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ONE TANK WONDER

Eastside Charms

KIRKLAND-REDMOND-BELLEVUE

Words and photos by Lauren Kramer

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We Vancouverites regularly head to Seattle when we have a free weekend, a destination just far enough to feel “away” yet close enough to make it a decent commute for a quick change of scene. If you’re anything like me, you’ve knocked off all the city’s major attractions over the years, from Pike Place Market to the Space Needle. But here’s what you don’t know: while Seattle swallows the limelight from the cities around it, there’s lots to explore on the periphery, specifically the tri-city region that straddles the east side of the glistening Lake Washington. Known locally as Eastside, the cities of Kirkland, Bellevue and Redmond are charming in their own right, with a wide array of shopping, dining and outdoor activities to keep weekend visitors engaged and excited. On a recent three-day weekend I zipped between the three, sampling the best of what each has to offer.

DAY ONE - KIRKLAND

My husband and I selected Kirkland as our home base, checking into the Heathman Hotel on Kirkland Avenue. The privately owned boutique hotel offers complimentary bikes for guests, a big attraction because it meant we could commute south without hitching bikes to the back of our vehicle. Newly renovated and smack in the heart of downtown Kirkland, the hotel combines attention to detail, farm-to-fork dining, and luxurious amenities with a property that’s intimate enough to feel personal and welcoming. We ditched our luggage and hopped straight on those bikes to explore, pedalling briefly through





Marina Park is a natural gathering place for locals and visitors to Kirkland, with an amphitheatre, grassy banks, a sandy beach and a pier lined with gorgeous sailboats.

The downtown shopping district in Kirkland brims with cool, one-of-a-kind stores, perfect for indulgent window shopping



the shopping district before careening off on Lake Washington Boulevard. It was late afternoon and the setting sun cast a glowing light on Lake Washington, an expanse of water so large you could easily be forgiven for thinking you were staring out at the ocean. We paused at the Marina Park, an arc-shaped refuge on the cusp of downtown with an amphitheatre, grassy areas for picnics, a sandy beach and a pier delivering views of some enviable luxury vessels.

Window shopping is a favourite activity and a great way to take the pulse of a town centre. Kirkland's shopping district, just a few easily walkable blocks in size, is brimming with cool, one-of-a-kind stores. At Sur La Table we explored a culinary heaven of gadgets, gizmos and food-related tools, while at Lady Yum, we sampled toasted coconut macarons and ogled at the raspberry chardonnay, espresso fudge, and honey lavender varieties. We tried a flight of wine at the Maison DeLille Wine Lounge on Lake Street, feeling like sophisticates as we sipped on reds that artfully combined merlots with cabernets, rich and fruity on the palate. To cap it all off, we dined on butter-soft steak and sablefish at Hearth, the popular eatery back at the Heathman Hotel.

DAY TWO - REDMOND

We were back on those bikes first thing the next morning, this time on the Cross-Kirkland Corridor, a four-mile trail that weaves through the cities. While a better ride is to be had on the Burke-Gilman Trail, a 43-kilometre route that circles parts of Lake



Washington, we were determined to explore Redmond, so we wrapped up our ride and drove ten minutes east.

Best known for its Microsoft presence, the city of Redmond feels decidedly new in every aspect. Walk around its downtown outdoor mall and it's as if the heart of the city opened just yesterday, with trendy, festive restaurants like Woodblock rubbing shoulders with expensive boutiques. Redmond's logging and agricultural past, which dates back to the 1870s, has been long overshadowed by technology, particularly since Microsoft moved its corporate campus here in 1986. The 500-acre campus has 125 buildings where some 47,000 employees work. With this number of techies on the ground, it's no surprise the city has become a playground for high-achieving, smart, young people from all over the world.

We visited the Microsoft Visitor Center, a fun venue with information on the company's early days, images of its founders then and now, and interactive exhibits. Large computer monitors invite you to enjoy a game, focusing on the faces of visitors and revealing the age that matches their visage, or the dog species most closely associated with them. Kids sat at a row of computers playing Xbox games and a long line in front of the Forza simulator, a simulated racing video game, suggested it was the centre's most popular attraction. It's gratifying to learn about Microsoft's commitment to giving back by matching its employees' donations of time, money and skills to various charities. In 2017 this amounted to \$156 million raised for 19,550 non-profits and schools the world over.



For farm-to-fork fine dining, Hearth Restaurant, inside the Heathman Hotel, is a popular spot for a special meal coupled with distinctive craft cocktails.

DAY THREE - BELLEVUE

Bellevue was our destination on our last day, and a fitting place to begin was Third Culture Coffee, a new coffeehouse opened by Varun Das and Radhika Kapur, two techies determined to serve international versions of coffee, tea, and wine. That means Haldi Doodh, a turmeric latte served in India, Ethiopian Guji, Guatemala Aragon and a host of other cool beverages you'd be hard-pressed to find elsewhere. I sipped a heavenly yogurt and rosewater lassi as Das explained his mission. "We're trying to transcend borders and bring together tradition and the history of cultures with coffee, tea, and wine," he explained. "Our job is to respectfully invite people to explore coffee in a different way."

Later we walked around Old Bellevue, a few streets filled with stores distinctly different to the city's newer shopping malls. We stopped to browse the hand-blown, exquisitely coloured glass votives at Glassybaby and poked our heads into independent apparel stores and chocolatiers. The morning sunshine warmed our backs as we strolled through Bellevue Park, a 20-acre green space where kids play frisbee, dog walkers chat about their canines, and well-dressed executives take a breather from the office. The park separates old Bellevue from its newer counterpart a couple of blocks up the street. Here, Bellevue Square's 250 stores are connected by pedestrian corridors to the Westin and the Hyatt hotels, so visitors can move between food, entertainment, shopping, and lodging without ever having to brave a cold, rainy day.

Before heading back on the highway we drove to Mercer Slough, a 320-acre environmental education centre minutes from downtown. Borrowing binoculars and birding books from the visitor centre, we headed to the waterside boardwalk, a peaceful place where herons fish in the wetlands and locals rent canoes in the warmer months. It was a blissful end to a gorgeous weekend of fun finds, spectacular views and new favourite places. But the road was calling, so we bade a reluctant farewell to Lake Washington's Eastside and hit the freeway for home. ◀

WHEN YOU GO

INFORMATION

For useful resources on accommodation and activities in Eastside, visit BellevueWashington.com, ExploreKirkland.com and ExperienceRedmond.com.

STAY

Heathman Hotel
heathmankirkland.com
 @heathmanhotel

EAT

Lady Yum
ladyyum.com
 @ladyyum

Maison DeLille Wine Lounge
delillecellars.com
 @delillecellars

Hearth Kirkland
hearthkirkland.com
 @hearthkirkland

Woodblock
woodblockredmond.com
 @woodblock_redmond

Third Culture Coffee
thirdculturecoffee.com
 @thirdculturecoffee

VISIT

Sur La Table
surlatable.com
 @surlatable

Glassybaby
glassybaby.com
 @glassybaby

Microsoft Visitor Center
 Located at 92-15010 NE 36th Street in Redmond, the visitor centre is closed weekends but open varying hours from Monday through Friday.
microsoft.com/visitorcenter

Mercer Slough Nature Park
parks.bellevuewa.gov