

Portland Oregon Introduction Walking Tour

Welcome to Portland, Oregon! My name is Richard, here with Tours by Foot, and I am going to walk you around and provide some commentary and history of this lovely city.

With a population of about six to seven hundred thousand people, Portland has a nice big city feel to it, but is also managable and a great place to walk. The name Portland (Both Maine and here) refers to English Isle of Portland, on the south coast of the English Channel.

This logging outpost began to be populated in the 1840s by men who had blazed the Oregon trail and worked in the fur and timber trades. Oregonians are still proud of our pioneer spirit and the independent and hard-working nature of those early generations.

On this tour we will look for some themes as we explore the downtown and waterfront park to give you a sense of the history and character of the city. It may be raining or cloudy when you take this tour, and that's ok. Because that is the way we like here. Ideal weather for growing Roses in what has become know as 'Rose City'. Indeed when Lewis and Clark arrived here in 1805 the Willamette Valley was heavily populated by the Chinook People. They were drawn here by the rich soil, fertile lands and forests. Our Douglas fir,

Western Hemlock, Red Cedar, and big leaf maple trees has made Oregon and its ports a lumber powerhouse for the past two centuries.

The 1900s saw massive population growth and construction as shipbuilding business arrived and young workers were drawn from all over the country. Economic growth continued apace in the 60s and 70s and the 1990s saw the emergence of a tech industry that attracted professionals and hippies alike.

Some iconic brands from Portland that you may recognize include Nike, Columbia sportswear, Leatherman tools, and Pendelton Woolen Mills, among others.

1) Pioneer Courthouse Square

Pioneer Courthouse Square originally housed Central School, built in the 1860s. In 1890 a hotel was completed on this spot, making it the center for social activity until 1951 when the city cleared the hotel for a two-story parking lot.

Remnants of the hotel, an original archway and iron gatework, are found today on the east side of the square. The reimagined square we see today opened in 1984 as a public park.

One of the more recognized pieces of public art in Portland is [Seward Johnson's *Allow Me*](#), commonly referred to as *Umbrella Man*. It depicts a life-sized man dressed in a business suit, hailing a cab and holding an umbrella and is one of seven casts made. Seward Johnson, whose grandfather founded the Johnson & Johnson Company, where he worked for a time was a somewhat controversial artist. Seward was known for his lifelike sculptures and maintained a studio and built a foundry in New Jersey.

Weather Machine is a [lumino kinetic bronze sculpture](#) and columnar machine that serves as a [weather beacon](#), displaying a [weather prediction](#) each day at noon. Designed and constructed by Omen Design Group Inc., the approximately 30-foot-tall (9 m) sculpture was installed in 1988. During its daily two-minute sequence, which includes a trumpet [fanfare](#), mist, and flashing lights, the machine displays one of three metal symbols as a prediction of the weather for the following 24-hour period: a sun for clear and sunny weather, a [blue heron](#) for [drizzle](#) and transitional weather, or a [dragon](#) and mist for rainy or stormy weather.

Its creators described the machine as "light-hearted ... active, distinctive—and fun". Those who inspired the

sculpture, called it a "gentle spectacle" and described the work as "a cartoon contraption, an odd little thingamajig. It has bells and whistles and other mechanized wonders that confirm rain sometime after the downpour and proudly announce sunshine in the bright light of day."

Weather Machine has been compared to a giant [scepter](#) and has been called "bizarre", "eccentric", "playful", "unique", "wacky", "whimsical", "zany", and a "piece of wizardry". In other words... Welcome to Portland!

Hang around in the park to soak up the atmosphere. Grab a bite at one of the food carts or a coffee at the 40th Starbucks in the world which was opened here in 1989. The water feature in the form of a cascading waterfall makes this the perfect place to sunbath... or just pretend you are in Italy at one of the iconic squares from which this one draws inspiration.

2) Oregon Historical Society Museum

Now you are in front of the Oregon Historical Society Museum which dates back to 1898. The museum moved into this building in 1966.

