

Escape

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Seattle stagnant but still pleasing

JOHN BISHOP

SEATTLE'S Space Needle, built in the sixties as a symbol of Seattle's rise as a city of substance, is still its major tourist attraction.

So is the monorail, which was constructed at the same time when Seattle was striving to be taken seriously as a city.

The Space Needle, which opened in 1962 for the World's Fair, was intended to do for Seattle what the Eiffel Tower had done for Paris: become an instantly recognisable feature that signified Seattle.

It didn't work as well for Seattle as the Eiffel Tower did for Paris, but the World's Fair was held successfully, and the monorail still takes passengers from downtown to the foot of the Space Needle, just as it did 56 years ago.

Elvis Presley made a movie there (*It Happened at the World's Fair*) and all manner of celebs of the day turned up to marvel at the engineering skills involved in its construction.

The revolving restaurant at the top of the Needle had a commanding view over the

city and Puget Sound. A IHP motor moves the restaurant around "so gently it won't ripple your martini".

Very 1960s, and that in essence is the appeal and the problem of Seattle. It's quite interesting but all very much yesterday.

On tours of the city I heard constantly about the three great businesses that came out of Seattle in the 1990s: Starbucks, Amazon and Boeing.

Earlier there was Bartells, a major pharmacy chain (now overshadowed by Walgreens and others), and Nordstrom, a major department store chain that began as a shoe retailer in 1901.

These are all cited as evidence of the Seattle spirit of innovation and entrepreneurship. Grunge music, which began with Kurt Cobain's Nirvana and other pioneers of the Seattle sound that flourished in the 1990s, is cited in the same way. (Musically the city can also claim Jimi Hendrix.)

The mythologies are full of holes. Amazon is now looking for a second headquarters and will downsize its presence in Seattle once it selects a second home.



PRODUCE HUB: The famous Pike Place Market sign in Seattle, WA. The market opened in 1907, and is one of the oldest in the US. Photo: iStock



The Seattle Monorail and Space Needle on a sunny day. Photo: iStock

Boeing still makes planes in and around Seattle, but its corporate headquarters moved to Chicago, and Starbucks has its issues both financially and with covert racism.

A rather telling comment at a Cobain exhibition at the Museum of Popular Culture said Seattle was still waiting for what would replace grunge.

Waiting is right. Whatever combination of circumstances produced the grunge explosion in the 1990s hasn't formed again, and there is not the same sense of excitement any more.

By the Space Needle are a range of other attractions: the

Pacific Science Museum, Space Needle Park with lovely play and recreation areas, the Children's Museum, the monorail and the Museum of Popular Culture (founded and funded by Microsoft's co-founder Paul Allen), which had a fantastic Star Trek exhibition when I visited, plus Grunge and Hendrix retrospectives.

Also there is Chihuly Gardens, which is a magical display of glass flowers, plants and other creations, the work of master glass craftsman Dale Chihuly. This area is a tourist hub, and much enjoyed by locals and visitors.



The glass art on Chihuly's roof in Seattle.

Photo: Contributed

The other must-see attraction is Pike Place Market on the waterfront. This began in 1907 as a place where farmers sold their produce directly to the public as a way of breaking the stranglehold the middle men of the day had over both producers and household shoppers (the price of onions had moved from 10c an item to nearly a dollar each).

There are still elements of that there. Fresh seafood is abundant and sometimes you can see large whole salmon being tossed about.

Much of the market is now taken up with craft stall holders

who now seem to dominate markets like this: tie-dyed T-shirts, jewellery, flowers, arts and crafts as well as meat, honey, wine, cheese and fruit and vegetables.

There are 120 Starbucks outlets in greater Seattle and hundreds more locally owned coffee shops. The standing joke is that the locals drink so much coffee, that they are "sleepless in Seattle". It works for them.

John Bishop travelled with some assistance from Visit-Seattle.com. His work can be seen at eatdrinktravel.co.nz

Why coffee makes world go round for visitors and residents alike

JUST because Seattle is the birthplace of Starbucks, it doesn't mean your coffee choices are limited. Look to the city's burgeoning independent cafe scene to understand why coffee is synonymous with life in Seattle.

1. Milstead & Co

Among those in the know, Milstead & Co is thought to serve the best "craft coffees" in the city. Along the way, it has also acquired a reputation for being one of Seattle's "snobbiest" cafes.

Though relatively young in the coffee scene, Milstead & Co has amassed an army of fans who will vouch for its attention to detail. This includes fastidiousness when it comes to

brewing methods.

2. Zeitgeist Coffee

Zeitgeist Coffee is first and foremost a community space, and second, a supporter of great coffee and quality art. *Lonely Planet* claims that it is "possibly" Seattle's best and busiest coffee house, and a common stop on art-themed walking tours.

3. La Marzocco

Once the primary supplier for Starbucks, Italian espresso machine maker La Marzocco opened its first cafe and showroom in Seattle last year. Here, coffee takes centre stage, and a monthly rotating roster of coffee brands ensures a refreshing experience for regulars.



DAILY FIX: Coffee culture in Pike Place Market in Seattle, Washington.

Photo: iStock

4. Espresso Vivace

Espresso Vivace has been around since 1988 and its name loosely translates to mean

"great enthusiasm and excitement for espresso". This is where you go for one of the best espressos in the city,

where superior taste is guaranteed by the chief quality controller, aka owner David Schomer. In his words: "I'm very unhappy if there's any bad espresso coming out of the machines."

5. Tougo Coffee Co

Think of Tougo Coffee Co as a place where you can be yourself, and be accepted. Eater Seattle commends the decade-old cafe for being a "nerdy-not-jerky haven", where even coffee novices will feel right at home.

Tougo is said to be as equally focused on community building as it is on its coffee, so remember to strike up a conversation with your friendly barista while there.

HONOURABLE MENTIONS

Need an additional energy boost for your Seattle excursions? Four coffee picks from the local staff at Pan Pacific Seattle worth a try:

- 6. Little Oddfellows:** Books and coffee – the perfect combination.
- 7. Royal Drummer:** Trendy and cosy.
- 8. Seattle Meowtropolitan:** Where cat lovers unite and bond over coffee.
- 9. Craftworks Coffee:** For the curious coffee connoisseur.