

One Family's Northwest Adventure

A four-day road trip loops from bustling Seattle through western Washington's scenic Cascade Range

By Joanna Nesbit
Photographs by Rob Casey

OUR FAMILY HAD VISITED SEATTLE MANY TIMES, usually to see friends rather than play tourist. And every time we went, the kids would bring up the Space Needle. In short, they begged to go, and we would say, "Some other time." After all, we live only an hour and a half north of the city. We could go anytime. But after realizing all the places Leah, age 10, and Ty, 7, had never seen in our home state, my husband, Curt, and I decided that a four-day trip around western Washington, including a day and a half in Seattle, was in order.

We planned all the quintessential Seattle excursions: going to the top of the city's famous spire in Seattle Center's World's Fair site, taking a Duck tour, riding the monorail, touring Pike Place, and walking the waterfront. For the remainder of our adventure, we opted for the Washington less traveled: a mountain route east over the rugged North Cascades. Besides providing a wilderness escape after our city stay, this route would capture Washington's diverse landscape. From the bucolic evergreen valleys on the west side of the mountains to the dry ranch country on the east, and through all the little towns in between, it would give our kids a taste of what Washington has to offer and remind us of why we love it. During two and a half days, we'd pack in waterfall sightings, train-history lessons, fun hikes, and a stay in a Bavarian mountain town. Here's how our adventure unfolded.



Seattle's Space Needle



Pike Place Market in Seattle



Downtown Cle Elum

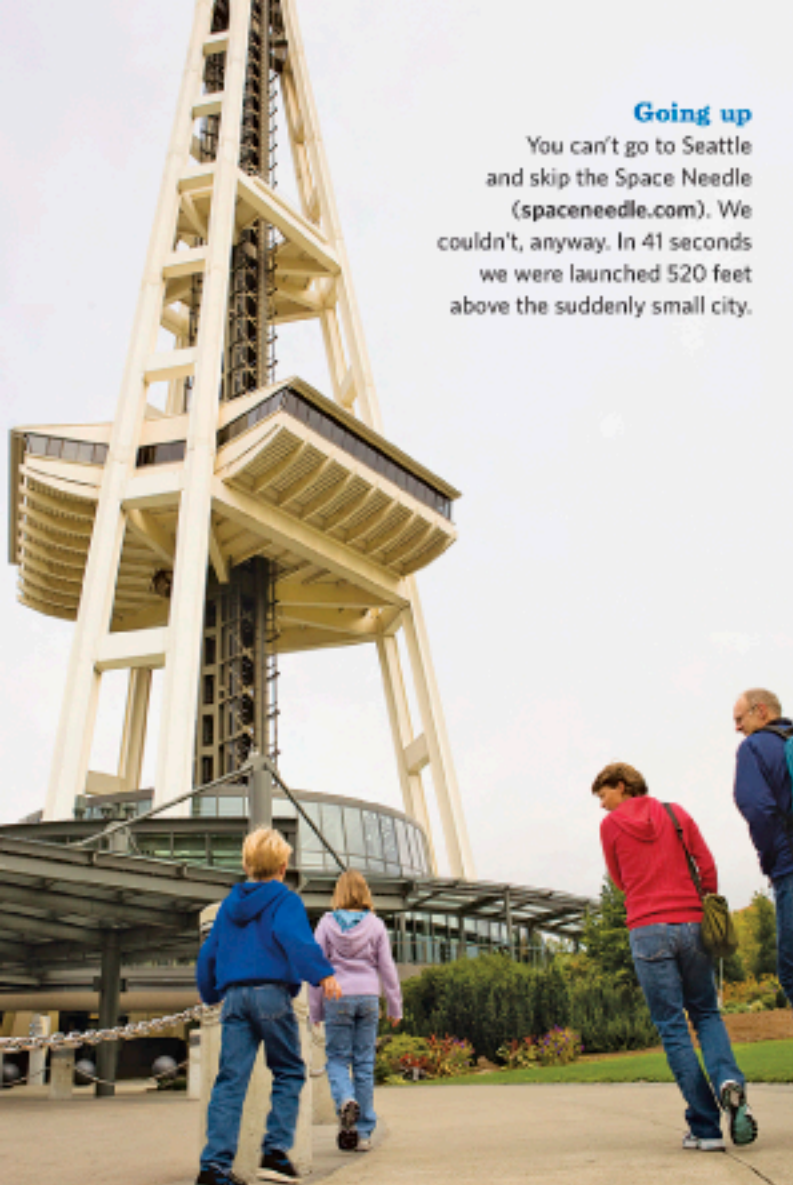


During day two of our trip (page 110), we explored Snoqualmie Falls, our first stop outside Seattle. When the sun came out, the shoes came off.



