couples dancing outside a Fifth Avenue restaurant as a romantic ballad performed by the restaurant's singer drifted out on to the sidewalk. STUART EMMRICH

Friday

6 p.m.

1. Walk Along the Bay

The piers along Alaskan Way, with their expansive views of Elliott Bay, espresso stands, as well as the Seattle Aquarium, provide an For a pre-dinner snack, head for one of the two dozen outdoor tables at Steamer's Seafood Cafe (on Alaskan Way, between Seneca and University Streets, 206-623-2066), grab a small serving of local steamed Manila clams (\$4.99) and a Pike's Pale Ale (\$4), and watch the ferries shuttle between Bainbridge Island and downtown Seattle as the sun settles into the horizon.

8 p.m.

2. Dinner in Belltown

The once-gritty neighborhood of Belltown, a few blocks northwest of Pike Street, has been gentrified in recent years and is now one of the best places in town to hang out for an evening, with more than a dozen high-quality restaurants within walking distance of each other on First Avenue. Several good options for dinner include expertly prepared Mexican at Tia Lou's (2218 First Avenue, 206-733-8226), where a large deck beckons during fine weather; upscale classic fare (crab cakes and "free run" chicken) at Queen City Grill (2201 First Avenue, 206-443-0975); or satisfying barbecue -- and incendiary chili -- at the Frontier Room (2203 First Avenue, 206-956-7427). Or walk a couple of blocks over to Brasa (2107 Third Avenue, 206-728-4220), where the chef, Tamara Murphy, is winning accolades for her inventive, Mediterranean-influenced cuisine, including a robust suckling pig (\$22).

10:30 p.m.

3. Sudsy Nightcap

Wind up the evening at the Virginia Inn (1937 First Avenue, 206-728-1937), a popular Belltown bar with a lively if occasionally raucous crowd, a friendly staff and an impressive selection of locally brewed micro beers, including Manny's Pale Ale and Mac & Jack's African Amber, both \$4.25 a pint.

Saturday

10 a.m.

4. Rising From the Ashes

Much of old Seattle was destroyed by the Great Fire of 1889. Today in Pioneer Square you can see many of the striking Victorian Romanesque buildings (most designed by the architect Elmer Fisher) that rose from the ashes of that conflagration. At night this is a rollicking bar scene with live jazz and blues in several clubs along First Avenue. By day it provides a glimpse into Seattle's past. Start your walking tour in Occidental Park where you can find a locator map highlighting milestones in Seattle's history, ranging from the establishment of the city's first hospital (1863) to the opening of its first gay disco (Shelly's Leg, in 1973). For a coffee break, skip the ubiquitous Starbucks and Tully's and stop in at Torrefazione Italia (320 Occidental Avenue, 206-624-5847) for a caffè latte and freshly made coffee cake. Then head over to Elliott Bay Book Company (101 South Main Street, 206-624-6600), one of the country's

best bookstores, known for handwritten staff recommendations that are as pithy ("Edith Templeton's fictions/memoirs are as crisp, impeccable and as evil as a well-made martini -- Janet") as they are accurate. Finish up your tour with a visit to the 35th-floor observation deck of the Smith Tower (506 Second Avenue, 206-622-4004; 10 a.m. to 8:30 p.m.; \$6 for adults, \$4 for ages 6 to 12), opened in 1914 and for years Seattle's tallest building. Forget the Space Needle; this provides the best views of the city's skyline.

