

Even when it rains these days, Astoria, Oregon, looks bright. New shops, restaurants, and hotels are springing up downtown and along the nearby Columbia riverfront—from the West Mooring Basin, where the over-the-water Cannery Pier Hotel opened last summer, to Pier 39, where the abandoned Bumble Bee Seafoods cannery buildings are being converted into offices, lodging, a pub, a coffeehouse, and the sales office for the new condos going up down the road.

5

“All along the waterfront there’s an energy,” says native son and Pier 39 developer Floyd Holcom. “I don’t think anybody would have predicted it.”

Astoria has always been a place for self-starters, from Lewis and Clark to John Jacob Astor himself. The decline of logging and fishing over the last half-century sent this historic Oregon community—the oldest American city west of the Mississippi—into a long economic slump, but

there’s no denying the upswing. No longer can you pick up a century-old Victorian for next to nothing, and new art galleries are snapping up empty storefronts on downtown’s Commercial Street, where the 1925 Liberty Theater—\$6 million into its projected \$8.5 million revival—often sells out its 677-seat house.

But for the foreseeable future, Astoria is keeping it real. The Astoria Riverfront Trolley (*tickets \$1; 503/325-6311*), popular with tourists who pile off the cruise ships that call on Astoria in spring and fall, clatters by the town’s active fishing fleet. The colorfully idiosyncratic works in Lunar Boy Gallery (opened by two former Disney Imagineers) seem as comfortable on Commercial Street as the neighboring chocolate store and apothecary. And no one can stop the rain, which at an average of 67 inches a year scares off some would-be newcomers—and, in so doing, may prove to be the town’s saving grace.

Next great destination: Astoria

In Astoria, new life is springing up all along the Columbia River. Opposite page, clockwise from top left: Jimmy Pickering (seated) and Troy Winterrowd, owners of Lunar Boy Gallery; the Cannery Pier Hotel; the hotel’s lobby provides warmth on the rainiest of days; chef Uriah Hulsey of the Columbian Café; the revamped Liberty; sea lions sunning on the pier.



Our picks

LODGING

Cannery Pier Hotel. From your bed (or bath), watch oceangoing ships glide by seemingly inches away. Built on pilings over the river, the new 46-room hotel's multi-level design mimics the original 1897 cannery that once stood here. From \$139. 10 Basin St.; www.cannerypierhotel.com or 888/325-4996.

Fishermen's Suites, Pier 39. Three new suites occupy an upstairs corner at Pier 39, each with a commanding view of the river and forested hills beyond. From \$150. 100 39th St.; www.pier39-astoria.com or 503/325-2502.

DINING

Columbian Café. Long a local favorite, this funky hole-in-the-wall is a true destination eatery, thanks to chef-owner Uriah Hulseley's inspired vegetarian fare. \$\$; breakfast and lunch Mon-Sat, dinner Wed-Sat. 1114 Marine Dr.; 503/325-2233.

T. Paul's Urban Café. Eclectic and original, not to mention filling. Try the turkey sandwich (on focaccia with marionberry mayo) or the chipotle pesto pasta with bay shrimp and spinach. \$\$; lunch and dinner Mon-Sat. 1119 Commercial St.; 503/338-5133.

CULTURE

Liberty Theater. The hand-painted murals have been refreshed, the chandelier restored, and the elegance returned to this former movie palace that now hosts a variety of local and visiting performers. 1203 Commercial St.; www.liberty-theater.org or 503/325-5922.

Lunar Boy Gallery. Original work by leading pop surrealist artists, with quirky modern gifts to match. Closed Tue. 1133 Commercial St.; www.lunarboygallery.com or 503/325-1566.

