

Don't believe rainy rumors, Seattle's a great destination

BY NORMA AND WENDY SCHONWETTER
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Seattle isn't the biggest city on the planet. But it's been in the news for some really big things.

Like the biggest personal bank account in America (Bill Gates), the largest airplane manufacturer in the world (Boeing), the tallest mountain in the lower 48 states (Mt. Rainier), and the most recently active volcano in the United States (Mt. St. Helens).

Rumors of rain in Seattle are greatly exaggerated or at least misunderstood. The annual rainfall is 36 inches, less than New York and Atlanta. When it rains (mostly in the winter), it seldom pours.

Seattle rain is usually passing showers or a gentle mist, moderate like the climate itself, a necessary element of life in "The Emerald City."

The area is also the home of international icons - rockers Ann and Nancy Wilson of Heart, Amazon's Jeff Bezos, actor Kenny G, actor Tom Skerritt, authors Ann Rule, Robert Fulghum and Tom Robbins, and glass art's Dale Chihuly.

His work is prominently displayed in three exterior displays at new Museum of Glass and Union Station, both in Tacoma. Doves of people make a pilgrimage to Seattle to see gravesites of entertainment superstars.

IF YOU GO
 For more information: Go to Seattle's Convention and Visitor's Bureau.
 www.seeseattle.org
 Savings: To save 50 percent on admission at six Seattle attractions, go to www.citypass.net

Martial arts expert Bruce Lee and his son Brandon Lee, rock legend Jimi Hendrix, and grunge idol Kurt Cobain are the biggest draws. Greenwood Cemetery in suburban Renton, is where you'll find Hendrix's grave.

MUSEUMS
 To see Hendrix memorabilia and more, go to Experience Music Project, masterminded by Microsoft co-founder and billionaire Paul Allen.
 This unorthodox museum combines hands-on experiences with interpretive exhibits illustrating the creative process in American popular music.
 Seattle is big on museums of all sorts. From the Klondike Gold Rush Museum to the Police Museum, there's something for everyone. Check out

the Pacific Science Center, Museum of Flight (at Boeing Field), The Museum of History and Industry, and the Children's Museum. The Seattle Art Museum is behind the mammoth "Hammering Man" sculpture, created by famed post-modern architect Robert Venturi.

My favorite art museum is the lesser-known, and recently expanded, Frye Museum. It has a wonderful collection of impressionistic paintings and beautiful art by William Bouguereau.

Seattle's enduring symbol, the once futuristic and Jetsonesque Space Needle, offers spectacular views of the city.

If you doing offbeat things, try to spend some time in Fremont, the undisputed epicenter of funkiness in Seattle. The world's only public sculpture of a troll under a bridge, devouring a real Volkswagen Beetle, can be found here. Try to catch one of their many fun street fairs, if you can. Finding the orange-and-blue Fremont Bridge (one of four drawbridges in North Seattle) provides free entry into the Fremont state of mind.

TASTE OF HISTORY
 For a fun taste of history,

take The Underground tour in Pioneer Square. Did you know that Seattle's topography was quite similar to San Francisco's up until 1889?

After a fire the powers that be took advantage of the situation to literally reconstruct the landscape, scraping away the mountains of dirt from hilltops and depositing it into tidelands below.

Guides take you to the "original" Seattle, which is some 13-30 feet under present day streets.

Seattle has the largest ferry system in the country. Plan a day trip to Victoria or Vancouver. Or take a drive to Roslyn, Wash., transformed into Cicely, Alaska for the TV series, Northern Exposure, and have a meal at The Beik.

Go east on I-90 to Salish Lodge, perched atop a precipice beside the thunderous Snoqualmie Falls, and the setting of another 1990's TV show, Twin Peaks.

Now that you know the little known truth about the rain, you can be the first kid on the block to escape to Seattle in the off-peak season.

Norma and Wendy Schonwetter are a mother-daughter travel writing team. Norma lives in Farmington Hills and Wendy in Seattle.



The Seattle skyline with Space Needle in the foreground and Mt. Rainier in the background.

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