Noon

5. Grazing at the Market

At some point every visitor to Seattle ends up at the Pike Place Market (85 Pike Street), site of one of the city's most unusual tourist attractions: the fishmonger's stand at the main entrance. Standing before rows of gleaming Dungeness crabs and glisteningly fresh Alaskan sockeye salmon, are dozens of out-of-towners, snapping their cameras as huge fish are tossed from one employee to another, all to the plaintive background noise of the guy behind the counter imploring, "Anyone here to buy some fish? Anyone? Anyone?" After a few minutes, tear yourself from this rather puzzling scene for a movable feast, taking advantage of the huge number of foods available at the various stands. At Crêpe de France, start out with a savory crepe, like the one filled with spinach, ham and mozzarella (\$6.50). Then head to the Market Grill for a grilled local halibut sandwich, served on freshly baked bread with homemade tartar sauce (\$8.45). Finish off the meal with some organic peach and orange juice (\$4 a pint) at the Jordan Village Farms stall. Then pick up a bag of chocolate-covered cherries (\$7.95) from the Chukar Cherries stall for a snack later on.

3 p.m.

6. A Fat Tire, Please

The Capitol Hill area of Seattle is one of the city's liveliest neighborhoods, particularly along Broadway, a cafe-lined thoroughfare. Stop in at the Alley (219 Broadway East), an urban mall complete with a tattoo parlor and an aromatherapy shop, or head down to the DeLuxe Bar and Grill (625 Broadway East, 206-324-9697) for a game of pool and a pint of Fat Tire Amber Ale. Finish up your visit by walking down to Summit Avenue East between Mercer and Roy Streets to grab a bracing cup of espresso at the popular Top Pot (609 Summit Avenue East, 206-323-7841).

6 p.m.

7. Wine Country

Washington's vineyards have become justifiably famous in recent years. More than 40 locally produced (and often hard to find) wines can be sampled at the Tasting Room (1924 Post Alley, 206-770-9463), a vest pocket bar/retail store in an alley in the Pike Place Market.

8:30 p.m.

8. Dinner (and a Show)

There's no more theatrical dinner experience than to sit at the satay bar at Wild Ginger (1401 Third Avenue, 206-623-4450) and watch the chefs prepare your meal. You can also sit at a table, of course, which has gotten easier since the restaurant moved a few years ago into a larger space. No matter where you sit, don't pass up one of the restaurant's specialties: Wild Ginger Fragrant Duck, with its crispy skin spiced with cinnamon and star anise (\$14.95).

Sunday

10:30 a.m.

9. On the Water

For a farewell glimpse of Seattle, return to the waters of Elliott Bay, with its views of the Cascades to the east and the Olympics to the west. Narrated one-hour boat tours are available through Argosy Cruises (Pier 55, Alaskan Way, 206-623-4252). Get there 20 minutes before the 11 a.m. sailing. Adult fares are \$16; ages 4 to 13, \$7.

12:30 p.m.

10. The Brunch Crowd

The lines outside Etta's (2020 Western Avenue, 206-443-6000) are a reliable indicator of this restaurant's appeal. This local favorite -- a blurb posted in the window cites Michael Kinsley, the former Slate editor, as calling it "my favorite restaurant in the world" -- offers traditional Sunday brunch fare. But opt instead for specialties like king salmon with cornbread pudding (\$14) or sauteed halibut with pine nuts and Walla Walla onion rings (\$14).

THE BASICS

Visiting Seattle

Seattle is served by Seattle-Tacoma International Airport (known locally as Sea-Tac), about 15 miles from downtown. Cabs to the city cost about \$30, without tip; a cheaper alternative is the Airport Express bus (\$8.50; you can pay either at the airport ticket counter or

on board), which stops near all the major downtown hotels. Catch it at Door 24 (near United) or Door 8 (near international arrivals).

The stylish W Hotel (1112 Fourth Avenue, 206-264-6000; \$205 to \$294), has a 24-hour gym, a lively bar scene in the evenings and high-speed Internet access in its rooms. Inn at the Market (86 Pine Street, 206-443-3600; \$195 to \$500) is a well-appointed boutique hotel and houses one of the city's best restaurants, Campagne. More easily affordable lodging can be had at the centrally located Renaissance Seattle (515 Madison Street, 206-583-0300; \$129 to \$199), with great views from the rooftop indoor pool.

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