

A kaleidoscope of colours and sights

Ian Murray is left surprised, enthralled and delighted by America's Pacific Northwest

It's that scene we all remember, the one where Richard Gere, clad in white officer's uniform, sweeps Debra Winger off her feet to the strains of Joe Cocker's *Up Where We Belong*.

Every woman in the cinema swooned, every chap startled and wondered where he could lay his hands on a US Navy aviation dress suit.

An *Officer and a Gentleman* was one of the époque-setting movies of the 80s, and here I was in the naval base where the story was filmed. If I was excited, Mrs M was ecstatic.

Alas there was little chance of meeting either Mr Gere or even an officer cadet in his pristine white formal as we toured Fort Worden. Today preserved as a State Park, the Fort has been turned into upscale recreation accommodation as well as a theatre and museum covering some 434 acres.

The park is the jewel in the crown of Port Townsend, the beautifully preserved Victorian sea port – one of only three in the whole of the US – some two hours' drive away of from Seattle in Washington State. Set hard against the Olympic National Park and looking out over the Straits of Juan de Fuca with its resident pods of killer whales (orcas), Port Townsend is a gem of a find. For the Murrays, touring the region before setting off on a cruise from Seattle itself, the only wonder was why more Brits don't explore an area with so much to offer.

The locals describe their home as 'One of the Coolest Small Towns in America'. To be fair, the title was actually bestowed by a number of US national organisations including NBC News, Yahoo Travel and Fox News. But from our experience we weren't about to argue.

We were staying at the fabulous high-end B&B, the Ravenscroft Inn, a gorgeous colonial-style home with beautiful rooms and views from its balconies over Townsend Bay and Mount Baker. Just a short walk from the downtown area, yet secluded enough to ensure that the only noise that might disturb a peaceful stay would be an over-enthusiastic gull or raven. Owners Dave and Carolyn Petro have created their own little piece of heaven. Dave's breakfasts produced with locally sourced ingredients were truly stupendous. Our only sadness was we couldn't linger longer. (Ravenscroftinn.com).

From the Ravenscroft we were free to explore Port Townsend which is famous for its large number of art galleries and boutique stores.



Dungeness Spit near Sequim



Purple Haze lavender farm at Sequim

Dave Petro at the Ravenscroft Inn at Port Townsend



Factfile:

Travel to Seattle direct with British Airways and Delta Airlines.

More information: visitseattle.org

Washington State: experiencewa.org

Olympic Peninsula: olympicpeninsula.org
To reach the Olympic Peninsula either drive south from Seattle towards the city of Olympia and then turn north towards Port

Townsend, Sequim and Kitsap following the Hood Canal, or take the Washington State Ferry (wsdot.com) from Seattle across Puget Sound to Bainbridge Island, which takes around 40 minutes and costs around \$15 for a vehicle and driver.

Port Townsend: enjoypt.com

Sequim: vistsunnysequim.com

Kitsap Peninsula: visitkitsap.com

The town oozes charm and it's little wonder that it attracts many visitors from Seattle and beyond. Many come for the summer at Centrum, the state-of-the-art cultural centre at Fort Worden State Park. A gathering of creative artists and learners of all ages, this is actually eight festivals under one umbrella encompassing some 170 artists over 36 events.

Time spent in Port Townsend historic district is well spent, and what better way to end the day than to enjoy a meal at the Alchemy Bistro, situated near to the town's focal point, the famous Haller Fountain.

A short drive outside Port Townsend and we visited the Finnriver Farm and Ciderly to meet with owner Crystal Kiser. A Washington State certified organic farm and artisan winery, Finnriver produces handcrafted hard cider and fruit wines which proved to be superb. Choosing what to taste and what to buy in the farm shop can take a whole lot of time, and I speak from experience. (finnriver.com)

From Port Townsend we headed for one of the sunniest spots in the Pacific Northwest: The town of Sequim (pronounced 'Skwin', we were assured) gets so much

sunshine it reputedly has its own microclimate.

The Olympic Mountains are the cause, trapping the rain clouds and ensuring the climate is perfect for growing all manner of produce. It's the reason why the area is famous worldwide for its lavender fields. When the fragrant flower is in bloom, thousands of acres turn the region a distinctive purple-blue hue.

