

# In the footsteps of Lewis and Clark:

Two centuries ago, the Lewis and Clark expedition ventured into the unknown to connect the new American nation to the Pacific

**T**HE PACIFIC Northwest is an area often defined as the northwestern corner of the United States. Its boundaries are imprecise, but it invariably refers to the coastal states of Washington and Oregon.

Various factors distinguish the region from the rest of the United States, making it a unique and attractive place to set up home.

## Washington

At the turn of the twentieth century, Washington had the dubious honour of being considered one of the roughest areas west of the Mississippi. Certainly as 'wild' as the rest of the 'Wild West', Washington merely swapped cowboys for lumberjacks.

This reputation has proved to be somewhat enduring, but the state has worked hard to shed this reputation and has experienced considerable success in this endeavour.

According to the US Census Bureau, the state population is 5.9 million and the workforce numbers some 3.1 million people.

The state's economy has adapted well to the demands of the modern market place.

The 2003 total gross product for Washington was US\$244 billion, making it the 11th most productive state in the nation. The per capita income was an average of US\$33,332 per annum.

Significant businesses now also include the design and manufacture of jet aircraft, computer software development, electronics, biotechnology, aluminium production, and mining and tourism.

Microsoft has headquarters in the state, while until 2001 Seattle was Boeing's home base until it announced its desire to separate the corporate headquarters from its major production facilities. Boeing's commercial airplanes division, several plants and the Boeing Employees Credit Union are all still located in the city. Other large employers include Amazon.com, UPS, Washington Mutual Bank and Pacar.

The state generates a significant amount of hydroelectric power and trade with Asia ensures the prosperity of the ports of the Puget Sound.

Washington is a leading agricultural state. According to the Washington Agricultural Statistics Service, the

value of Washington's agricultural produce was US\$3.2 billion, the eighth highest in the nation.

Seattle is the largest city in the region, with a population of 572,600 and a metropolitan population of 3.8 million according to the 2004 census.

Seattle is a city of many names; the 'rainy city', the 'gateway to Alaska' and the 'jet city' to name but a few, but its official nickname is the 'Emerald City'. It has a skyline made famous by the popular television show *Frasier*.

Seattle is an important bastion of modern popular culture, and is particularly famous for being the home of two things: grunge and Starbucks. It has a large multicultural population, and has experienced a considerable increase in immigration, with the foreign-born population increasing by 40 per cent between 1990 and 2000.

The cosmopolitan nature of the city is something that Elizabeth Ibrahim identifies as a positive feature. She moved to Seattle with her husband and two daughters

under the investors programme with an E-2 visa in June 2004.

"There is a huge range of different cultures – a really diverse mix of people. This diversity is celebrated with lots of different festivals."

Among Seattle's best known cultural events are the 24-day Seattle International Film Festival, Northwest Folklife and Seafair. Seattle is a noteworthy centre of the performing arts.

This liberal culture is reflected in the leftward lean of Seattle politics. Social Conservatism is especially weak in the city, with only one per cent of the population voting for George W. Bush in the 2004 presidential election. Partisan elections are dominated by the Democrats, with Greens getting more votes than in other cities.

Seattle has a more than typically educated population. Of the population over 25 years old, three per cent have a bachelors degree or higher (compared to the national average of 24 per cent), while 93 per cent have a high school diploma (the national average stands at 80 per cent).

Seattle's Public Schools are of a generally high standard, keeping 'white flight' (and middle-class flight in



Skyline at dusk in Portland, Oregon.

general) to a minimum.

However, Elizabeth UK," explains Elizabeth, "this means people are a lot more reliant on cars because they can't just walk to a train station."

"We are lucky. We live in Lake Washington School district, which is an affluent area and ranks highly among the school districts in the state. In some catchment areas, the standards of public schooling is lower."

Post-secondary education in Seattle is dominated by the University of Washington, with over 40,000 students it is the largest university in the Pacific Northwest. Seattle is also home to Seattle University and Seattle Pacific University.

"The transport system here isn't as good as in the UK," explains Elizabeth, "this means people are a lot more reliant on cars because they can't just walk to a train station."

The road networks are better than in Surrey, where we used to live. It takes 20 minutes to drive Downtown from our house, and when you arrive it's easy to find parking."

## Oregon

The Northern boarder of Oregon lies along the Columbia River, and two mountain ranges, the Coastal Range and the Cascade Range, run north-south through the state. Oregon is a state of scenic grandeur, which

# Discovering the Pacific Northwest

coast. Today, Katy Humphries takes a look at what this dynamic and vibrant region has to offer the modern migrant



View of Space Needle, Seattle Skyline and Puget Sound with Mount Rainier in background

ranges from rain-forests to arid deserts which are separated by the Cascade Mountains.

