ABOUT THIS GUIDE

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 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.

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.

SPECIAL EVENTS

NORDIC CULTURAL HERITAGE GUIDE

MUSEUMS + LANDMARKS + HERITAGE SITES + SPECIAL EVENTS

YA SURE, YA BETCHA! IT’S BALLARD!

Marvin’s Garden

The nearby opened in 1917, connecting Lake Washington and Lake Union with Puget Sound through the Ship Canal public moorage along the Canal, which led to the establishment of numerous small businesses catering to the recreational interests of the city’s residents.

Bergen Place Park

A small park located on the site of Ballard’s Old City Hall, now called Market Street, is home to a handful of businesses catering to Nordic immigrants.

While Scandinavians settled throughout the Puget Sound region, Ballard was settled in 1907 by Swedish immigrants from transcontinental railroads promoting lands available for settlement.

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SYTTENDE MAI NORWEGIAN CONSTITUTION DAY

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SPECIAL EVENTS
INTRODUCTION

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 to Seattle in 1907.

“Today, Ballard’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 Fisherman’s Terminal, now home to one of the world’s largest fleets of fishing vessels.

King Olav V of Norway dedicated the Bergan 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 Ballard neighborhood is most closely associated with Nordic heritage.

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 parades, speeches, and a parade. Ballard’s celebration includes one of the largest parades outside of Norway and a joyful and historic community celebration. 17thofmay.org

SKANDIA MIDSOMMARFEST
Last 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

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

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. leif Eriksonodge.com

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/nff

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SANT 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

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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 visit Ballard.org.
NORDIC HERITAGE SITES

A. NORDIC HERITAGE MUSEUM

Uvel 2077, N. 36.9 53.0 1.707
Opening 2019. 2615 N.W. 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 Yulafest. nordicmuseum.org

B. LEIF ERIKSON STATUE

Shidhola Bay Marina, 7901 Ferris Avenue NW

At the entrance to one of the largest marinas on the
West Coast, an imposing statue of Leif Erikson looks
out toward the water, in keeping with Viking tradition.
According to Norse legend, Erikson was the first
Norwegian to visit North America, in 1000 AD, and he
is a folk hero for generations of Norwegian 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
run-of-the-mill stones with Viking designs created by
artist Jay Wieland, and a tribute to Norwegian immigrants.
liefukerk.org

C. FISHERMEN’S TERMINAL

34th—26th Avenue W. 266.792.1391

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 Fishermans’ 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. seatl/fishermensterminal

D. EDVARD GRIEG STATUE

Mozart Ave., 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/edvard

E. SWEDISH CLUB

2120 Divisadero N, 206.283.2090

Founded in 1912 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

F. OLD NORWAY HALL

(Now Rasbeck Performance Hall)

2305 Nona Avenue, N. 206.572.2873

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. seattoldnorwayhall

G. SWEDISH HOSPITAL

1205 Main Street (Featue of historical display)

More than a century ago, Dr. Nik Johnson, 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. seattlwashedhistory

H. WASHINGTON HALL

315–4th Avenue, 206.622.4952

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

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, or the “Little White Church on the Hill,” built
in 1890, is a folk hero for generations of Nordic immigrants. The
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MARY OLSON FARM

29728 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

STILLAGUAMISH VALLEY

Ferry of Norden

Many Nordic immigrants settled in the Stillaguamish Valley in the late 19th
century, establishing prosperous dairy farms. Timber frame barns still
lie along the Pioneer Highway, but the largest is the State of Washington’s
labour of love, the historic “Ferry of Norden.” The project’s mission
is to preserve this significant engineering feat by raising funds for the
restoration of the現役 ferry. ferryofnorden.com

HOVANDER HOMESTEAD PARK

5299 Nooksack 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. seatl/hovanderhomestead

DO YOU KNOW?

• The terms Nordic and Scandinavian are often used interchangeably. 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

• 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

• The Scandinavian Hour, a fixture on Seattle radio for more than half a century, is currently heard on radio KIXX 1150 AM on
Saturday mornings, and features interviews, announcements about community events, and accordion, fiddle and dance music.
thescandinavianhour.com

• Bergan, Norway became Seattle’s second sister city in 1967, and Reykjavik, Iceland became a sister city in 1968. 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, but was inspired in part by Norse mythology. seattleopera.org/ring

DENMARK
FINLAND
ICELAND
NORWAY
SWEDEN