

Tips for Living

Tips for living in the US as well as Things to do in and around Portland - Marco Behrmann 07/02/2004 ¼

Number 1 Tips of Getting Around in the American Culture

The American culture is a bit different from the German one. The best way of experiencing it is first to not behave conspicuous. In the Pacific Northwest nothing and nobody is conspicuous at all – in the first place. Everything is just normal. There will be many times that you realize how normal extravagant behaviour or clothing etc. are handled.

However, with all the freedom of living there apply many rules (similar to recipes of meals) that help the people to get along with each other. Here I list a few of those things that you might be used to differently from a German background.

- Be prepared to say "Hi." To everybody and anybody. This is just as the friendly and open culture works! Also, you will not have two seconds on your own in a store ("Are you finding everything all right, today?"). Don't be annoyed by that. You might miss this service orientation once you are back in Germany.
- Being in line: Americans are best practiced line standers. Use your time in line waiting for your turn to meet interesting people.
- Individual Space: is larger than in Germany . This applies for example also if you use the bus. People would change the seat as soon as another seat gets free. Respect the individual space in order to not get sued.
- Restaurant visit:
 - Wait to be seated
 - Tipping rules: add 15% (10-20%) to the amount you had in a pub, restaurant or desert place. Really!!!
- Traffic:
 - As a pedestrian: never cross a street diagonally and only cross a street at the end of a block!!!
 - As a biker: if you want to turn right, you show this by raising your left (!) hand straight
 - As a driver:
 - Stop sign is equivalent the German "Yield"-Sign.
 - Caution with stop signs: You also have to check whether the cross road has stop signs. If it is not a four-way-stop you really will have to stop for the cross-traffic
 - Gas station: In Oregon NEVER fill your tank yourself. It is forbidden by law! You stay in your car and wait to be asked what fuel you need. BTW: Gasoline is cheaper in suburbs compared to downtown but more expensive on the coast again.
 - Always yield to pedestrians!!!
 - Freeway: if there is an exit, there is no guarantee that there also is an entrance to the highway within the next ten miles ;-) This applies also to urban freeways!!
 - What the lane markings mean:
 - Yellow line at the border of the street: no parking
 - Red line at the border of the street: no stopping
 - White line at the border of the street: here you can park
 - Yellow center line: two-way-traffic on this road
 - White center-line: one-way-only on all lanes

- Always respect police officers!
 - Rental Cars:
 - approximate costs: 10-15\$ per weekend-day, 20-25\$ per weekday, plus 10\$ obligatory liability insurance and an optional 20\$ collision damage waiver as well as 20\$ additional 20\$ insurance if you are under 25. That sounds expensive but might level if you calculate how often you might need a car. Check out Thrifty.com (guarantee the cheapest rates)
 - Never rent a car from the Airport! It is three times as expensive there!!! However, you usually can return it there for no additional fee.
 - Public Transportation: fareless square: yes, there might be places where you do not have to pay for using public transportation. (However, the Portland Streetcar is not – as formerly reported, sorry – totally free. You will have to buy and validate a one-zone ticket prior to boarding if you want to go further as Powell's bookstore, e. g. to the Nobhill area in Portland)
- Alcohol:
 - Never consume alcohol in public!
 - Always carry your ID if you want to buy alcohol (in stores or pubs)
 - Never have alcoholic beverages in the main cabin of your car! Nobody in your car is allowed to drink alcohol while you are driving. Always transport alcoholic beverages in your trunk!!!
- Coupons: Collect whatever reduction you can get ;-)
- Coffee shops: some have a punch card system, where you get your tenth for free or so. Also, you get a reduction, if you bring your personal cup

You can get more detailed information from good tour books

My favourite, however German, guide, that I really recommend, was published at:

- Iwanowski's Reisebuchverlag, Ettenheim. " USA – Nordwesten, Reisehandbuch" (2000, 3rd ed.; there might be newer editions out by now) by Dirk Krise-Etzbach.

Also, a new book that I just found published in the 2nd edition is:

- "The Portland Handbook – A practical guide to international residents"

This book includes much interesting information about not only institutions you need, places to go, sight to see, rental, insurance, public transport, buying a car etc. but also about architecture, history etc. in Portland, OR !

Very well done. You can definitely get it at Powell's. Might also be available via Amazon.

Dating Rules: I recommend a book since it is a science as its own.

I have no idea how this works in Germany without those rules...

