Creativity, technology and progressive thinking reign in this Pacific Northwest metropolis. Seattle companies such as Amazon and Microsoft may be changing the world, but locals live for its inclusive culture and beautiful backyard. Snowcapped mountains cradle the heavily forested metro area on the Salish Sea, an inland body of water inhabited by orcas and the world’s biggest octopuses. And don’t be fooled by the rumors of rain: The Emerald City has a Mediterranean climate perfect for year-round urban exploring and outdoor adventures. Here, a chef, author and artist show us around their lovely, leafy hometown.
“These are not cookie-cutter businesses. They’ve developed based on the life experiences of the families who run them.”

As an Indigenous person, occupying space in an old INS building has special meaning,” he says. “I’m also a resident alien—I moved about 10 miles from British Columbia to Washington as a kid, a shift my people made seasonally for thousands of years before the border existed. In my early 20s, I traveled to Mexico and didn’t have the proper ID to return. I was detained and then had a deferred hearing right here.”

We drive half a mile north-east to The Wing Luke Museum of the Asian Pacific American Experience, which houses more than 18,000 artifacts. A ‘source of inspiration and opportunity’ for Gong, it’s also a cultural heavyweight, affiliated with the Smithsonian and the National Park Service.

“I spent a lot of time trying to really understand who I was and how I was perceived,” he says. That led to national-level activism about the mixed-race experience and also Gong celebrating his heritage through art. “I discovered my complex identity was legitimate. So I put that on...
shoes, which critics thought were too lowbrow for cultural art. But everyone responded to it.”

Gong grew up in a house without running water and went to school with farm kids. “Like other people in my tribal community, I wasn’t exposed to thinking big. You can’t really imagine things you’ve never seen before.”

Young Louie did have a Bruce Lee poster that he believed would protect him from ghosts, though. Gong also watched his father travel the world as a champion kickboxer and Muay Thai fighter, and trained at the martial-arts school his father ran.

“The ideas—when to be strong and when to flex—were all really useful. Also, when you’re not afraid of getting punched, it’s easier to speak up for yourself.”

His childhood enthusiasm resurfaces in the museum’s Bruce Lee exhibit, a constant theme among the community-curated displays. “Here’s a guy who was kicking butt, getting the girls, and making political statements in the 70s. Only in the last couple of years have other Asian males been able to do that. He was way ahead of his time.”

We encounter more ground-breaking a third of a mile downhill at Hood Famous, run by Geo Quibuyen and Chera Amlag, a couple who opened the café in 2019, specializing in Filipino and Asian-Pacific flavors. Our quarry: the legendary cheesecake made with ube (bright purple Japanese yams). Manager Anton Coleman beams and wryly catwalks for us, showing off his Eighth Generation phone case and a shopping tote with Gong’s Guardians design, the fu dogs and Coast Salish elements representing the artist’s mixed heritage. Then, getting back to business, Coleman says, “I helped start the coffee program here and get the word out about the specialty scene that includes growers and roasters in the Philippines.”

Customers now flock to Hood Famous for lattes drizzled with house-made ube syrup, among other treats.

Gong and I make one more stop, at Bopbox in Georgetown, which serves scratch-made modern Korean cuisine. As we wait for our kimchi pancakes and bulgogi bowls, Gong says, “It has healthy curated options for everybody. I appreciate the artistry of the meals, the aesthetics of the space, and the energy of the owner’s entrepreneurial journey. It reminds me of my own path from drawing on shoes to business success.”

Seattle

MUST VISIT

**Museum of Pop Culture**

In the shadow of the Space Needle at the Seattle Center, this shimmering, undulating 140,000-square-foot Frank Gehry-designed structure is an homage to geek culture. Founded by Microsoft billionaire Paul Allen, this nonprofit museum presents wide-ranging exhibitions encompassing everything from music and science fiction to horror films, video games and even black leather jackets. It also houses the world’s largest collection of artifacts and memorabilia from Jimi Hendrix and Nirvana.
“you’re so famous! people are surprised you still live in Seattle,” I remark, as Lindy West and I stroll through Kubota Garden in the city’s diverse Rainier Beach neighborhood.

