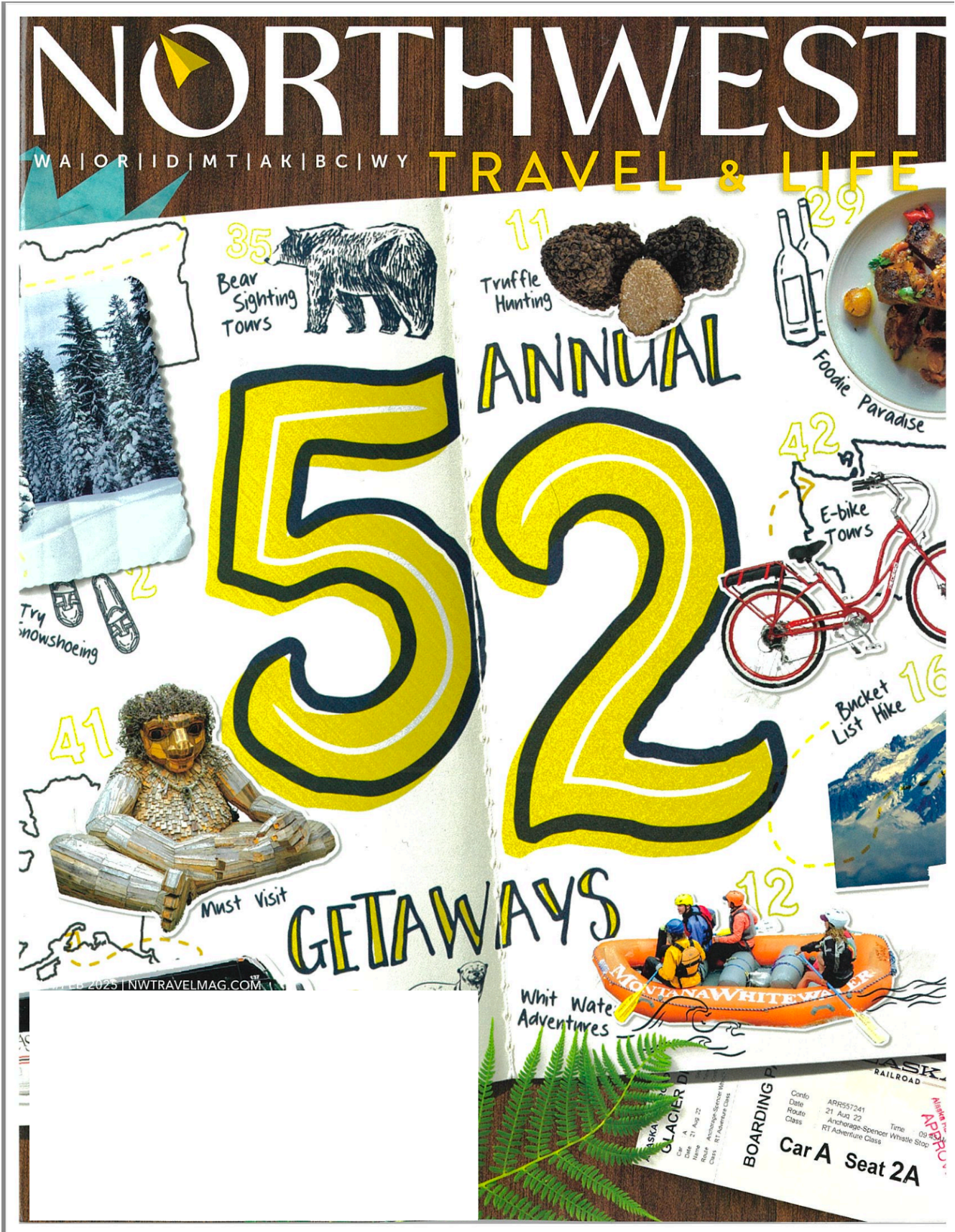
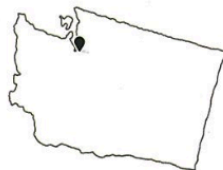


