

Portland's charms range from books, bikes, and food trucks to a vegan bar and a bagpiping unicyclist.

BY JESSICA SPIEGEL
PHOTOGRAPHY BY NASHCO

Rose City Confidential



Outsmart pricy happy hours
at RingSide Steakhouse.

Portland is a small town—an especially creative, entrepreneurial one—disguised as a major city. Its thriving maker culture shines in its close-knit food cart scene, handmade wares at the busy Saturday Market, and frequent celebrations of local artists.

International food carts

More than 500 carts scattered around the city in stationary “pods” draw crowds all day. The **Cartopia** pod in Southeast is popular with the late-night crowd, but the sprawling **Cartlandia** pod on SE 82nd Avenue surrounds the brick-and-mortar Blue Room Bar, where you can bring in your food cart grub to pair with your locally brewed beer.

Soccer fandom

Forget American football: Two major-league soccer teams—the **Portland Thorns** and **Portland Timbers**—play to enthusiastic crowds in downtown Providence Park. Sing and cheer with the Rose City Riveters and Timbers Army on game days, or visit one of the city’s many soccer-centric bars—**4-4-2**, the **Horse Brass Pub**, the **Toffee Club**, and **Beulahland** stand out—to feel the love in the off-season. AAA members receive a discount on Thorn ticket prices.

City of books

Everybody knows about **Powell’s**, but it’s still a must. Browse 1 million books in the enormous block-long store. When you’re overwhelmed, retreat to the less-trafficked rare book room on the third floor or the in-house coffee shop for a respite. In the Orange Room, find an array of items including Powell’s merch, embroidered patches, and Egg Press greeting cards.

Get your cycle on

See the city like a local on two wheels. The bike-sharing program **Biketown** is easy to use, with more than 1,000 neon-orange cruisers available all over the city. Hop on the Waterfront Loop downtown at Tom McCall Waterfront Park for a casual 2.6-mile ride that takes you over the Steel and Hawthorne Bridges and along the Willamette River, or coast through the quiet Eastside Greenways for an insider’s view of quiet neighborhoods.

Best bites

Happy hour in Portland means great food at fantastic value. Head to old-school **RingSide Steakhouse** for a \$3.95 gourmet cheeseburger, **Doug Fir Lounge** for \$1 oysters, or the vegan **No Bones Beach Club** for \$6 “crab” cakes. **Bamboo Sushi**, the world’s first certified sustainable sushi restaurant, is usually a splurge—but in the early evening, it’s one of the city’s best deals.

Urban forest

Nature is just around the corner. Amble directly from the busy side-walks of northwest Portland into **Forest Park**. The lush escape has more than 80 miles of trails for hiking, mountain biking, and horse-back riding. On some Saturdays, you can take a free walking tour to learn about park history or the use of local flora in beer making.

Monthly art walks

Galleries celebrate new shows each month during **First Thursdays** in the Pearl District and **Last Thursdays** in the Alberta Arts District. In summer, the latter takes on the flavor of a street party, with live musicians and performances. Patrons mingle while browsing handmade jewelry, vintage ceramics, and unique art.

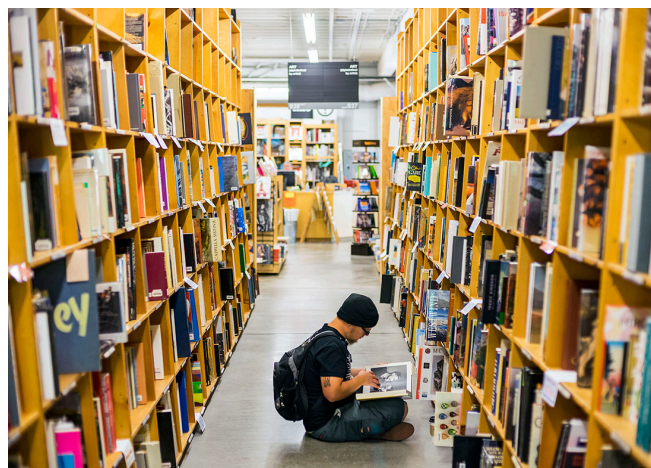
Snow year-round

The triangular mountain on Portland’s horizon is home to the only year-round skiing on real snow in the United States. **Mt. Hood Meadows** is its largest winter playground, but you can head to **Timberline** for skiing or snowboarding without consulting a calendar. The lower areas are open from fall through spring, while the upper Palmer Glacier lifts operate May through September.

Keep Portland weird

Get your quirk on at the fabulous **Paxton Gate** curiosity shop or at **Darcelle XV**, where Darcelle XV—the country’s oldest drag queen—still performs sassy routines regularly well into her 80s. Keep an eye out for the kilt-wearing **Unipiper**, who plays the bagpipes (which sometimes spout flames) while riding his unicycle. ●

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FROM TOP: Octogenarian drag queen Darcelle XV wows the crowd at her eponymously named club. A reader pores over a book at Powell’s, which offers plenty of tomes to browse and buy, plus a bevy of made-in-Portland wares. Visitors to verdant Forest Park can roam miles and miles of groomed trails.