A bold, scrappy journalist, West published her memoir, *Shrill*, in 2016. The best seller prompted The New York Times to call her “one of the most distinctive voices advancing feminist politics through humor.” The next year the newspaper hired her as a columnist. West also helps write and executive-produce Hulu’s eponymous adaptation of the book, which debuts its third and final season on May 7.

“I never needed to relocate for work,” she explains amid the park’s evergreens, waterfalls and ponds. “I grew up here and feel like a deeply Seattle person. Geographically the city’s just beautiful. It’s also small and sort of manageable, and there are still lots of weird little businesses. I want to live in a diverse place—in every sense of the word.

“Seattle has a real underdog vibe,” she continues. “Like, we’re up here in the corner, separate from the rest of the country, and we’re kind of dorky.”

This 20-acre park blends Northwest native plants with Japanese landscaping fashioned by horticultural pioneer Fujitaro Kubota. The immigrant began transforming a waterlogged swamp in 1927, when Asian residents couldn’t own property in the U.S. (a friend signed the title). After internment during World War II, Kubota naturalized and eventually could spend his passion project. Seattle declared the garden a landmark and rescued it from developers following his death in 1973. “It’s so stunning and peaceful,” West says. “You can’t see the city and you feel so immersed in nature.”

We push off, driving past another local sanctuary: Seward Park, a peninsula jutting into Lake Washington with 120 acres of old-growth forest, inhabited by barred owls and pileated woodpeckers. As the city grew, the Olmsted Brothers—the landscape architecture legends behind Atlanta’s Piedmont Park and St. Louis’ Washington University campus—fought to retain its beauty. It forms part of an “emerald necklace” of parks, playgrounds and boulevards.

“With the paved loop, you’re along the water the whole way,” West says. “There are turtles everywhere. My husband [the musician and comedian Ahamefule J. Oluo] once photographed a turtle a day—spring, summer and fall. It was a fun ritual, and a way to get out and engage with the lake. Honestly, it was the greatest year of my life.”

A half-mile northwest stands another of her special spots: Third Place Books, whose name references sociologist Ray Oldenburg’s notion of a necessary gathering space beyond one’s home and workplace. “When we first lived here, it was our grocery co-op,” West laughs. “Now it’s this perfect indie bookstore with a really warm sense of community. And it’s gorgeous.”

We hop to the Central District for lunch on the planter-fringed patio of Cafe Selam, a family-run Ethiopian restaurant celebrated for its fresh ingredients. I order my usual veggie combo, while West goes for ful—puréed fava beans topped with tomatoes,
chilies, feta and egg, served with crusty bread. “My friend group has been coming here since 2005 and having ful every weekend,” she says. “The staff saw my kids grow up and now they come here on their own.”

As we chat and eat alfresco, West gasps. “Is that an eagle? It looks huge and it has a white head. Yeah, that’s a bald eagle! Hello, buddy!” The bird wheels over us—a more common sight lately, as U.S. populations have quadrupled since 2009.

“Every inch of this city is beautiful,” she adds. “There's so much shoreline. You can grab a blanket and a cooler and spend the whole day sitting on a dock where you can see Mount Baker and Mount Rainier. If it’s hot enough, you can even jump in and swim.” She’s particularly fond of the nearby T docks in Madrona Park.

Given the clouds skittering in, we head a mile south to Two Big Blondes instead. Lisa Michaud has owned this plus-size consignment store, which recycles fashion, for the last third of its 24 years. “I’m just the current host of this amazing community,” she says. West loves to shop and sell there, enough so that the boutique has a section—online and in real life—called Lindy West's Closet.

Michaud strokes a silky chartruese dress. “All of her fun pieces and bright colors go so fast.”

West adds, “People tag me in pictures of what they bought and I love it! I’m such a fan of this store.”

Next we stock up at Deep Sea Sugar & Salt, a cake shop with subtly sweet layered confections. A cashier loads heavy slices—vanilla-bean custard and chocolate with 9lb Porter from nearby Georgetown Brewing Company—into takeaway boxes for us.

We finish our day in Columbia City, where West has lived since 2012. “I deeply love Island Soul,” she says as we pass the cheerful restaurant, which fuses the flavors of the Caribbean and Louisiana bayou. “One of my first dates with my husband was here. Everything’s good, but if you want to do it right, get the goat curry, greens, a coconut muffin and a tropical cocktail.”