There is a large two-part mural on this building called [Oregon History](#), painted by Richard Haas; of the two

murals, that on the building's west side depicts the [Lewis and Clark Expedition](#).^[9] Part of the sales agreement stated that both the building, which was built in 1923, and the mural would be preserved.

The museum contains over 85,000 artifacts relating to the history of the region in its collections. Artifacts include a 10,000-year-old sandal, memorabilia from the [Lewis and Clark Centennial Exposition](#), Native American artifacts, a miniature vehicle collection, and many everyday items from knives to wagon wheels.

Spend some time here looking at the old photographs of Oregon to see how the streets and buildings looked. You will learn about a thriving port city that attracted both heroes and scoundrels. Early on the reputation here was of a hard-edged, gritty port filled with saloons, bordellos and gambling dens. The California Gold Rush and its aftermath changed the population. Both world wars left their mark and introduced ship building to the area. In the 1940s and 50s Portland became a hub for underground criminal activity, kidnappings, and organized crime. It all culminated in a famous US Senate Select Committee in 1957 that exposed corruption with the Portland Mayor and Chief of Police. The country was rocked by investigative reporters who exposed corrupt Teamsters Union officials who took over the vice rackets.

Moving into the 1960s, an influx of hippie subculture began to take root in the city in the wake of San Francisco's burgeoning countercultural scene. The City's nearby Crystal Ballroom became a hub for the city's psychedelic side, with the Grateful Dead, Blue Cheer, and others playing here. 90s Portland bands like Everclear, Cherry Poppin Daddies, and the Decemberists all played here. A thriving local scene has developed here with bands like Blitzen Trapper, The Shins, and Blind Pilot.

The Museum's permanent exhibition, Experience Oregon, has Interactive stations throughout the exhibition include a canoe-building exercise, a covered-wagon replica visitors can walk through, role-playing games that allow visitors to take sides in historical debates, listening wands that bring out voices from the past. You will need at least an hour and a half to visit the museum and with temporary exhibits on rotation, it is always a good time to revisit. Not to mention their excellent gift shop!

Portland was originally known as "The Clearing" or "Stumptown" for all the old growth trees that were cleared for the settlement. Landowners Asa Lovejoy from Boston and Francis W. Pettygrove of Portland, Maine both wanted to name the new area after their hometowns. The question was settled over the flip of a coin. Best two out of three. Pettygrove won and the original "Portland Penny" is on display here at the museum, open daily until 5pm.

3) St. James Lutheran Church

This walkable area boasts several theaters including the Portland Center for the Performing Arts, the Portland Art Museum, NW Film Center, and the Central Library. The Portland Farmers Market has two locations within walking distance of St. James. Often called “church row” this area is full of beautiful churches and other buildings whose architecture is listed on the National Historic Registry.

The congregation was founded in 1889 by missionaries as Portland's first English-speaking [Lutheran](#) church. The first pastor was Rev. M. L. Zweizig. The cornerstone for the present building was laid in May 1907 and it is designed in the Late Gothic Revival style. Many of the original fixtures are still in use in the building, including the marble baptismal font and oak pews.

An intricately carved oak- and fir-bracketed ceiling support system in the Gothic style is a dominant feature of the interior. Large stained glass windows on the Park Avenue and Jefferson Street walls of the nave depict “Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane” and “Christ Blessing Little Children”. They are both major works by the Povey

Brothers, whose glass studio was the source of historic windows in churches and private homes throughout the Pacific Northwest.

Smaller windows and rondels were added in the decade following the dedication of the main sanctuary and bear memorial inscriptions honoring members of the parish.

A circular window depicting Jesus with a crown of thorns, above the altar, was dedicated in memory of Eugene Gelinsky, a young parishioner.

Semi-circular rows of dark oak pews face the south chancel wall and elevated altar and choir area. Carved oak altar, pulpit and lectern were created for the sanctuary in 1910, as were the painted organ pipes – a surviving part of the original [Estey Organ](#) (now modified and expanded with exposed pipework in the north balcony).

