

# ABOUT THIS GUIDE

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**seattle**

## NORDIC CULTURAL HERITAGE GUIDE

MUSEUMS • LANDMARKS • HERITAGE SITES • SPECIAL EVENTS



Photo: Don Wilson/Port of Seattle



Fishermen's Terminal | Photo: Don Wilson/Port of Seattle

## INTRODUCTION

Immigrants from Nordic countries – Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Iceland and Finland – settled in large numbers in the Pacific Northwest in the late 19th century, drawn to a landscape of saltwater fjords, farmland, forests and mountains that reminded them of home. By 1910, these Scandinavians were the largest ethnic group in Washington State, comprising over 30 percent of the foreign-born population.

*“Immigrants from Nordic countries were drawn to a landscape of saltwater fjords, farmland, forests and mountains that reminded them of home.”*

Letters from immigrants to their friends and family back home described economic opportunities around Seattle, and these letters were supplemented by pamphlets in Swedish and Norwegian from transcontinental railroads promoting lands available for settlement.

Many Nordic immigrants worked as fishermen and in canneries, as loggers and in mills, and as farmers, miners and boat builders. In rural communities, settlers constructed hand-hewn log houses with notched corners reflecting Old World craftsmanship, and farmers worked together to form cooperatives that reflected traditional social values.

In urban settings such as Seattle and Tacoma, Swedish and Norwegian language newspapers thrived, and numerous churches and social organizations were established to provide a safety net and sense of community for the region’s Nordic population. Many iconic local businesses were established by Nordic immigrants and their descendants, including Nordstrom department stores, and Ivar’s Seafood Restaurants founded by Ivar Haglund, the “King of the Waterfront.”

Today, Seattle’s Nordic heritage is celebrated through traditional festivals, exhibits, and performances. Organizations such as the Sons of Norway, Daughters of Norway, Swedish Cultural Center, Northwest Danish Association, Icelandic Club, Finlandia Foundation and Swedish Finn Historical Society document genealogy and community history, and sponsor special events throughout the year.



St. Lucia's Day | Photo: Jack Storms

**SEATTLE CULTURAL HERITAGE GUIDES** are a resource for visitors who want to explore the city’s rich cultural heritage. Learn about museums, historic sites, public art and neighborhoods that will give you an insider’s view of Seattle’s vibrant ethnic communities and unique history.

The guides are produced by the Cultural Tourism program of Visit Seattle, and supported by funding from **4Culture** (King County Lodging Tax) and the **Office of Arts and Culture**.

Learn more about Seattle and access expert travel advice at [visitseattle.org](http://visitseattle.org). Or stop by one of our Visitor Information Centers at 1st & Pike in downtown Seattle or the main floor of the Washington State Convention Center at 7th & Pike.

Our sincere thanks to all the community members who helped contribute to this project and who preserve and protect Seattle’s cultural legacies.

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[visitseattle.org/culturalheritage](http://visitseattle.org/culturalheritage)

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Cover photo: Viking Fest | Photo courtesy of the Nordic Heritage Museum

# SPECIAL EVENTS

## NORDIC LIGHTS FILM FESTIVAL

January, SIFF Film Center

Contemporary, award-winning films from Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden are presented at this annual event sponsored by the Nordic Heritage Museum in partnership with the Seattle International Film Festival. [nordicmuseum.org/nlff](http://nordicmuseum.org/nlff)

## SYTTENDE MAI NORWEGIAN CONSTITUTION DAY

May 17, Market Street in Ballard

On this day in 1814, Norway's Constitution was signed, and the anniversary is celebrated in towns throughout Norway with parades and other festivities. In Seattle, the day has been celebrated since 1889 with proclamations, speeches, and a parade. Ballard's celebration includes one of the largest parades outside of Norway and is a joyful and historic community celebration. [17thofmay.org](http://17thofmay.org)

## SKANDIA MIDSOMMARFEST

Late June, St. Edward State Park in Kenmore

The Skandia Folkdance Society Midsommarfest features traditional music and dancing, the raising of a garlanded Midsommar pole, a crafts market, and specialty foods. This organization also sponsors classes and performances throughout the year. [skandia-folkdance.org](http://skandia-folkdance.org)