We pop into Coffeeholic House, a giant in the city’s burgeoning Vietnamese coffee scene. Co-owner Chen Dien describes the signature Coffeeholic Dream flavor as nutty with cheesy foam. “It’s like tiramisu in a cup. It took me a year to get the right ratios.”

Balance can be hard to find in a rapidly changing landscape like Seattle, which ranked as the country’s fastest-growing metro area of the last decade. But West takes comfort in her neighborhood and the ones around it. “This is my favorite Seattle,” she says. “You still have big immigrant communities and small businesses that don’t feel quite so designed for Instagram. You actually feel like you’re in a place with roots and character. It’s all hits, no misses.”

**Seattle MUST VISIT**

**Space Needle**

When it was unveiled at the 1962 World’s Fair, this 605-foot-tall landmark was the tallest building west of the Mississippi. The most conspicuous figure on the skyline, it’s become an architectural mascot for the city—with more than 20,000 people launching up to the observation deck every day. Serving Pacific Northwest cuisine, the glass-floored Loupe Lounge rotates 360 degrees every 30 minutes with views of downtown Seattle, the Olympic and Cascade mountains, Mount Rainier, Elliott Bay and the islands in Puget Sound.
beyond here and food fish and chips. Spoiler: He’s native, wanted to strike a balance of pop-ups. Steinbrueck, a Seattle minutes. The restaurant opened in-house. It once sold out in 24 in live, then cooked and cracked with Dungeness crab, brought caught the buzzy $27 roll made butternut-squash sandwich with Victor Steinbrueck joins us for restaurant in July.

Throughout Dining New-Wave the Emerald City

As chef Brady Williams and I meet in funky Fremont, a man races out of the Asian taproom and hands us six packs of organic craft beer. I receive a sampler, and one of the region’s top chefs scores — classic light lager? “Are you a big pilsner-malt fan?” I ask. “No, I like cheap beer!” My friend said that was lazy, so he’s trying to turn me on to respect-able light brews.”

That answer’s delightfully down-to-earth—and not what I expected from 2019’s James Beard Beat Chef Northwest, Williams won while at Canlis, a fine-dining icon in Queen Anne overlooking Lake Union. He led the kitchen for six years, but now is on to his next challenge, opening his own restaurant in July.

We head into the seafood restaurant Local Tide, where chef Victor Steinbrueck joins us for shrimp toast and a Zaatar roasted butternut-squash sandwich with chermoula (Moroccan herb sauce). On the weekend, we could have caught the buzzy $27 roll made with Dungeness crab, brought in live, then cooked and cracked in-house. It once sold out in 24 minutes. The restaurant opened in August, after about three years of pop-ups, Steinbrueck, a Seattle native, wanted to strike a balance between fine dining and fast-food fish and chips. Spoiler: He’s succeeding.

Williams says, “You associ-ate Seattle with seafood. But beyond here and Taylor Shellfish, there aren’t many places where it’s handled well from the boat to the plate.”

“This is the new Seattle din- ing,” he continues. “This is the next wave of talent doing things sustainably and ethically, not just sourcing principles, but business practices, too.”

We finish and plan our route, leaning against his 1994 Toyota Land Cruiser Prado. “It’s kind of a cult surfer vehicle in Japan, where my mom’s from,” he explains. We drive past DeLaurenti, a Pike Place Market gourmet pioneer. “The wine selection’s versatile and vast,” Williams says. “It also has really good artisanal meats and cheeses. This place is a must.”

We arrive in the Chinatown-International District (C-ID), listed on the National Register of Historic Places, where Williams and I sit under Mount Fuji cherry trees at Kobe Terrace park. Had we climbed higher, the clear day would have revealed Mount Rainier, the most glaciated peak in the contiguous U.S., 86 miles southeast of the city. Few local sights can compare to when “the mountain’s out.”

“It’s such a beautiful area,” Williams says. “When you’re a chef, you’re the beneficiary of that landscape. We have such incredible products. To me, the Northwest is second to none.”

This bounty also benefits one of the nearby restaurants he loves: Tsukushino. “We’re second-gene-ration owners,” Marin Caccam says. “My brother [Shota Caccam] is the main sushi chef. He’s follow-ing our late father’s legend, while

I keep alive our mom’s authentic recipes, including a curry sauce that cooks over five days.” Other standouts include the omakase, especially if it involves saba (blue mackerel) and spinach oshirashi (steeped in dashi broth). This eleg-ant hole-in-the-wall has no sig-nage but many fans, including Williams. “This is the food I grew up eating,” he enthuses.

