

By Elianna Lev, The Canadian Press, thecanadianpress.com, Updated: March 14, 2011 12:17 PM

Seattle full of secret spots for travellers

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The Smith Tower in downtown Seattle, lower right, once the tallest building west of Ohio, is dwarfed by taller buildings now, as seen Feb. 21, 2007. For travellers who take the much-journeyed road trip along the Pacific Northwest, Seattle is known as one of the mandatory big-city destinations along the way. And yet, there's seemingly endless charming and historical secret spots throughout the city, begging to be discovered. It's enough to warrant Seattle as a stand-alone destination. THE CANADIAN PRESS/ AP- The Seattle Times, Dean Rutz

Project could easily have been modelled after rock 'n' roll itself. It's often hard to wrap your head around and easy to get lost. Be sure to refer to the museum's program guide.

If you're looking for another destination to stimulate your senses, treat yourself to a tour of the Theo chocolate factory located in Fremont, a neighbourhood famous for its giant Lenin statue.

The chocolate company, which produces up to 128,000 bars per week, bills itself as the "first certified organic and fair trade chocolate maker in the United States," among other things.

"We're a true bean-to-bar maker," said Dana Kemmerling, the company's national events manager.

That means they make chocolate bars and truffles from scratch, using imported, fair trade cocoa beans. Melters, on the other hand, purchase chocolate couverture, melt it down and then add other flavouring.

Visitors to the five-year-old chocolate factory are taken on a one-hour tour, which starts with a 20-minute educational segment about where cocoa beans actually come from and ends at the machine that turns the chocolate into bars.

"There's very few chocolate factories where you can get as up-close and personal as you do here. You learn so much," said Kemmerling. "Most folks don't realize that chocolate comes from the seed of a fruit."

Not to mention the generous samples provided along the way, which start with the company's purest bar (read: bitter) to its sweetest. Theo's tours have proven to be a real hit with both tourists and local residents.

SEATTLE - For travellers who make the popular road trip along the Pacific Northwest coast, Seattle is known as one of the mandatory big-city destinations along the way.

But there are enough secret, charming and historical spots throughout the city, begging to be discovered, to make it a great stand-alone destination.

Take the Experience Music Project as just one example. It's an unavoidable tourist destination, due entirely to the perplexing multicoloured structure of the building, which architect Frank Gehry modelled after the interiors of a guitar.

Yet, while the highly interactive rock 'n' roll museum is famous for its three-storey art installation, made entirely of guitars, and its tribute to Jimi Hendrix, it's also home to another little-known yet equally compelling destination: the Science Fiction Museum.

For any true fan of the genre — and it's safe to say there are many of them out there — this spot will provide plenty of entertainment, although sections are currently closed for the preparation of the upcoming "Avatar" exhibit, scheduled for June 2011.

There's still lots to take in. The museum's current feature is "Battlestar Galactica: The Exhibition," a selection of props and costumes from the iconic show, which originally aired in 1978 and then was revamped as a new series in 2003.

One warning before visiting the museum: the floor plan of the Experience Music

"We've definitely become a destination location," said Kemmerling. "We have some pretty diehard fans who've come on this tour eight or nine times."

If you're looking for a more historical, and panoramic, perspective of the city, head over to the Smith Tower, located in downtown Seattle.

Built in 1914 by tycoon Lyman Cornelius Smith, the 42-floor building was the fourth tallest in the world, making it the only skyscraper outside of New York.

Smith was a manufacturer who'd taken his products, which included firearms and typewriters, to China.

The Chinese were so thrilled that they gave him a hand carved ceiling and black carved wood furniture which now decorate the tower's big selling feature — the Chinese Room and observatory deck. Located on the 35th floor, it offers visitors a 360-degree view of the city.

There's one piece of furniture in the Chinese Room that has many single women making the trip up the tower. The 330-year-old Wishing Chair is said to guarantee any single woman sincerely desiring marriage will be hitched within a year.

"A great number of women make a bee-line for the chair when they get off the elevator," said Peter Michaels, the room's manager. "A great number of them love to tell us how they met their spouses. It's quite entertaining."

If you go . . .

More information on Seattle and its attractions can be found at www.empsfm.org, www.smithtower.com, www.theochocolate.com, www.visitseattle.org

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