

## 72 Hours in Salem

Written by James Sinks

Photos by Krista Rossow



*photo by Krista Rossow*

Government at work is like making sausage: You don't really want to see how it's done. Oregon's capital city would like to challenge that notion.

Salem, surrounded by farmland in the central Willamette Valley, is home to roughly 158,000 people and one gold-plated Oregon Pioneer. The eight-ton statue—once dubbed the “burly woodsman”—stands atop the Capitol, looking westward, and unwittingly posing for lots of photos.

Away from the statehouse, Salem has an array of enticements to stay: eateries, farmstands, museums, shops, wineries and breweries, a carousel with hand-carved horses, and access to waterfall-laced Silver Falls State Park, the largest in the state park system.

If that doesn't earn your vote, then consider this: There's also really good cake. Initially called Chemeketa, or “resting place” in the local Kalapuya language, the city was platted by Methodists who'd trekked the Oregon Trail hoping to convert American Indians but with

scant success. Parcels in the city were sold to help finance their college, which would become Willamette University, the oldest university west of the Mississippi.

Soon after its founding, Salem vied with three other cities—Corvallis, Eugene and Oregon City—for the right to become the state capital. The tug-of-war wasn't settled until 1864, five years after statehood.

During the fray, the state's first Capitol building in Salem caught fire, in 1855, only a month after being occupied. The second Capitol was a little more fire resistant and didn't burn to the ground until 1935.



*photo by Krista Rossow*

The current marble building, one of two Art Deco-style statehouses in the nation, opened in 1938. It survived a blaze in 2008 that gutted much of the governor's office.

As the holiday season nears, the Capitol mall is decorated with snowflake lights. Inside, a redolence of fresh-cut firs wafts into the rotunda as holiday songs pour from visiting school choirs.



*photo by Krista Rossow*

You won't find lit candles inside, however. The Capitol's fiery history has snuffed out that possibility.

## **Memorials, Museums, and More**

When legislators are called to work, their Capitol offices echo with repetitive chimes. Thankfully, your day starts with the hiss of an espresso machine at the Governor's Cup, a brick-walled landmark in Salem's downtown district.



*photo by Krista Rossow*

From there, it's a four-block stroll to the Capitol mall. Your first stop: Oregon's handsome new World War II memorial, dedicated this year. The \$1.2 million plaza is set around a three-story granite obelisk and includes the engraved names of 3,771 Oregonians killed in the war.





The mall has rows of cherry trees, which attract droves of people for spring's blossoms. On the walkways, stone plaques underfoot dole out Oregon trivia such as the founding dates of counties.

The Capitol, open weekdays, houses the legislature, governor, treasurer, and the secretary of state, plus murals, interpretive displays, and a vault that once held the state's money and bonds. Today, that vault is used as a storage closet with a really heavy door.

Oregon's lawmakers are famously accessible, so don't be surprised to spot them during session, which starts in January.

Hungry after watching sausage making? Find the good kind—and other carnivore fare—at Adam's Rib Smokehouse up the street near the Supreme Court building.



*photo by Krista Rossow*

Across State Street from the Capitol is Willamette University and the Hallie Ford Museum of Art. Oregon's third-largest art museum has a permanent collection of more than 6,000 items, including paintings from Northwest modernists, Asian ceramics and historical artifacts from across the globe.

A somber chapter in Oregon's past waits at the Oregon State Hospital Museum of Mental Health on Center Street. The once-decrepit asylum was the backdrop for the Hollywood rendition of Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, and you can view props, as well as a creepy metal operating table where real-life lobotomies were performed on patients. A nearby memorial displays copper cans of unclaimed ashes of cremated people, once kept in the state hospital basement.

Finish your tour with a pint at Boon's Treasury on Liberty Street, the site of the state's first state treasury, now one of the historical sites rehabbed by Portland's McMenamin family.

If you enjoy French fare, make reservations in advance at Crooked House Bistro in West Salem. Or, if there's a show at the gothic-inspired Elsinore Theater downtown, dine at venerable Da Vinci Ristorante, where the din of lobbyists and piano mingle like garlic and Italian food.

## **Silver Falls, Buena Vista Ferry, Cake**

The star attraction of Oregon's state parks is a twenty-mile drive to the east. That gives ample time to mow through several cinnamon-dusted apple cider doughnuts from EZ Orchards Farm Market, which makes them six days a week in the fall.

Silver Falls State Park encompasses roughly 9,200 acres of forestland, and touts fishing, camping and a look at the backside of water. Because waterfalls here tumble from basalt and onto softer rock, erosion has created a passage to walk behind them.

The nine-mile Canyon Trail loop will take you to around ten falls, including 177-foot South Falls. Longer trails beckon mountain bikers.

After you've worked up an appetite and some numb fingers, warm up—inside and out—at Gilgamesh Brewing. Their jalapeño mac 'n' cheese (\$9) comes in five levels of heat, and medium can make you sweat. The wide drink selection is an Oregon-only affair, with cocktails, cider and beer, including a tea-infused brew.



In Salem's early years, the availability of hops made it a hub for beermaking, with the first brewery founded in 1862. Today, Rogue Farm Hopworks is a beer-lover's twist on the vineyard tour, with a tasting room set among a latticework of hop trellises to the south of town.

En route, hop the four-car Buena Vista Ferry, if it's running (\$3 per vehicle, bring cash). If wine is your fancy, take in the view and renovated tasting room at Willamette Valley Vineyards, which overlooks acres of vineyards outside of nearby Turner. The \$6 million overhaul added an open kitchen, an outdoor seating plaza with a fireplace and swanky guest suites.



*photo by Krista Rossow*

Finally, the cake.

Gerry Frank's Konditorei on Kearney Street, serves forty-two cake and cheesecake varieties, available by the slice for \$5.95. You can't go wrong, unless you have been counting calories on this trip.





*photo by Krista Rossow*

Frank moved to Salem in 1954 to run the local Meier and Frank store, and later was longtime chief of staff for the recently departed United States Sen. Mark Hatfield. Frank knows a thing or two about cake: He's judged them at the Oregon State Fair for fifty-five years.

People often express surprise to learn that he lives in Salem, he said, when he could be anywhere in the world. When that happens, he invites them to visit.

"I like the place and I like the people," he chuckled. "You will too."