- Dr. Judy Kuriansky (2003). "The complete idiot's guide to 'Dating'". Alpha: New York

What also helps much for getting around in the city (not as much for cultural issues, though ;-) are:

- the Yellow Pages (called "QuestDex" in Oregon)

Free Newspaper: There are weekly free newspapers with more good places and tips. For Portland , make sure to grab the

- "Willamette Week" (Wednesdays),
- "The Portland Tribune" (twice a week) or
- "The Portland Mercury"

Other Useful Tips That You Might Need in the US

- Photographing:
 - Packing: Make sure to only taking 24-picture film rolls from Germany !!! 36-exposure rolls are very expensive to develop in the US (compared to the 24-rolls) because they are just rare!!!
- Phoning:
 - Cheap (international) telephone card: "UNI" (you will get more information about this from your Orientation guides). Watch for "no connection fee".
 - Country code for Germany from the US : 01149
 - If you have no long distance carrier from your local phone company, you still can use the so-called 10 10-numbers (similar to the German 010xx-numbers), to make cheap calls to Germany. Use google for getting the cheapest rates.
 - Area code in Portland : 503 and 971 (the second one is new), 541 the rest of Oregon
- Housing:
 - Lease: Rent with a time commitment
 - Rent: usual rent, as you might know it
- Postal Service
 - There is a way to relatively cheaply sending books and copies home: "Printed Matter". You have to have different packages for textbooks and paperwork. The stuff will be sent by USPS in a sea bag. It will go by ship, so do not send pictures that might get wet (worst case, never happened to my stuff, though). It will take about six to eight weeks and you will be called from the German Customs Service to pick up your package. Make sure to ensure there that all the stuff in the box was used or given to you as a present. So, if the money value does not exceed 40 EUR, you will not have to pay tax.

What to see in Portland, OR

Finally, I have listed a couple of sights and my personal favourites to do in Portland . Since Portland was my town of exchange I do not know as many things about the other cities like Eugene , Corvallis , Ashland or La Grande. However, it would be just great if somebody could add tips about their places similar to the ones here, too! Please feel free to forward them to me (marcobehrmann[at]web.de). I do not want you to believe that just because I stayed in Portland , and have many tips here for Portland , that a year at one of the other Oregon cities is not the same exciting. The tips listed here, however, are interesting for all Baden-Wuerttemberg students in Oregon , because many things you can already see and experience during your orientation weeks.

(BTW: This is almost everything I did (among other things, of course) within my 2 ½ weeks of re-visiting in June 2004; but it took me a year of living in the city in 2001/02 to figure out which were the hot tips)

Here are my personal Must-Sees

- Oregon History Center in SW Park blocks right south of PSU (This museum features very interesting and well researched exhibitions about the development of Portland as a city as well as about the whole Pacific Northwest as it was discovered from the sea and the Columbia River; good place to check out during your orientation weeks; you get a student reduction with ISIC or other student ID card)

- Council Crest Park (considered the highest spot in Portland; nice views to Mt Hood, Mt Adams, Mt St Helens and even Mt Rainier on some days as well as to Beaverton; take Bus 51 [Vista]; the Bus driver often feels himself as an informal Portland guide; tell him that you are visiting and he even might stop for you at nice viewpoints to take pictures. If you go by bike, you cross the Vista Bridge [Nickname: Suicide Bridge], however, the hill is steep)
- Pittock Mansion (enjoy one of the best views to Portland from NW; Bus 20 [W Burnside], may need to walk a bit (The museum however is not worth the money, but the view from the Park, which is even for free!)
- Rocky Butte: Joseph Wood Hill Park (My favourite spot in NE Portland: views to Mt St Helens, Mt Hood, Mt Tabour, PDX Airport, the Columbia River, Portland downtown)
- Mount Tabour (in SE Portland [ca. SE Hawthorne & 60th] one of only two still active volcanoes within city borders worldwide; nice view downtown and to Mt Hood; take Bus 15 or the bike)
- Japanese Garden (best Portland Skyline calendar view; also make sure to see through a spot of the trees to Mt Adams)
- International Rose Test Garden (wonderful in late May and early June; again: nice views)
- Washington Park (take the red or blue westbound Maxline and make sure to check out the Washington Park station)
- NW 23rd Ave ("Nobhill"): Nice restaurants, pubs, coffee shops and shops: The In-Street [Take Portland Streetcar or Bus 15 NW23rd]
- Brew Pubs (e. g. Bridgeport Brew Pub [NE Marshall & 14th] or Lucky Labradador [SE Hawthorne & 9th], etc.)
- Happy hour appetizers at many SW Portland Restaurants (For about two dollars plus a purchase of a drink you get a good meal! And maybe enjoy the nice location. Tip about 15-20% here!).