But he and Caccam worry about developers and big chains push-ing into the neighborhood. “A lot of the small family-owned restaur-ants are disappearing,” she says.

“It scares me. It’s always nice to have that comfort food that that comfortable place.”

One addition strikes the right note, however. Gift Shop, little sibling to the upcoming Pylon market. The owners sought to respectably add to the C-ID with- out being redundant. The result? An eclectic “New World convenience mart” that serve craft-roasted espresso and sells every-thing from records to hot sauce to Spanish tinned octopus.

Despite crushing it on the haute-cuisine front, Williams doesn’t stand on ceremony off-hours. His favorite hang-outs include Billiard Hoang, a Columbia City pool hall serving pho and banh mi. For watering holes, he often heads to Loreta’s Northwesterner, a ‘cozy dive bar serving arguably Seattle’s best burger” in hip blue-collar South Park. It sits a block from Left Bank, a natural wine shop and bar. On warm nights, this stretch of 14th Avenue South feels like a big street party. The chef also likes Paradise Cafe in lively, diverse White Center, 2.5 miles west. “Whether you’re stopping in for lunch or coming off a graveyard shift, it’s a welcoming place with communal tables on a back patio. You just keep to yourself,” he says.

Our culinary expedition ends at another of Seattle’s pop-up turned-powerhouse eateries, Musang on Beacon Hill, which ...
serves Filipino cuisine. Chef/owner Melissa Miranda joins us for cocktails: an Isa (apple- and allspice-infused bourbon with *panutsa* palm sugar) and Tatlo (spicy tequila with Earl Grey and calamansi citrus).

An unexpected dish arrives and Williams lights up. “My dad caught this squid on the pier downtown,” Miranda explains. “He supplies all our squid, which currently go into *paella negra* with cuttlefish ink and smoked milkfish.”

“When my dad immigrated, he moved to this historically Filipinx neighborhood,” she continues. “After living in Italy and New York City, I was driving down *Beacon Avenue* and realized we have no space anymore!” So she crowdsourced more than $90,000 and launched in a lavender Craftsman house, site of a former Asian community center. *Seattle Met* magazine immediately crowned the result 2020’s Restaurant of the Year.

“I think of it more as a community space,” Miranda says. “It has inspired a lot of pop-ups to start sharing their stories and incredible food. For a while restaurant owners were really disconnected and insular. Now we are all supporting each other.”

Williams agrees: “This new wave’s not just about delicious food and sustainable sourcing, but also community outreach and heritage reclamation. And it’s about treating people well, whether they’re guests, neighbors, staff, peers or industry members.”

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**SEATTLE IN YOUR POCKET**

Find the must-go places in this Local Takes: Seattle story on Urbaniser, the new app for collecting, organizing and sharing all the spots you love. Rather than keeping endless notes, with Urbaniser you’ll have all your favorites in one place, and always at your fingertips.

The Seattle venues featured here have been neatly collected for you to download and keep on the free Urbaniser app. Just scan our QR code.

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**Historic Charm**

*The Edgewater*

This waterfront institution once hosted several music legends, including The Beatles (who were photographed fishing from a hotel window). The property leans into this legacy with suites dedicated to the Fab Four and Pearl Jam and complimentary loaner guitars and record players.

[edgewaterhotel.com](http://edgewaterhotel.com)

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**Elegant Grandeur**

*Fairmont Olympic Hotel*

This classically elegant hotel opened in 1924 and is now listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The building is renowned for its Italian Renaissance design, and the amenities include an indoor pool. The restaurant, Shuckers, is one of Seattle’s oldest oyster bars.

[fairmont.com](http://fairmont.com)

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**Stylish Panache**

*Palihotel Seattle*

The design-forward Palisociety brand opened this outpost in 2018. The property bursts with eclectic touches, ranging from a portrait of a sailor at the check-in desk to distressed wood walls in the restaurant. The Hart and the Hunter (stop by for an oyster-shell-infused Elliott Bay Gibson cocktail).

[palisociety.com](http://palisociety.com)

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For more on Seattle, see our City Guide at americanway.com/seattle