The fertility of the Willamette Valley and Western Oregon's high levels of rainfall underpin the states' strong agricultural economy. Timber production was historically important to the region, however, forest fires, over-harvesting, and law suits over the proper management of federal forests have greatly reduced the amount of lumber produced.

According to the Oregon Forest Resources Institute, timber harvested on federal lands has dropped some 96 per cent since 1989 to 173 million board feet. Even the

shift in emphasis to finished products such as paper has not stemmed the decline of the lumber industry.

Technology industries and services have been a major employer since the 1970s. The influence of companies like Tektronix and Intel have led to the nicknaming of Portland, the states largest city, as 'Silicon Forest'.

Oregon has one of the largest salmon fishing industries in the world and tourism is also strong in the state.

Henry Liebman, an immigration lawyer and president of American Life Inc, explains that the Pacific Northwest is geographically isolated, and this has had

positive and negative effects on the regional economy.

"The next big city east, Minneapolis, is over 2,000 miles away. Until the age of jet planes we were really isolated. As a result, the Pacific Northwest tends to grow its own companies."

"Improved transportation links mean that we are now able to export our produce.

To put it another way, if you eat fish or wheat, or drink wine, some of it came from here, if you use a computer fly in an aeroplane, use wood products or drink coffee, some of it came from here."

Politically, Oregon is more rightwing than Washington, but the state still leans towards the Democrats. It has supported Democratic candidates in the last five presidential elections although Republicans dominate the eastern and central regions of the state and the southwest and southern suburbs of Portland.

Straddling the Willamette River, Portland is the largest city in Oregon with a population of 538,544 and a metropolitan population of two million people.

Portland is a prime example of a well-planned city. The urban growth boundary,

established in 1974, preserves the land surrounding the city from development.

The down-side to this is high housing costs. Still, property prices are lower than most urban areas in neighbouring California and Washington and residents benefit from a more compact urban area with efficient public transport and less traffic than most similarly sized cities.

Portland is becoming more ethnically diverse. Recent trends see young people moving into the city as older families with children are moving out to the suburbs.

The population is overwhelmingly white, but this is changing, with 60 per cent of people moving to Oregon coming from racial minorities.

Portland's public schools remain rather segregated, with three of its high schools (Cleveland, Lincoln and Wilson) being 80 per cent white and three being over 70 per cent non-white (Jefferson, Marshall and Roosevelt). The remaining four schools in the city are ethnically balanced.

Compared with the national standard, Portland's students have better than average test results.

## Climate, landscape, lifestyle and leisure

The majority of the Pacific Northwest boasts a mild climate with temperatures moderated by the sea.

Liebman states that, despite common stereotypes, "it doesn't rain all the time. It is much like the Mediterranean coast of France. I prefer our moderate to damp climate to the hot and muggy summers you get back east."

Average temperatures range from lows of zero degrees Celsius at night in winter to up to highs of 30 degrees in the summer.

In Washington, the sun shines from mid-July through to mid-September, while in Oregon the season begins in June and turns to autumn in late-September.

"The climate is pretty similar to that of the UK," Elizabeth observes. "We have hotter summers here, but we don't have really high humidity."

The exception to these generalisations lies to the east of the Cascade Mountains in Oregon, an area that is dry and hot. However, this region has a low population when compared to the more popular west coast.

Wherever you live in Washington and Oregon, you'll find yourself within shouting distance of mountains, rivers, forests and lakes.

Opportunities for skiing, cycling, sailing, biking, camping and hiking are close by and accessible throughout most of the year. This has a major impact on the lifestyle offered in the Pacific Northwest. Elizabeth has found this to be one of the best things about living in the region.

"The mountains and scenery are stunning. You can find really good fun things to do here that don't cost much money. We spend a lot more time outdoors, often visiting the lakes. The only thing we miss about England is our family, if they were here it would be the perfect place to live."

■ For more information on emigrating to the Pacific Northwest, email Henry Liebman at: [henry@americanlifeline.com](mailto:henry@americanlifeline.com), or visit: [www.amlife.co.uk](http://www.amlife.co.uk)

■ For advice on obtaining a US visa contact Richard Robinson of Robinson O'Connell via e-mail: [richard@robinsonocconnell.com](mailto:richard@robinsonocconnell.com)