## VIKING DAYS

August, Nordic Heritage Museum in Ballard

A sanctioned Seafair event, the Viking Days annual weekend celebration features traditional foods, folk music and dancing, crafts, demonstrations and activities, and Viking reenactments. The Nordic Heritage Museum sponsors other events throughout the year, including a traditional Yulefest in November. [nordicmuseum.org](http://nordicmuseum.org)

## LEIF ERIKSON DAY

October, Sons of Norway Lodge in Ballard

While Norse sagas do not record Erikson's birthday, the hero of Scandinavian immigrants is commemorated in the U.S. on the anniversary of the first landing of a Norwegian immigrant ship, the *Restauration*, in 1825 in New York. The Leif Erikson International Foundation sponsors a celebration most years at Ballard's Sons of Norway Leif Erikson Lodge. [leiferiksonlodge.com](http://leiferiksonlodge.com)

## SAINT LUCIA'S DAY

December, Various locations

One of the few saint's days traditionally observed in Sweden, the Feast of Saint Lucia features a procession led by a young woman wearing a crown of candles. Saint Lucia's Day celebrations are held each year at the Swedish Club and various Seattle churches including Our Redeemer's Lutheran Church in Ballard and First Covenant Church on Capitol Hill. [swedishclubnw.org](http://swedishclubnw.org)



Skandia Midsommarfest | Photo: Sy Bean/The Seattle Times



Viking Days | Photo: Nordic Heritage Museum



Saint Lucia procession, First Covenant Church Julfest | Photo: Swedish Singers of Seattle



Reykjavik Calling | Photo: Matthew B. Thompson



Syttende Mai Parade, Photo: Mark Harrison/The Seattle Times

## YA SURE, YA BETCHA! IT'S BALLARD!

While Scandinavians settled throughout the Puget Sound region, the Ballard neighborhood is most closely associated with Nordic heritage. Located northwest of downtown, Ballard was settled in the 1860s and incorporated as its own city in 1890. It was annexed by Seattle in 1907.

*"Today, Ballard Avenue's modest commercial buildings from the 1890s through the 1930s are home to boutiques, galleries, restaurants and live music clubs."*

Once known as the **Shingle Capital of the World**, Ballard's milling and ship building industries provided employment, while restaurants, businesses, and social clubs catered to Nordic immigrants.

The nearby **Hiram Chittenden Locks** opened in 1917, connecting Lake Washington and Lake Union with Puget Sound through the **Ship Canal**. Nordic fishermen rallied the Port of Seattle to create fresh water public moorage along the Canal, which led to the

establishment of **Fishermen's Terminal**, now home to one of the world's largest fleets of fishing vessels.

King Olav V of Norway dedicated the **Bergen Place Park** (5420 22nd Avenue NW) in 1975, in the name of Seattle's Norwegian sister city. In 1976, King Carl XVI Gustaf of Sweden read an official proclamation establishing the **Ballard Avenue Historic District**, the commercial area south of Market Street. He also dedicated the small park located on the site of Ballard's Old City Hall, now called **Marvin's Garden** (22nd Avenue NW and Ballard Avenue).

Today, Ballard Avenue's modest commercial buildings from the 1890s through the 1930s are home to boutiques, galleries, restaurants and live music clubs. A Sunday market of farmers and craftspeople draws visitors year-round. **Market Street, 15th Avenue NW** and **24th Avenue NW** are home to a handful of Scandinavian bakeries, gift shops and traditional food markets.

Walking guides to the Ballard Avenue Historic District are available at [seat.tl/BallardWalk](http://seat.tl/BallardWalk) and [ballardhistory.org](http://ballardhistory.org).