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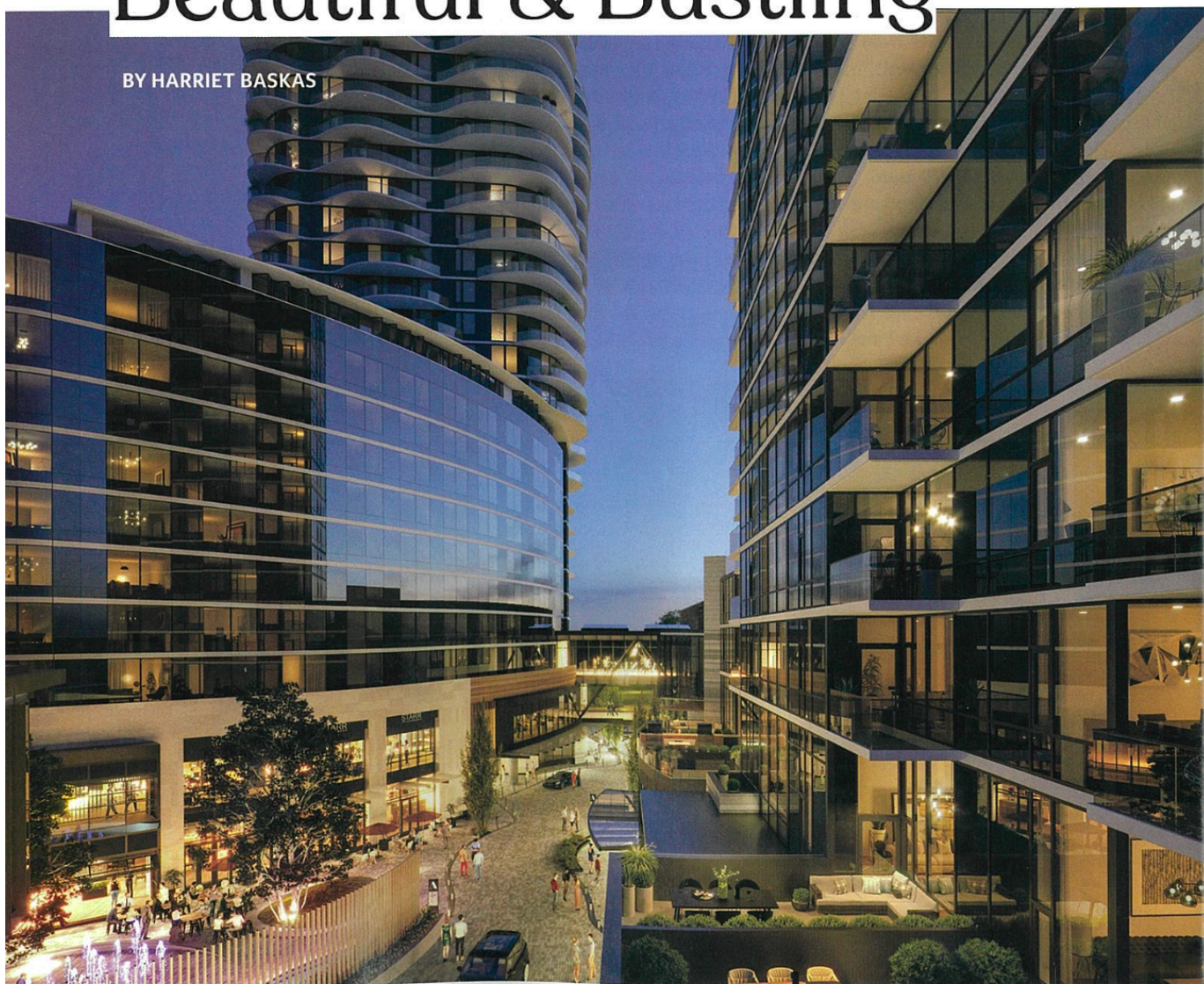
When you go

Plan your trip to Bellevue at visitbellevuewa.com.

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Bellevue, Washington: Bold, Beautiful & Bustling

BY HARRIET BASKAS





Like many longtime Seattleites, my image of Bellevue, just across Lake Washington, was stuck in the past. I'd skirted the city for years on my commutes to and from the Eastside, the moniker for the collection of suburbs east of Seattle, Bellevue being one.

But while I wasn't paying attention, the suburb long considered "Seattle's little sister" grew up and filled out.

It is now a sophisticated go-to destination for upscale shopping, top-rated dining, creative entertainment and all manner of enticing indoor and outdoor activities.

And that's thanks in no small part to a compact downtown core, a bevy of green spaces, a diverse population of more than 150,000 and a tech boom fueled by companies such as Microsoft, T-Mobile, Amazon and dozens of others.

Spend a weekend there and, like me, you'll end up being bewitched by Bellevue.

Checking in

The luxury brand of InterContinental Hotels and Resorts made its Pacific Northwest debut in fall 2024 with the 208-room InterContinental Bellevue at the Avenue (ihg.com/intercontinental/hotels/us/en/bellevue/seaha/hoteldetail), located downtown in the mixed-use Avenue Bellevue development. (Tip: ask for a scenic view room on floor 7 or above). The Pacific Northwest's

first standalone location of Jo Malone London, known for scented colognes, bath oils, soaps and candles, is two doors down and offers complimentary hand and arm massages.

