

Embracing the Emerald City

Seattle's dog-friendly coastal diversions are out of this world.

Cherie Langlois

Tagging along with Dorothy to Oz and the Emerald City must have been a mind-blowing experience for a little country canine like Toto. Today I wonder if Pippin, our 4-year-old Coonhound mix, feels similarly dazzled during one of his rare visits to Washington's own Emerald City, Seattle.

This is a wildly different world from our farm, where Pippin's predictable routine includes quiet walks, tracking furry creatures, and snoozing on the couch.

My family and I love Seattle: the energy-charged atmosphere, diverse shops, ethnic restaurants, and fascinating museums. Inviting our dog along on this excursion, however, means skipping a few of these human-centric places. But that's OK — we've found a few alternatives perfect for a sunny Seattle Sunday. Now, if only Pippin will act like a polite city gentleman.

Dog park n' play

After a 90-minute car ride and no morning walk, Pippin's pent-up energy threatens to boil over if we don't take prompt action. So my husband Brett, teen daughter Kelsey, Pippin, and I proceed first to 340-acre Warren G. Magnuson Park on the shores of Lake Washington. Seattle boasts canine-friendly parks aplenty, but this former naval air station ranks as the dog-friendliest, thanks to its fully fenced, nine-acre off-leash area — Seattle's largest. (206) 684-4946; www.seattle.gov/parks/magnuson/ola.htm

After loosing our eager hound, we set off to roam the spacious play areas, pup-watching as we go. With so many breeds represented, it feels like we're at a dog show, except this place welcomes all canines, pedigreed or not.

We encounter Bulldogs and Beagles, Whippets and Welsh Corgis, shepherds and Shelties, mixed breeds of all shapes and sizes. We even spot a Cairn Terrier who resembles Toto. Pippin cavorts with a bouncy Boxer named Cocoa and chases after a lithe, lovely Redbone Coonhound. Tragically, she eludes him.

We trail along with sniffing canines and chatting humans to the dog beach, where Labrador and Golden Retrievers, and other water-loving dogs swim and fetch tennis balls in the glittering lake. Wading no deeper than his dewclaws, Pippin shoots them an "are-you-insane?" look and climbs a twisted tree leaning low over the pebbly beach instead. Maybe he's showing off for Emma, a pink-collared Basset Hound. More likely, he found the best place to escape the spray shaken from two dozen wet dogs. Ugh!

Ice cream cruise and a wedding

"Is it really OK to take dogs on board?" I ask doubtfully, eyeing the cute little ferry boat afloat at the dock. We're in the funky Fremont district now, standing in the shadow of the Aurora Bridge. I figure when they get a good look at Pippin — who has never set paw on a boat before — the folks running the Sunday Ice Cream Cruise will promptly change their dogs-allowed policy. (206) 284-2828; www.seattleferryservice.com

But Ann-Marie Leon, first mate of the Fremont Avenue, smiles warmly. "We love to have dogs on board," she assures me.

Capt. Larry Kezner also gives our dog a friendly welcome. He informs us we're in for a treat — he'll be performing a marriage ceremony in the middle of Lake Union.

To our relief, Pippin doesn't get seasick, jump overboard, or bark at seagulls. In fact, he acts like an angel during the 45-minute cruise. He analyzes the brisk breeze for new scents, soaks up attention from passengers, and sits solemnly through the brief, laid-back wedding of Megan and Evan, whose dog, unfortunately, could not attend. After the applause fades, we humans savor ice cream floats, coffee, and other treats in the whimsically decorated cabin. Time to absorb the view: sleek kayaks and sailboats plying the sparkling water, Mount Rainier peering over the hills, the shiny Space Needle jutting from the city skyline. Our captain points out sights like the houseboat featured in the movie "Sleepless in Seattle" and glass artist Dale Chihuly's studio. We growl past a trio of fishing vessels appropriately named Husky, Retriever, and Labrador.

Funky Fremont

Following the cruise, we walk Pippin past famously odd Fremont landmarks (www.fremont.com) like the troll lurking under Aurora Bridge and the Rocket, a sculpture shooting up from the Center of the Universe, as Fremont likes to call itself.

Nose quivering, our dog drags us into Railey's Leash & Treat, a boutique packed with cool pet stuff. Pippin's right — he deserves a treat. We buy Cheesy Chicks and some other baked dog goodies, then trek back to our car. (206) 632-5200; www.raileys.com

Sadly, creeping traffic jams the freeway. Too bad we don't have ruby slippers to transport us home. Not that Pippin cares. He fell asleep a few minutes ago.

Cherie Langlois is a freelance writer who lives in Washington state with her husband and daughter, along with Coonhound Pippin, and a menagerie of furry and feathered friends.