# NORDIC HERITAGE SITES



## A. NORDIC HERITAGE MUSEUM

Until 2017: 3014 NW 67th Street, 206.789.5707  
Opening 2018: 2655 NW Market Street

The center of Seattle's Nordic community is the Nordic Heritage Museum in Ballard, and it is the only museum in the U.S. that represents the cultural heritage of all five Nordic countries: Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden. Permanent exhibits highlight Nordic culture, the immigration experience, and settlement in the Pacific Northwest, while special exhibits feature contemporary and historic arts and cultural themes. The museum presents a wide range of programs including contemporary art exhibits, concerts, lectures, and events such as the Mostly Nordic Chamber Music series and Yulefest. [nordicmuseum.org](http://nordicmuseum.org)



## E. SWEDISH CLUB

1920 Dexter Avenue N, 206.283.1090

Founded in 1892 by newly arrived Swedish immigrants, this organization's current facility overlooking Lake Union was built in 1960, and is a striking example of mid-century Modern architecture. The Club hosts performances, classes, and special events such as a famed monthly Swedish pancake breakfast. [swedishclubnw.org](http://swedishclubnw.org)



## F. OLD NORWAY HALL (NOW RAISBECK PERFORMANCE HALL)

2015 Boren Avenue, 800.726.ARTS

Commissioned by the Sons and Daughters of Norway, this social hall built in 1915 originally featured carved dragons on each of the four gables, and hosted dances and social events for Seattle's large Norwegian immigrant community. The dragons have moved on, but the building retains some traditional Norwegian design elements. After serving as a dance club for many years, the Hall is now a classroom and performance venue for Cornish College of the Arts. Original murals were relocated to the Sons of Norway Leif Erikson Lodge at 2245 NW 57th Street in Ballard. [seat.tl/oldnorwayhall](http://seat.tl/oldnorwayhall)



## G. SWEDISH HOSPITAL

1201 Madison Street [location of historical displays]

More than a century ago, Dr. Nils Johanson, a surgeon and Swedish immigrant, convinced ten of his fellow Swedish Americans to buy \$1,000 bonds in order to finance the opening of Swedish Hospital. Historical displays feature the stories and people associated with this internationally recognized medical center, and the history of the surrounding First Hill neighborhood. [seat.tl/swedishhistory](http://seat.tl/swedishhistory)



## H. WASHINGTON HALL

153 - 14th Avenue, 206.622.6952

The local chapter of the Danish Brotherhood in America commissioned the construction of Washington Hall in 1908 to serve the Danish immigrant community as a fraternal lodge, settlement house and social center. As a performing arts venue, Washington Hall has hosted artists such as Duke Ellington, Jimi Hendrix and Billie Holiday. Restored by Historic Seattle, the hall now serves as an event space in one of Seattle's most ethnically diverse neighborhoods. [washingtonhall.org](http://washingtonhall.org)



## B. LEIF ERIKSON STATUE

Shilshole Bay Marina, 7001 Seaview Avenue NW

At the entrance to one of the largest marinas on the West Coast, an imposing statue of Leif Erikson looks toward the water, in keeping with Viking tradition. According to Norse sagas, Erikson was the first European to visit North America, in 1000 AD, and he is a folk hero for generations of Nordic immigrants.

The statue was created by sculptor August Werner, and was originally unveiled for the 1962 Seattle World's Fair. It is now surrounded by a series of runic-like stones with Viking designs created by artist Jay Haavik, and a tribute to Nordic immigrants. [leiferikson.org](http://leiferikson.org)



## C. FISHERMEN'S TERMINAL

3919 - 18th Avenue W, 206.787.3395

Since 1914, this terminal has been a home port for the North Pacific fishing fleet, providing fresh water moorage for a variety of fishing vessels, many operated by second and third generation Norwegian families. A ceremonial Blessing of the Fleet is held each May, and a Fishermen's Memorial honors those lost at sea. These working docks are busiest in spring as crews prepare to depart for the summer fishing season, to catch halibut, cod, salmon and crab. [seat.tl/fishermensterminal](http://seat.tl/fishermensterminal)



## D. EDVARD GRIEG STATUE

Skagit Lane, University of Washington Campus

Seattle hosted its first world's fair, called the Alaska Yukon Pacific Exposition, in 1909 where the University of Washington is now located. The Norwegian and Swedish communities participated in that celebration, the former building a replica Viking ship to sail across Lake Washington. Another Nordic cultural legacy of the AYPE is a statue of Norwegian composer Edvard Grieg, located in a quiet grove just northwest of Suzzallo Library, near the heart of the Neo-Gothic university campus. [uw.edu/visit](http://uw.edu/visit)



