

# Taking off on a flight of culture

## Weekend break in Washington State offers an eclectic blend of experiences

BY LIISA ATVA, THE PROVINCE MARCH 18, 2014 11:36 AM



Commercial Avenue street scene The popular Brown Lantern Ale House on Commercial Avenue.

Needing a break from Vancouver grey, we looked for a last minute flight to somewhere warm. When our search turned up “nada” my travel partner and I resorted to a weekend drive to Washington State. It was grey there too, but at least it was a different shade. (Apparently there are fifty of them.) By skipping the better-known cities and towns, we discovered places at least one of us had never been to before — Snohomish, Mukilteo and Anacortes. With no waits at the U.S. border — a Friday morning in January — less than two hours later we were soaking up new experiences, enjoying local culture, and savouring, if not the sights and warmth of Mexico, at least the taste.

There may have been no flying involved but there were lots of airplanes. The tour of the Boeing factory in Mukilteo, two hours south on the I-5, was a first for me. The “Future of Flight” is the only public tour of a commercial jet assembly offered in North America. Definitely not just a guy thing, the 90-minute tour was a trip highlight. The facility is the largest building in the world by volume (13.3 million cubic

metres), so large that all of Disneyland California would fit inside. With a 115-foot high ceiling, rain clouds formed inside until the air circulation system was perfected. At close to ceiling height, the viewing deck offers an expansive view — a dozen airplanes in various stages of production, cranes suspended from the ceiling whizzing by, and hundreds of workers, some manually welding parts into place, others at banks of computer terminals, or riding bicycles from one end of the factory to the other.

Our tour guide's radio voice, light-hearted humour and enthusiasm for aeronautical history made the tour informative and entertaining. There was even Canadian content — one of Boeing's earliest customers was Canada Post. Also, during the Second World War, when the USA wasn't supposed to sell airplanes to Allied Forces, Boeing would leave airplanes in fields near the South Dakota/Manitoba border. During the night, farmers towed the airplanes into Canada with their tractors.

In cafés and taverns we found that friendly locals were always willing to share their culture with us. Our first stop was Fred's Rivertown Alehouse in Snohomish, a riverside town of antique shops and restaurants a short jaunt east of the I-5.

"Wow, look at all those bottles!" I said, as we sat down at the bar. The bartender presented us with both the lunch menu and "the catalogue" of the single malt scotch that they offer — all 200 of them, one of the largest selections in the country. Each scotch was lovingly described by region. The Ardbeg, with a nose described as burnt toffee tar, paraffin, spicy dried ginger, and vanilla wood spice, had him (the male half of the weekend trip) drooling. The 15 year-old Dalmore, with a nose of chocolate orange, potpourri, perfume, fruitcake and sherry, almost had me. With 34 beers also on tap, beer drinkers weren't left behind. With more driving to come we stuck to the lunch menu but vowed to make it back for one of their monthly whisky tastings, so popular that reservations are recommended.

At the Brown Lantern Ale House in Anacortes we met the Seattle Seahawk's 12th player, Fan, and joined in the excitement of watching the Seahawks defeat the New Orleans Saints in the NFL quarterfinal game. The locals that we shared a table with suggested a draft pilsner from Seattle's Georgetown Brewing Company. The beer was a hit with the male half even before he knew that it had his name on it — "Roger's."

Back at our hotel, the historic Majestic Inn and Spa, Wild Bill Hickok greeted us. Not an actor hired by the hotel but a local character that wears 150-year-old styles all the time. "Where do you get those clothes?" I asked. "Online from costume re-enactment suppliers," he said. Only his guns were missing.

There was a non-alcoholic beverage tasting as well. The town of Langley, on Whidbey Island, has a cluster of cafés on one block. We picked one that seemed popular with the locals, Useless Bay Coffee. In a funky room with old-fashioned vinyl booths and a stamped tin ceiling, we enjoyed the breakfast Panini as the proprietors explained how they create their custom blends of organic coffee.

Even better than the coffee was the Mexican hot chocolate at Frida's Gourmet Mexican Cuisine in

Anacortes — rich dark melted chocolate with a hint of cinnamon, and their secret spice. Frida's, named after the artist Frida Kahlo, offers fine-dining Mexican style. For a more casual atmosphere, yet still in a lovely room, eat at one of the tables in the bar at the back of the restaurant. His entrée, the "Maria Izquierdo," a chicken breast stuffed with poblano chilies, onions and Monterey cheese in a creamy poblano sauce, was delicately flavourful with a hint of hotness. My "Taco de Pesacado al Pastor" a meal-sized appetizer of cod marinated in achiote paste served with corn tortillas, avocado and grilled pineapple in a balsamic reduction was absolutely delicious. There was not a refried bean in sight! Their Ultimate Margarita, made with Anejo tequila and orange liquor, and served over crushed ice rather than blended, was very, very smooth.

Not yet done with things Mexican, our final stop was the Costco in Burlington for a 1.5 litre bottle of Jose Cuervo Gold Tequila, costing half of its Vancouver equivalent. A few shots of tequila have been known to change my shade of grey. Salud!

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