The church grew and thrived through the first half of the 20th century, and in 1956 added an educational annex, with space for classrooms and offices. The church was forced to remove the tower of the main building in 1951 due to structural deterioration. However, the tower was replaced in 1974 using historic photographs to match the original style and design as far as possible.

The Saint James building was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1975. A regular schedule of concerts,

Jazz Vespers and hymns with a classically-oriented organ make this a special place in the neighborhood.

4) Portland Building

The distinctive look of [Michael Graves'](#) Portland Building, with its use of a variety of surface materials and colors, small windows, and inclusion of prominent decorative flourishes, was in stark contrast to the architectural style most commonly used for large office buildings at the time, and made the building an icon of [postmodern architecture](#). This building's design has been described as a rejection of the [Modernist](#) principles established in the early 20th century.

This whimsical office tower was designed to represent the Northwest with an American Indian motif, making extensive use of turquoise and earth tones.

Indeed, since 1982 this building has drawn strong opinion from both the lovers and the haters. But architectural critics have to admit, that Graves design here broke the mold and pointed the direction to a return to classicism, new ideas, and better buildings.

Above the front entrance to the building kneels Raymond Kaskey's 'Portlandia', the second-largest hammered-copper statue in the world after the Statue of Liberty.

To get a better eye-level view of the sculpture, take the escalator at the front of the Standard Plaza Building up to the landing.

Based on the city seal, the 34-ft-high lady's entrance into the city in 1985 was a popular and grand affair, with residents cheering her on along the route.

The statue depicts a female figure, Lady Commerce, dressed in [classical](#) clothes, holding a [trident](#) in her left hand and reaching down with her right.

The statue is 35 feet high and weighs 6 tons.

An accompanying plaque includes the official dedication poem, also titled "Portlandia", written by Portland lawyer and poet [Ronald Talney](#):

"She kneels down, and from the quietness of copper reaches out. We take that stillness into ourselves, and somewhere deep in the earth our breath becomes her city. If she could speak this is what she would say: Follow that breath. Home is the journey we make. This is how the world knows where we are."

5) Tom McCall Waterfront Park

In 1968, Governor Tom McCall initiated a task force to study the feasibility of replacing Harbor Drive with open park space. Architects were commissioned in 1971 to design the park. Removal of Harbor Drive began in 1974 and the park was opened to the public in 1978, replacing both Harbor Way and former industrial sites. A major milestone in the freeway removal movement, it is now primarily used by those taking a stroll, eating lunch, or playing frisbee.

Broad, grassy, and well-kept, the 30-acre park affords fine ground-level views of Downtown Portland's bridges and skyline. When the cherry blossom trees bloom, it announces the arrival of spring.

Originally from Massachusetts, Tom McCall spent time growing up on his father's ranch near Prineville in Eastern Oregon. He worked as a journalist early in his career ending up at the Oregonian newspaper in Portland. After serving in the Navy during World War II McCall returned to Portland and worked in local TV news. He was elected as Oregon's Secretary of State in 1964 and he won the governor's race in 1968. From early on in his journalism career, McCall was a passionate environmentalist and pushed for long-term clean up efforts of local waterways.

Responding to rapid population growth and suburban sprawl in the 1970s, McCall became famous for a CBS interview when he told the reporter:

“Come visit us again and again. This state is full of excitement. But for heaven’s sake, don’t come here to live.”

A leading figure in passing urban growth laws and the Oregon Beach Bill which declared Oregon shores public land in 1967, McCall is honored throughout the state with schools and awards named after him. A year after his death in 1983, this park was re-named in his honor.

Wander around the park and you will find the Battleship Oregon Memorial, honoring the “Bulldog of the Navy” and its heroic battles.

The Founder’s Stone which commemorates that famous coin flip that established the name of the city.

The Japanese American Historical Plaza in memory of Japanese residents who were deported to inland internment camps during WWII.

And the Police Memorial at Southwest Jefferson which was dedicated in 1993.

