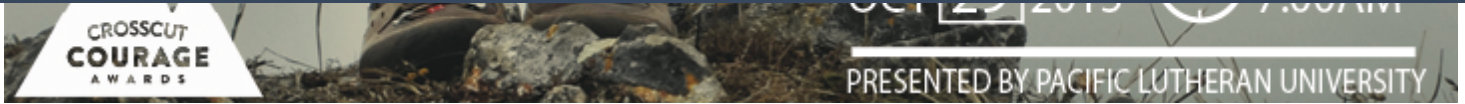




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GENERAL

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Fed up with Seattle? Here are 9 other cities you'll love



by Mark Hinshaw

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Over the past year or so, there is been considerable kvetching in certain journalistic quarters about how Seattle (or perhaps more specifically, Capitol Hill) is dead. Over. Or at least overdone.

This is nothing new, of course, and over the years, various groups have taken their turn at being the scapegoats. Thirty years ago, it was the yuppies. Then it was the migrating Californians. Then it was the Bridge and Tunnel crowd invading music clubs in hords. Now the currently convenient target is the Amazonians with their swinging badges, walking five abreast on the sidewalk. There has been a rather relentless moaning about traffic. Disappearing cafes, clubs and coffeehouses. Overpriced houses. Rent increases. Long lines at food trucks. Oh, did I



The dream of the '90s is alive in Tacoma. Credit: [Jim Culp via Flickr](#)

mention traffic?

Listen up, now. Cities. Change. Constantly.

It's in their job description. Always has been. They are turbulent stew pots of social and economic ingredients that are continually being re-sorted, altered, morphed and mangled. It's not always pretty, and rapid change for most humans is a difficult thing to handle. But change they do.

Yes, the Seattle that existed when you first arrived here and went to college / had your first sexual coupling / saw your favorite bands / had your first full time job is indeed dead. And it's not coming back. But hey, if you can't deal with it, there is something you *can* do. You can reinvent your own place elsewhere. No shame in that; people have been moving from Manhattan to Hoboken or Brooklyn, from San Francisco to Oakland, from inner Boston to outer Boston for decades, creating new and exciting places to live and work and enjoy themselves.

Fortunately for those of us who are hooked on the culture, climate or politics of the Pacific Northwest, we have choices. They are found at all points of the compass. Most are within an hour of the big city, which means you can still enjoy the greater variety of the center. But they are less fraught with housing costs, less frenzied, and perhaps even more friendly.

To the south there is the wonderfully gritty **Tacoma**. Having emerged for its decades of doldrums, it is now coming alive with galleries, museums, and renovated historic structures.

The splendid downtown campus of the University of Washington provides a stability that Tacoma has not seen in quite some time. There are pleasant neighborhoods, nice small houses, and tidy shopping districts. 26th and Proctor is like a diminutive Capitol Hill, and the North End is as fine as any established urban neighborhood in the country. It feels settled but still nicely edgy.

To the west, there is **Bremerton**. Yep. The burg that used to be the butt of jokes in the region. In the '90s, things there were so



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bad, it actually *lost* population. The downtown now is layered with new housing, restaurants, music venues and unique parks along the waterfront. You can pick up a place to live for a fraction of the cost in Seattle. And the commute time to downtown Seattle (by ferry) is less than from Issaquah. I lived on the west side of the Bay for a year, and the time spent in transit, watching the always-different mountains, water and sky was invigorating. Not to mention the thrill of arriving daily into the picture perfect skyline of Seattle.

To the north is the much underappreciated **Everett**. Barely mentioned in the family of Puget Sound cities, it's a virtual secret hiding in plain sight. The neighborhoods around downtown have a pleasant patina, acquired from decades of being a working class city. Its downtown is filled with lots of interesting spots - some new some old. It's kind of like turning the clock back to the more peaceful, small town days when Seattle was a remote, backwater town. Want a less costly place to live? To paraphrase the Village People, "Go North, to begin anew!"

There are many more examples if you are willing to get beyond the commute shed of public transport. **Bellingham** is its own splendid island of cultural quirkiness. **Olympia**, believe it or not, is becoming a fine little city with a spectacular waterfront, public market and funky, arts-oriented downtown. And places like **Snohomish**, **Puyallup**, **Anacortes** and **Port Angeles** display bursts of urbanity, diversity, and a distinct character all their own.

The cool thing about all these places is that they share a generally liberal attitude toward politics, they nurture the arts, and they are seeing an influx of people from different cultures and countries. They are, in a sense, microcosms of Seattle, but without the traffic, without the big apartment blocks, and without the looming tower cranes.

So if Seattle has worn you down, and you are convinced it is dead (to you), you might think about booking a U-haul and creating your own sweet spot in somewhere else in our great, lovely part of the world. There are plenty of folks itching to take your place.

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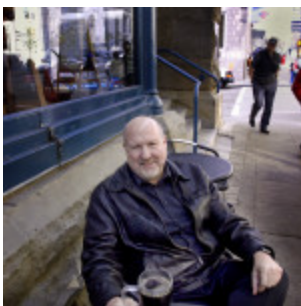
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