My personal favourites:

- "Stanford's" at Riverfront Marina and
- "McCormick's & Schmick's" at Riverfront Marina as well as
- on the 30th (!) floor [the view is gorgeous!] of the US Bancorp Tower [W Burnside & 6th] the " Portland City Grill"
- People Watching: A good place for is Pioneer Courthouse Square (from the Starbucks right on the top of the fountain); but any coffee shop is just fine for people watching
- Powell's bookstore: largest independent bookstore in the world (W Burnside & 10th)
- Portland Saturday Market (Saturdays and Sundays under the west end of Burnside Bridge)
- Shopping: Lloyd Center (largest Portland downtown shopping mall; you can get there by an red or blue eastbound Maxline within fareless square; there is an ice stadion within the shopping mall)
- Portland Chinatown Gate (nicer than the one in San Francisco)
- Chrystal Springs Rhododendron Garden in SE Portland near the Reed College (Bus 19 [Woodstock], or if you take the bike, you better come from North taking 12th, because Bybee Bridge across a little creek there is closed for reconstruction until September 2004. This park is very nice early in the year (March – May when the Rhododendrons are flourishing. Admission is free on Tuesdays and Wednesdays and from November to March)
- Bike the bridges (even TriMet [the public transport company in Portland] has released a little biking guide including this tip)
- For bikers: Springwater Corridor: Very nice biking trip through all SE Portland. Start at the OMSI going south.

- You can go as far as Gresham and take the Maxline back. This paved off-traffic-trail used to be a railway track.
- Willamette Jetboat Excursion. I just did it five days ago! Wow! You will get wet. So choose a great and sunny day.
I did it once in October which probably was not the right time. They run from May to October. It is worth the money (28\$). You get many stories about all (!) Portland bridges (not only the ones in downtown!), the Willamette River, Portland's famous or well-off inhabitants, and the Willamette falls. The tour takes about 2.25 hrs and goes north as far as St John's Bridge and south as far as Oregon City on the Willamette. Board at the USS Blueback Submarine near the OMSI south of SE Hawthorne Bridge
- Seasonal: Christmas Lights:
 - SE Peacock Lane (around Christmas for one of the most known Xmas Light Streets in Portland)
 - The Grotto (very nice at Christmas for the Xmas Lights, but also nice Mt St Helens & Mt Adams views during the day from the upper level where the convent is located; use elevator for a small fee)
 - Oregon Zoo (in Washington Park : also Christmas Light Parade)
- Oregon City:
 - Oregon Trail Center (good tour and very good tourist information center)
 - Willamette Falls
 - Oregon City's "public" elevator

This is what you might want to see, but in my opinion is not among the upper priorities

- Willamette Stone State Park (the smallest State Park of Oregon, in NW Portland; this is basically the zero meridian for the West of the US from where every claim used to be referred to. Right on the border between two counties near the big cemeteries. Nearby: Nice views to Mt St. Helens. Take Bus 20 [W Burnside] and good hiking shoes. You might want to connect this trip with your Pittock Mansion visit)
- Mill's End Park (smallest park in the world, Guinness book of records [SW Naito & Taylor]; my flowerpot at home is smaller, though...)
- USS Blueback Submarine Tour (quite interesting, but just a submarine; it was one of the submarines used in the movie "The Hunt for Red October" (Sean Connery) before it was brought to Portland)
- OMSI: Oregon Museum of Science and Industry (you can really leave this out if you do not have kids with you)
- Oregon Maritime Museum: at the Waterfront (SW Naito Ave near the Saturday Market). However, the steam wheeler on the waterfront belongs to that museum too. The movie Maverick (w/ Jodie Foster) was filmed on that boat.)
- Ira Keller's fountain (east of PSU campus near the PSU bookstore)
- Oak's Amusement Park (in SE Portland at the Willamette): a good place to spend money, though... ;-)
- Oregon City : John Mc Laughlin House (just a house...)
- Vancouver, WA : historic Fort, historic Victorian houses (Marshall's row)