6) Oregon Maritime Museum

Located along the Waterfront park, check out the sternwheeler Portland, the last operating steam-powered sternwheel tug in the U.S. The vessel uses the same technology as those at the turn of the 20th century, as evident when you tour the engine room. Volunteer docents will take you on a tour of the steamer, including the pilot house and engine room.

This paddlewheel tugboat was built in the late 1940s to wrangle commercial ships at the Port of Portland. It served in that role all the way into the 1980s, but otherwise would have been right at home a hundred years earlier.

Inside the museum you will find ship models, maritime artifacts and memorabilia. As well as objects and displays that relate to steam power, sailing vessels, battleship Oregon, underwater diving, and the shipyards during WWII that built the liberty ships and the merchant marines who sailed them.

7) Voodoo Doughnut

In 2003, two friends opened the first Voodoo Donut in this location. In 2007 Anthony Bourdain visited and his show launched the Portland brand into iconic status.

Open 24/7, Voodoo Doughnut is known for its eclectic decor, pink-neon sign, imaginative flavors and quality ingredients.

Bacon maple donuts appeared in Episode 4, Season 2 of Portlandia, and have been a fan favorite ever since. The Simpsons parodied the shop in 2012 with a cameo of “Devil Donuts”.

The NyQuil Glazed donut and the Vanilla Pepto Crushed Tums donught, did not pass local regulations and had to be pulled.

But, with names like "Voodoo Doll", "Old Dirty Bastard", "Viscous Hibiscus", "School Daze 'PBJ'", "Marshall Mathers", "Maple Blazer Blunt", and "Tangfastic", you are sure to find something in here to enjoy. I prefer my donuts sprinkled with Captain Crunch.

While riding a sugar high, be sure to take your picture in front of the 'Keep Portland Weird' sign across the street

8) Old Town Chinatown Gateway

Serving as the official entrance to Portland's Old Town Chinatown neighborhood, this 38-ft (12 m) tall "paifang" made of bronze, marble, granite, wood, tile, and steel

features eye-catching depictions of 78 dragons and 58 mythical characters. As tradition requires, one bronze lion is male and the other is female (representing yin and yang), while the Chinese letters on the front and back read "Portland Chinatown" and "Four Seas, One Family", respectively.

The gate was proposed by the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association in 1984, who've designated Taiwanese architects and artists to complete its design before having it shipped to Portland and presented to the City of Portland as "gesture of goodwill from the Chinese community". The gate is the second largest in the country after Washington, D.C.'s version.

On the outer edge of Chinatown is a remarkably authentic classical Chinese garden, designed to be appreciated in any kind of weather. You'll feel like you have stepped off a boat in ancient Suzhou, the coastal Chinese city where the entire garden was designed, packed up, and exported to be reassembled here in 2001. Different "rooms" and areas are dedicated to different types of botanicals, complete with koi-filled ponds, small buildings and shaded places to sit. Everything is placed conveniently along a path so you can just walk freely and focus on the flora and fauna.

Among other attractions in Old Town Chinatown are the Portland Saturday Market; The Old Portland Underground (Shanghai tunnels), and the original 1888 Skidmore Fountain.

8) Powell's City of Books

Powell's City of Books claims to be the largest independent new and used bookstore in the world. Indeed their flagship shop that occupy's the entire block in the Pearl Disctrict buzzes with energy and interest from biblophiles all day. Originally a car showroom, Powell's has nine color coded rooms with over Four million titles searchable online. Powell's is a great place to go if you are looking for rare or out-of-print books and manuscripts.

Walter Powell founded the store in 1971 and after rapid expansion in the 1990s and early 2000s. Ownership is still in the family and this place stands as a point of pride for residents, and as a bulwark against the national chains and ecommerce giants that dominate this space. Going to Powell's offers the chance to shop in the kind of independent bookstore that many people grew up with. Here you can see that there is not just a love of books, but a love for bookselling.

Like a trip to Pioneer Square, visiting Powell's is one of those things that you must do when visting downtown Portland.

I hope you have enjoyed this tour today and I hope your stay in Portland is filled with both wonder and joy. My name is Richard, please look to us for all of your audio tours here at City by Foot.