The Hyatt Regency, the W Bellevue or the Westin Bellevue—all part of the sprawling Bellevue Collection (bellevuecollection.com) of downtown stores, restaurants and entertainment venues—can also serve as a weekend base, and each offers a package that includes parking and shopping gift cards.

What to do

Award-winning Savor Food Tours debuted its Bites of Bellevue Food Tour in fall 2024. Day one of my long weekend visit started with this well-paced walking tour that lasts roughly two hours and includes five stops and at least 10 food and drink tastings from downtown businesses clustered mainly on Old Bellevue's Main Street.

In between bites, our guide shared tidbits about Bellevue's nationally noticed culinary and cultural scene and stories about the city's history, people and growth. "We want to reveal the vibrant community beneath the surface, including small businesses, skilled artisans and a rich history that often gets overlooked," said Annie Sim, Chief Eating Officer of Savor Food Tours.

I walked off some food tour calories doing early holiday shopping in the unique retail shops on Main Street, stopped in at Browne Family Vineyard's Bellevue tasting room to sample

their Walla Walla-made wine and then walked down the street to join about a dozen other novice chefs for a sushi-making (and eating) class at cookware store, Whisk. My classmates included weekend visitors, couples on dates or celebrating anniversaries and teens with their parents. And like the Bites of Bellevue Food Tour, this class (one of many on Whisk's menu) included tips on the city's culinary scene and an opportunity to mingle with locals.

After an easy 15-minute walk along bustling Bellevue Way back to the Intercontinental for a rest, it was off to Bakke's Place Bar & Bistro. This popular downtown venue hosts live jazz, blues and other acts, serves a New American dinner menu and is well known for its extensive selection of bourbons, ryes and whiskeys.



© Daniel Sheehan Courtesy of Visit Bellevue

Cruise from Bellevue

The second day of my Bellevue visit started with "urban hiking" in Bellevue Mall and a proper stroll through the 21-acre Bellevue Park Downtown, with its inviting lawn and stepped canal that leads to a 240-foot-wide waterfall. After brunch at Jocovine Bistro, it was a short walk to Meydenbauer Bay Park on Lake Washington where REI offers canoe and kayak rentals and where I joined Bellevue Lake Cruises.

These new 90-minute captained cruises run during the summer and fall seasons only and tour the lake in quiet, covered Duffy Electric Boats that carry about 10 passengers. Our captain took us by the lakefront homes of some of the region's rich and famous, pointed out splendid views of Mt. Rainier and the Seattle and Bellevue skylines and shared stories of growing up in the area.



© Greg Probst

Year-Round Festivities

Bellevue hosts events and celebrations year-round, including the BAM Arts Fair, the Northwest Chocolate Festival, the Old Bellevue Fall Wine Walk, Fashion Week at the Bellevue Collection, the Bellevue Jazz &

Blues Music Series and the Kelsey Creek Farm Fair. Snowflake Lane (bellevuecollection.com/snowflake lane), an evening parade filled with dancers, drummers, music, lights and falling snow, kicks off Thanksgiving weekend and runs through Christmas Eve.

Games & Gardens (and more food)

The day ended with dinner, cocktails and a virtual reality experience at Mirra, a new social gameplay arena with giant screens that good-naturedly pits four teams of up to eight people against each other in a changing set of challenging games.

I took full advantage of the perfect weather on the last day of my Bellevue

visit, which started with an urban hike to and through The Shops at the Bravern. The upscale mall is home to luxury brands such as Gucci and Neiman Marcus, but I made a beeline to two popular new food outlets located, conveniently, across the hall from each other. Bellevue is the first U.S. location for LeTAO, a dessert shop from Hokkaido, Japan, famous for its double-layered cheesecake and other exotic creations. The mall is also the first Washington state location for the wildly popular Chinese chain HeyTea, which claims credit for inventing “cheese tea” by adding a cheese foam to cold tea.

Next stop: the Bellevue Botanical Garden, east of downtown, which I reached via Bellevue’s on-demand shuttle service, Bellhop, providing free point-to-point rides in cute electric vehicles to destinations around town.

In addition to woodlands, meadows and wetlands, the 53-acre free attraction

has more than a half-dozen themed gardens dedicated to everything from dahlias and rhododendrons to fuchsias. If you miss the free docent-led garden tours (Saturday and Sunday at noon), you can get plant information by pointing your cellphone at a QR code.

From the garden, I walked over a 150-foot-long pedestrian suspension bridge (part of the Ravine Experience) and followed a path through the woods to Kelsey Creek Farm, which houses two historical barns, sheep, chickens, goats, bunnies and a pig named Cora and is a reminder that while Bellevue now has lots of office towers, it was once better known for its rich farmland. 🌿