Our visits took us to two of the most visited lavender farms, Purple Haze and Jardin du Soleil. Both farms have turned lavender into a complete industry and receive visitors from around the world. If you are lucky enough to visit while the flowers are in full bloom, we learnt, then there's the chance to join in festivals, BBQ events, poetry readings and even dancing amid the heavenly scents. (Purplehazelavender.com and jardindusoleil.com)

Downtown Sequim is surprisingly busy with a main street stocked with stores, boutiques, eateries and coffee shops. Well worth setting aside a couple of hours to explore.

For local produce we were directed to Nash's Organic Produce. Here generations of the Nash family have cultivated this rich land and their story is intertwined with the produce they grow. A visit to the family grocery outlet is worthwhile, especially to soak in the atmosphere of an America that existed a generation ago – and hopefully will continue here for many years to come. (nashorganicproduce.com)

Sequim has plenty more to offer than food and lavender of course. The area is rich in biking and hiking trails, as well as golf and watersports. At the famous Olympic Game Farm – 'Home of the Waving Bears' – there's three miles of drive-through wildlife adventures for visitors to experience, including elk, wild cats and of course those cheerful bears.

And no visit to the Sequim region would be complete without a walk to the Dungeness Spit. Several miles along, the stretch of wave-assaulted sand is at once stunningly beautiful but also strangely disturbing. Nature is at work here in the raw, the sea tremendous in its power. Not to be missed. (fws.gov/refuge/Dungeness)

From Sequim we drove to Port Ludlow, a sophisticated marina development where the rich bring their yachts from Seattle for lunch at the gorgeous Resort at Port Ludlow. The occasional seaplane breaks the silence of the bay as guests arrive for a drink on the veranda. (portludlowresort.com).

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Almost directly opposite Seattle, just a half-hour ferry crossing, is the Kitsap Peninsula. It was here we were to truly question why so few of us explore just a little farther when cruising from the Pacific Northwest.

Kitsap is just a short hop and yet could be a world away from the bustle of the big city. It's no wonder that it is a favourite bolthole or even day's get-away for Seattle dwellers.

With historic links to the US Navy – there are two massive mothballed aircraft carriers that dominate the waterfront near the port of Bremerton – the region has strong ties to the ocean. Indeed Bremerton's lively waterfront with its restaurants and bars also includes the Puget Sound Naval Museum, just one of 10 museums that is funded by the US Navy. A stunning water park of imaginative fountains adjoins the museum and walked at dusk as the water plays on the fading light is tremendous fun.

The area is also home to strong native American history with museums to the Suquamish and, at Port Gamble, the S'Klallam Tribe. Do visit the Bloedel Reserve on Bainbridge Island (bloedelreserve.org) One of the most famous elders of the Suquamish nation was

Chief Seattle who gave his name to the great city across the Sound. (Suquamish.nsn.us)

Kitsap County is bounded by water and its waterways are ideal for kayaking and canoeing. There are several places to hire boats and take to the water

A must is a visit to the small, pretty town of Poulsbo – known as Little Norway for

its connections to Norwegian immigrants – which, Viking souvenirs aside, is an arts and crafts centre as well as good place to head for lunch at one of the enticing eateries.



US Naval Museum on the Kitsap Peninsula

(historicdowntownpoulsbo.com)

On the Kitsap Peninsula we were based at the Oxford Suites in Silverdale, an ideal base to explore the region. The hotel overlooks the bay and is just a short hop to many attractions. Staff were extremely welcoming and a drink on the patio while the sun slips down over the

water is just the antidote to a soul a tad tired from so much exploring. (oxfordsuittessilverdale.com)

For dinner, the Yacht Club Broiler in Silverdale again has a patio right on the waterfront and can't be beaten for good service, grand portions and the best steaks and seafood we had tasted in a while. (yachtclubbroiler.us)

Our final stop off in Kitsap was on Bainbridge Island where the town of Winslow hosts the ferry terminal for the short crossing over to Seattle, whose glittering skyscrapers can be seen across the Sound.

Winslow is another arts centre on the peninsular and as such well worth ensuring you arrive with a few hours to spare to visit the boutiques and galleries. Do leave time for lunch at the Harbour Public House, a brilliant pub overlooking the marina with stunning views from its patio and just as stunning menu. (haborpub.com)

It's hard not to look forward towards the city of Seattle as the ferry leaves Kitsap and the Olympic Peninsula and heads towards the bright lights and glittering towers across Puget Sound. And yet we were sad to say goodbye to a region that had surprised, enthralled and delighted us.



Finnriver Cidery owner Crystie Kisler