Model trains at the Iron Horse B&B, South Cle Elum

Deception Falls Nature Trail, near Skykomish



Going up

You can't go to Seattle and skip the Space Needle (spaceneedle.com). We couldn't, anyway. In 41 seconds we were launched 520 feet above the suddenly small city.



Seeing a bird's-eye view of Seattle

The Space Needle's observation deck has a 360-degree view of the Olympic Mountains and Bainbridge Island to the west, the Cascade Range to the east, and on a sunny day, snowy Mount Rainier to the south. The kids loved using a telescope to spot people on the streets below.



Shopping for souvenirs

After descending the Space Needle ("Mom, my stomach feels butterflies," said Leah), the elevator deposited us at the entrance to the gift shop, where the kids just had to check out the snow globes.



OUR ITINERARY

THE DRIVE: We covered about 300 miles, traveling across three mountain passes, including Snoqualmie Pass (3,022 feet), Blewett Pass (4,102 feet), and Stevens Pass (4,061 feet).

DAY 1: We explored Seattle on foot, via monorail, and by "duck."

DAY 2: From Seattle, we headed east on I-90 over Snoqualmie Pass and spent the night in South Cle Elum.

DAY 3: We drove west on I-90, then north on Highway 97 over Blewett Pass, through pine country. From there we went west on Highway 2 to Leavenworth.

DAY 4: We took Highway 2 west over Stevens Pass back into the evergreen valley, then zipped down I-5 to Seattle.

Riding a duck

We thought the Space Needle would be our Seattle highlight, but it turned out to be the hilarious Ride the Ducks of Seattle tour (ridetheducksofseattle.com). A Coast Guard-certified captain took us on an hour-and-a-half ride through the city — and right into Lake Union — aboard an amphibious World War II vehicle. Along the way, the captain regaled us with Seattle trivia, and we played Spot the Starbucks (they're everywhere!).



Touring Pike Place Market

We couldn't miss this famous multistory marketplace (pikeplacemarket.org), home to one of the nation's oldest-running farmers markets, in operation since 1907. While we adults enjoyed eyeing and sampling the fresh produce, the kids loved the novelty shops on the lower levels.



Taking a break

From Pike Place Market, we strolled to the Olympic Sculpture Park (seattleartmuseum.org), which just opened in 2007. Ty decided that this Eye Bench (eye sculpture on one side, bench on the other) was the perfect place to lounge with an apple.

DAY 1

Where we ate

Breakfast: A buffet at our hotel. Doesn't get easier!

Lunch: The Center House food court (seattlecenter.com) at Seattle Center offered plenty of options.

Snack: The Starbucks at Pike Place Market (the original,

opened in 1971) for some mid-afternoon pick-me-up beverages.

Dinner: The Old Spaghetti Factory (osf.com) was a hit with the whole family.

Where we slept

Best Western Executive Inn (bestwestern.com; rooms start at \$150), one block from Seattle Center, was a great home base for touring the center and the waterfront on foot. From here, the monorail took us downtown.

What made us laugh

"It was funny watching the pedestrians watch us," Leah said after the Duck tour. Seattleites on foot did indeed seem to get a kick out of our tour, waving and cheering at us as we went by.

Sightseeing highlight

Need a typewriter eraser, anyone? Probably not these days, but the Olympic Sculpture Park has a colossal sculpture of one just in case. (We had to explain to the kids what a typewriter is.)

Picnicking at Small Fries

We left Seattle right around lunchtime and luckily stumbled on Small Fries in Falls City just when our own small fries were in need (425-222-7688). Burgers, fries, and shakes got us ready for Snoqualmie Falls.



Exploring the rails

On our way through Snoqualmie, we couldn't miss the old trains and the restored turn-of-the-century Snoqualmie Depot at the Northwest Railway Museum (trainmuseum.org). Admission is free, and even Leah, who's not a train buff, enjoyed the stop.

Splashing around the falls

At Snoqualmie Falls, we skipped the visitors' center and hiked from the lower parking lot to the pool at the base of the falls. Leah and Ty rolled up their jeans for a cool splash, while the wind from the powerful 270-foot waterfall (nearly 100 feet higher than Niagara!) enveloped us in spray (snoqualmiefalls.com).



Strolling through town

Snoqualmie, a picturesque town of 9,000 tucked among the jutting peaks of the Cascade Range, is also known for being the location of the television series *Twin Peaks*.



DAY 2

Where we ate

Breakfast: We had yummy croissants at Café Besalu in Seattle's Ballard neighborhood (206-789-1463).

Lunch: The kids loved the fries from Small Fries (see above).

Dinner: We headed for

Village Pizza (509-649-2992) in the town of Roslyn (featured in the TV series *Northern Exposure*), only 10 minutes from where we stayed in South Cle Elum.