## FURTHER AFIELD

### TOWN OF POULSBO

Kitsap County

This historic waterfront town on Liberty Bay, an inlet of Puget Sound, is located approximately one hour west of Seattle, via the Bainbridge or Kingston ferries. Poulsbo has earned the moniker "Little Norway" for its strong ties to the Nordic heritage of its 19th century settlers. A prominent Sons of Norway Hall anchors Front Street, which is lined with bakeries, boutiques and antique shops, and the hilltop First Lutheran Church built in 1886 watches over the town. Walking tours are offered by the Poulsbo Historical Society, [poulsbohistory.org](http://poulsbohistory.org). The community hosts special events and festivals throughout the year. [poulsbochamber.com](http://poulsbochamber.com)

### MARY OLSON FARM

28728 Green River Road, Auburn

Named for the matriarch of a Swedish American family who immigrated in the 1890s, this historic farmstead is tucked into a wooded canyon approximately one hour south of Seattle. The farmstead includes a restored 1902 farmhouse and 1897 hay barn, and is operated (limited seasonal hours) by the White River Valley Museum. [wrvmuseum.org](http://wrvmuseum.org)

### STILLAGUAMISH VALLEY

Vicinity of Stanwood

Many Nordic immigrants settled in the Stillaguamish Valley in the late 19th century, establishing prosperous dairy farms. Timber frame barns still dot the agricultural landscape along the Pioneer Highway (from SR 530), 1.5 hours north of Seattle. Notable historic sites include Silvana's Peace Lutheran Church, or the "Little White Church on the Hill," built in 1890, and the Toftzone Memorial in Stanwood's Lutheran Cemetery, dedicated by Crown Prince Olav of Norway in 1939, in honor of the first Norwegian settler to Puget Sound. The Stanwood Area Historical Society interprets local history. [sahs-fncc.org](http://sahs-fncc.org)

### HOVANDER HOMESTEAD PARK

5299 Neilsen Avenue, Ferndale

This pioneer-era farm was built by a Swedish immigrant family, and includes 350 acres on the Nooksack River, approximately two hours north of Seattle. [seat.tl/hovanderhomestead](http://seat.tl/hovanderhomestead)

Clockwise from top left: Poulsbo, photo by Sea Turtle; Mary Olson Farm, photo courtesy of White River Valley Museum; Peace Lutheran Church near Silvana, photo by Holly Taylor; Toftzone Memorial 1939, photo courtesy of Stanwood Area Historical Society.



## DID YOU KNOW?

- The terms **Nordic** and **Scandinavian** are often used inter-changeably. Traditionally, Scandinavia refers to the countries of Norway, Sweden and Denmark, while the list of Nordic countries also includes Iceland and Finland. The term Nordic is generally preferred in the community, as it is more inclusive.
- When they are not going after King crab in Alaska's Bering Sea, some of the vessels featured on the television series *The Deadliest Catch* are homeported at Seattle's Fishermen's Terminal, which was founded in part by Norwegian fishermen.
- The weekly newspaper *The Western Viking*, founded in Ballard in 1889, is the oldest Norwegian newspaper in the U.S. It continues publication as the *Norwegian American*. [norwegianamerican.com](http://norwegianamerican.com)
- The University of Washington's **Scandinavian Studies Department**, which celebrated its centennial in 2009, is one of the largest in the U.S. [scandinavian.uw.edu](http://scandinavian.uw.edu)

- The Scandinavian Hour*, a fixture on Seattle radio for more than half a century, is currently heard on radio KKNW 1150 AM on Saturday mornings, and features interviews, announcements about community events, and accordion, fiddle and dance music. [thescandinavianhour.com](http://thescandinavianhour.com)
- Bergen, Norway** became Seattle's second sister city in 1967, and **Reykjavik, Iceland** became a sister city in 1986. KEXP public radio sponsors a music exchange known as **Reykjavik Calling**.
- One of the city's best-known arts events is the Seattle Opera's production every four years of the *Ring Cycle*, which was written by German composer Richard Wagner, and was inspired in part by Norse mythology. [seattleopera.org/ring](http://seattleopera.org/ring)



DENMARK



FINLAND



ICELAND



NORWAY



SWEDEN



Wagner's Ring Cycle at Seattle Opera, Photo: Elise Bakketun