

Travel and Adventure: It's a verdant Northwest summer in the best little European city in America

by Stuart Wasserman

PORTLAND, Ore. - Portland can be a little paradise in the summertime. The city streets are crowded with residents enjoying the neighborhood bistros and coffee shops, and the hopping breweries have helped change deserted warehouse districts into thriving nightspots. By mid-June, the constant gray mists of spring have melted away, revealing deep-blue-sky summer days. Temperatures are perfect for long evening strolls.

MAJESTIC MOUNT HOOD - A view of downtown Portland, dubbed 'The best little European City in America,' with Mount Hood in the background. CNS photo by Stuart Wasserman/agpix.com. PORTLAND HAS THE BLUES - The Portland Blues Festival is held in a downtown waterfront park and has grown to become the largest blues festival west of the Mississippi. CNS photo by Stuart Wasserman/agpix.com. FOLLOW THE FALLS - Latourell Falls, the first in a string of waterfalls along the Old Oregon Highway, is located 45 minutes away from downtown. CNS photo by Stuart Wasserman/agpix.com. TAKE THE SCENIC ROUTE - Impressive sand dunes and vast sandy beaches await along the Oregon Coast, 90 minutes away from Portland. CNS photo by Stuart Wasserman/agpix.com. On occasion, hot days may send visitors on a journey to the coast about an hour and a half away or on an excursion to the string of magnificent waterfalls along the old historic Columbia Gorge Highway located just 45 minutes away.

While any week during the summer is a perfect time to visit Portland, the absolute best time to visit is during the first week of July, when the Portland Blues Festival takes place along Tom McCall Waterfront Park. This year the festival, which takes place along the Willamette River, celebrates its 20th anniversary and runs from Wednesday July 4 through Sunday July 8.

Who would have thought that white-bread Portland would develop such a love for the blues, but citizens here have used their collective love for music to raise tons of supplies for the Oregon Food Bank. Admission is \$8 and two cans of food for a full day and night of music.

Portland's Blues Festival has grown to be the largest blues festival west of the Mississippi and features 125 different acts performing on four stages and a dance with free lessons for beginners.

This year there will be a day of music dedicated to the Gulf Coast, featuring Marcia Ball, a day of music

dedicated to the Windy City of Chicago featuring Coco Taylor and Pinetop Perkins and a day of music focused on the British blues invasion featuring Savoy Brown and Eric Burdon and the Animals.

Politically, the city of Portland has an independent bent and is eco- and bicycle-friendly. Portland was the first town in the nation to set down a growth-control boundary around its environs and has stuck to it for 30 years. The goal was to keep farmland productive for local food production and for its pure aesthetic value. Farmland still lies within a 20-minute drive from the city center.

Residents gravitate to Portland's well-defined neighborhood districts, including N.W. 23rd Street, Hawthorne Street and the Sellwood and Pearl Districts. Each has its own flavor and several have their own local coffee houses along with antique stores, bookstores, pubs and small movie theaters.

This city for a long time has had more bookstores per capita than any other city in the country, and now it boasts having more restaurants per capita too - a prize previously held by San Francisco. A recently retired city commissioner called Portland "The best little European city in America."

Diane Hilton moved to Portland two years ago from Houston.

"I love getting around in this town," she said. "I walk almost anywhere in the city and when I use the trolley I'm downtown in minutes."

As an executive headhunter, she works long hours and often eats out a lot. She offers these current tips: "The best Caesar salad I found in town is at the Brasserie Montmartre on S.W. Park Avenue. On N.W. 23rd Street, Miso Hapi, a Viet-Thai restaurant, has the best black bean sauce and the best pizza can be found at Vincente's."

Scott Snyder, a Portland attorney, tosses his hat to a Spanish tapas restaurant located in the northwest section of the city called Tapeo.

"To my mind the food is outstanding. Each dish comes with many different merging flavors."

For those who love sushi and are on a budget, Snyder recommends Saburo, located in Sellwood. "They serve humongous, fresh sushi including pieces of unagi (broiled river eel) the size of Snickers bars and the bill for two including sake rarely comes to more than \$35," he said.

On warm summer evenings, the Portland brew pubs are a popular place to be. The Pearl District's Bridgeport Brewing on N.W. Marshall Street and 13th Avenue is the state's oldest operating microbrewery and is usually humming by 7 p.m.

If you are into sampling different microbrews, add to a long list of possibilities the Widmer Brothers Brewery at 929 N. Russell St. or any of the McMenemy Brothers establishments, including the Bagdad Theater on Hawthorne Boulevard or the Kennedy School on 33rd Avenue N.E., which was a grammar school built at the turn of the century but has recently been converted into a movie theater where guests can sit in overstuffed lounge chairs, eat pizza and sample different beers or skip the movie and dine in an indoor or outdoor restaurant. You can even stay overnight in a section of the school that has been converted into a B&B. The guest rooms are actually former classrooms that still feature the original chalkboards. Modern bathrooms have been installed in the old cloakrooms and in an open-air courtyard there is a heated soaking pool for guests.

Musical events are often staged on summer weekends in the waterfront park that stretches on the west side of the Willamette River. Among the best-known events are The Waterfront Blues Festival in July and the Labor Day weekend symphony concert, which is always a free event. Tourist boats float up and down the Willamette River offering visitors tasty brunches and dinners and scenic views which on sunny days include Mount Hood, Oregon's tallest peak.

With a few extra days to spare, head west to the coast for sun, sand and surf. Cannon Beach offers visitors a view of Haystack Rock and plenty of restaurants and art galleries. Venture further south and slowly wind your way through smaller but unique towns like Nehalem Bay and Wheeler, where small shops and dramatic views will keep you from moving too fast.

Different but equally dramatic views can be seen in the Columbia Gorge, just 35 miles east of Portland, a perfect distance for a day trip. There, a series of tall waterfalls delight visitors year-round, including Multnomah Falls, which is the second-highest year-round waterfall in the U.S., second only to Yosemite Falls. The Oregon Falls drops 620 feet.

Head out east on Highway 84 and then loop onto the Columbia River Highway (now U.S. 30), which was hailed as one of the country's prettiest drives when the road first opened in 1915. Just 40 minutes from Portland you hit the first of many sizable waterfalls, and almost all of them are worth a short stop, including Latourell Falls, Bridal Veil Falls, Wahkeena Falls, Horsetail Falls, Triple Falls and Elowah Falls. Some have trails that lead to the falls and a face full of mist.

For those looking for a long afternoon hike, the Eagle Creek trail is a good choice. Start early for this one. Along the way you will see Punch Bowl Falls, Loowit Falls and Tunnel Falls in a 12-mile round-trip walk with less than a 600-foot gain in elevation.

IF YOU GO

For more information about Portland, contact the Portland Oregon Visitors Association, 800-962-3700 or visit www.travelportland.com.

Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area offers information about the best waterfalls in the area and directions to them: <http://www.fs.fed.us/r6/columbia/waterfalls.html>.

Skamania Lodge: www.skamania.com or 800-221-7117.

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