Where we slept

The kids loved the Iron Horse Inn B&B in South Cle Elum (ironhorseinnbb.com; rooms start at \$125), where owners Mary and Doug happily filled us in on the area's train history (see page 112).

What we learned

Cle Elum is a Native American name that means "swift water." The Snoqualmie Tribe used Snoqualmie Falls as a gathering place for tribal meetings and for trading goods.

Sightseeing highlight

The Snoqualmie Pass Tunnel, off I-90, in Iron Horse State Park, is dark and spooky. At 2.3 miles, it's the longest tunnel for non-motorized use in the country. Flashlights and coats are a must (parks.wa.gov).

Curling up in a caboose

Formerly a bunkhouse for railroad workers, the Iron Horse Inn B&B in South Cle Elum (ironhorseinnbb.com) has been turned into a railroad-themed inn. We spent night two in one of the four converted caboose cars — does it get any more fun for kids? — and woke to a fabulous breakfast.



Going German

Leavenworth, in the heart of the Cascades, is a quaint Bavarian-themed town that doubles as a base for many outdoor adventurers, such as rock climbers and river rafters. We stayed right in town, where all the shopping amenities (and there are many) are within a few blocks. Parking is downright difficult, so walking is recommended, as is booking accommodations early (leavenworth.org).

Molding monuments of mud

When we needed a break from Leavenworth's touristy streets, we took a picnic to the kid-friendly Blackbird Island Waterfront Park, which borders a calm stretch of the Wenatchee River just a few minutes' walk from downtown. Ty decided to forgo his lunch for the mud, while Leah opted for lunch and wading the river's edge.



Getting goofy with hats

Hands down, we all loved the Hat Shop and its adjacent toy-store partner, the Wood Shop, in Leavenworth (509-548-4442). In fact, we went back three times.



DAY 3

Where we ate

Breakfast: A full breakfast comes with a night's lodging at the Iron Horse.

Lunch: We ordered sandwiches from Leavenworth's Baren Haus (barenhaus.com) and picnicked at Waterfront Park.

Dinner: Traditional German fare

in Leavenworth can be pricey, so we opted for Mexican at Los Camperos (loscamperos.com), now a family favorite.

Dessert: After dinner, Das Sweet Shoppe (509-548-5755) provided a happy ending for the kids.

Where we slept

The Dream House Suites (dreamhousesuites.com; rooms start at \$135) in downtown Leavenworth offered extra space and a full kitchen for a nice break from restaurants and bakeries.

What we learned

Once a dying sawmill town, Leavenworth reinvented itself in 1965 as a Bavarian tourist attraction. Now it draws more than 2 million visitors a year (leavenworth.org).

Driving highlight

Heading west from Leavenworth on Highway 2, we drove through the steep canyon walls and pine forest of Tumwater Canyon. It's a dramatic stretch of scenery that even inspired some wows from the kids.

Bouldering in bare feet

What kid can resist a scramble? Neither one of ours. After departing Leavenworth, we stopped at the Swift Water Picnic Area, just outside town, to let the kids climb on the huge boulders next to the beautiful Wenatchee River. Rock climbing is popular in the Leavenworth area, and chalk marks on the boulders told us climbers like the picnic area too. Caution: this is not a formal climbing area, so scale at your own risk.



Meandering a forest

Deception Falls Nature Trail turned out to be a gem of a forest walk, with massive old-growth cedar, hemlock, and fir trees. Perfect for kids, the half-mile loop trail features a wooden bridge, interpretive signs describing bygone logging practices, the roaring Tye River, and Deception Falls. Call 360-677-2414 for park hours.



Encountering wildlife

Spotting an animal would have been cool, but Ty was just as happy to find a fuzzy caterpillar along the Deception Falls trail. "Her name is Pumpkin," he told us. He returned her to her habitat before we packed up to head for home.

Joanna Nesbit and her family of explorers live in Bellingham, Washington.

DAY 4

Where we ate

Breakfast: We had cereal in our suite. Not my choice, but the kids loved it.

Lunch: At the Swift Water Picnic Area, we all chowed down on bagels from Leavenworth's Bavarian Safeway.

Snack: We treated ourselves to fresh fruit milk shakes — banana or rhubarb, anyone? — at Zeke's Drive-In (360-793-2287), then hit the road for home.

Hiking highlight

At Deception Falls Nature Trail, the Tye River bends around a big rock at a right angle, like a giant bendy drinking straw. No one knows why!

Our handy guide

Day Hike! Central Cascades: The Best Hikes You Can Hike in a Day, by Mike McQuaide, was great for picking out the best trails in the area. The book describes 70 of the region's top day hikes and

includes mileage, seasonal conditions, maps, difficulty levels, and driving directions to each one.