



Sleepless in SEATTLE



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As one gets older, the journey to the US gets drier; it takes a whole day of travelling to get to our destination. Like the other 99% of the population, my family and I flew cattle class to Seattle, but unlike my previous trips, I did not need to take midazolam to forget the ordeal this time round. Flying via Taipei on EVA Air, the journey broke up nicely, giving us time to walk around and enjoy some of the stores at the airport during transit. Moreover, the excellent personal in-flight entertainment options and good service rendered during the flight made the journey more tolerable.

Unlike many airports in the US, passing through the Seattle-Tacoma airport immigration was a breeze and the officers made us feel very welcome. Getting to the city via the train was easy; costing less than US\$3 per trip, I would recommend that all travellers visiting Seattle use it (<https://www.soundtransit.org>). With the train service, you can get right to the city centre by alighting at Westlake station, situated directly under Macy's department store. Try to choose a hotel nearby lest you really test the four-wheel drive of your luggage.

Sightseeing galore

On our second day, we went to the home of Starbucks – the famous Pike Place Market. There, one can see the Puget Sound (a sound is a costal waterway connecting two or more places to one or more bodies of water). The vista is breathtakingly expansive and beautiful. From the Market, we walked to Pier 52 where we bought our Washington State Ferry tickets (<http://www.wsdot.wa.gov>) to Bremerton to visit a friend who lives there – lucky her! The boat ferries passengers and vehicles, and was big and comfortable, with good dining options. Once we reached Bremerton, we spent several hours on the retired naval destroyer, USS Turner Joy. The ship saw action in the Vietnam War but was decommissioned in 1982 before being turned into a museum in 1992. It was fun clambering in and out of different parts of the ship, including the guns room, engine room, top deck and sleeping quarters. It is hard to imagine though, being a sailor and spending many days in such cramped conditions.

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Do remember that if you're heading to Seattle, the first Thursday of each month offers free entry to many museums. From our hotel, we walked to the Seattle Art Museum and enjoyed several hours viewing the native-American collection. From Macy's department store, one can take the monorail to the Seattle Needle, which was built for the 1962 World's Fair.

At the top of the Needle, you get panoramic views of the city,

Mount Rainier, Puget Sound, the Cascades and the

Olympic mountain ranges. Within the vicinity of the Needle, you can visit the Chihuly Garden and Glass, where glass sculptures by the American artist, Dale Chihuly, are exhibited. The Museum of Popular Culture got the kids very excited. Many movie props, comics and film strips were on display. There was also a section on video games.

In the evenings, we enjoyed very good seafood meals. One of the most memorable was at Blueacre Seafood. Here, you can try oysters from around Washington State, and check out the shells of oysters harvested from different waters. For Singaporean food fans, it is easy enough to try many types of fish, including tuna, Alaskan salmon and sole, served with great wines from all over Washington State, such as the Columbia Valley or Walla Walla Valley.

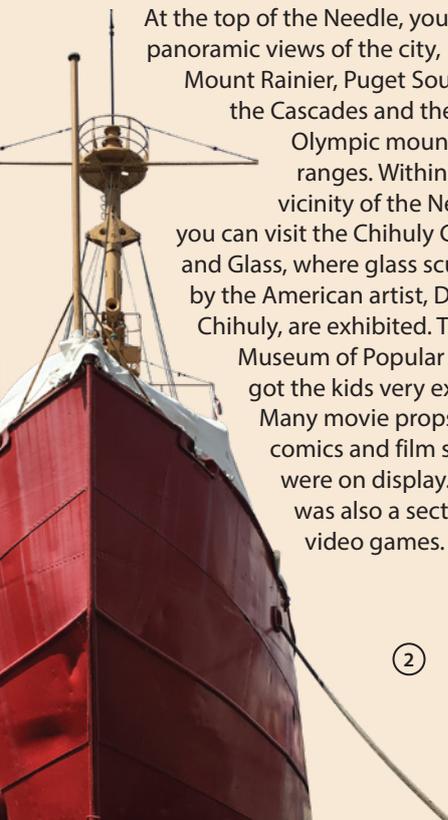
Getting around the city is pretty easy with the local transport system; it is even possible to get to South Lake Union using the streetcar (electric trams on tracks; <https://seattlestreetcar.org>). From there, we took a cruise from the lake to the Puget Sound and learned all about locks (elevators for boats). The lake has many antique boats and serves as a landing point for seaplanes. Along the way, you can even spy on the house from the movie *Sleepless in Seattle*, starring Meg Ryan and Tom Hanks. We also took a tour of the underground city of Seattle, which came about after the city grade was made higher by washing down the surrounding

slopes of hills. Seattle was originally built on tide flats and was prone to flooding. After a major fire, a decision was made to rebuild the city by first raising the grade of the land. This process took more than ten years and business owners rebuilt, leaving the first floor to eventually become the underground floor.

Seattle or Washington State is also home to other major corporations like Amazon, Boeing and Microsoft. Walking around the city, we even spied upon the original birthplace of UPS – Waterfall Garden Park! They are many other attractions located a short drive from Seattle but there was more than enough to do and keep us busy for a week. We left Seattle very happy with the great weather and wonderful time we had, and certainly had sleepless nights, what with all the activities. ♦

Legend

1. The Puget Sound
2. Boat docked at South Lake Union
3. Oysters from different waters in Washington
4. Pike Place Public Market
5. Chihuly glass sculpture



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