

# The Cost

What does it cost to live in our "most-livable" city? We offer this price list to almost everything in Seattle—from lattes to theater tickets to houses to ballparks.

It was Benjamin Disraeli, that famous statesman of the late 19th century, who said, "There are three kinds of lies: lies, damn lies and statistics." And through the years, very little has changed: We don't trust statistics. In our information-oriented society, numbers are used to inflate, sensationalize, oversimplify and confuse.

Seattle often appears on "Ten Best" lists of favorite places to live and work. With this popularity has come increased population, congestion and—some say prices. Longtime residents miss the "old days," but newcomers marvel at how "inexpensive" it is to live here compared to "back home." The purpose of what follows is to guide you through a general cost-of-living index, letting you come to your own conclusions.



## 1. Who We Are

Seattle's population has been growing steadily since 1980, though it only recently surpassed the number of people who lived here before the Boeing bust of 1969.

1970 population	530,831
1980 population	493,846
1990 population	516,259
1995 population	532,900

Median Seattle household income (1995) \$46,928

Source: Information Please Almanac.

by Peter Stekel

## 2. How We Spend Our Money

If Seattleites are typical of the nation as a whole, the way we spend our own money (what we have left after taxes) can be broken down into 13 separate categories.

Housing	24.45 %
Transportation	17.71 %
Food	14.48 %
Life insurance and pension	8.69 %
Utilities	6.75 %
Apparel	5.75 %
Entertainment	5.13 %
Health care	5.01 %
Miscellaneous	4.13 %
Cash contributions	2.68 %
Alcohol	1.97 %
Car insurance	1.96 %
Personal care	1.29 %



Source: Consumer expenditure survey by Bureau of Labor.

Taxes (income, state, sales, etc.) paid by income level, in Seattle, Los Angeles and U.S. average.

Income level	Seattle	Los Angeles	U.S.
\$25,000	7.4	6.6	8.6
\$50,000	6.5	7.6	8.9
\$75,000	6.9	9.7	9.9
\$100,000	6.5	10.7	9.9





# Cost of Living in Seattle

## 3. Housing

Nowhere else is supply and demand felt more keenly than in housing prices. Although the residential real estate market is not as hot as it was in the late 1980s, the cost of buying or renting a home in Seattle continues to rise.

Average selling price of a three-bedroom house in 1996	
Wedgwood	\$170,100
Wallingford	\$192,600
Queen Anne	\$283,300

Average selling price of a single-family homes in Seattle's north end (from Leschi to the county line, between Lake Washington and Puget Sound)

1989	\$147,300
1990	\$192,700
1991	\$191,800
1996	\$215,500

Average cost to rent a one-bedroom apartment in Queen Anne	
1986	\$386
1996	\$673

Average cost to rent a one-bedroom apartment in Wallingford	
1986	\$349
1996	\$625

Source: Northwest Multiple Listing Service and housing market analyst Robert Rothstein.

## 4. Transportation

In 1898, when 10-year old Joey Bufonchio drowned in the great Jackson Street chuekhole at Third and Jackson—which was as much as eight feet deep in places—the city fathers determined it was time to do something about the deterioration of Seattle's streets. Many citizens today feel that Seattle streets have surpassed that 1898 nadir and are calling upon the City Council to direct more tax revenue to maintaining our transportation infrastructure.



The state's motor vehicle excise tax (part of annual automobile license fees) and gasoline tax are primarily responsible for funding state and local highway construction, repair and maintenance. These taxes also underwrite ferries and other public transportation.

IN WASHINGTON (in 1995, except as noted)	
Washington State Department of Transportation budget (1995-'97)	\$2.6 billion
Number of registered vehicles in Washington state	5,184,463
Number of licensed drivers	3,774,924
Population of Washington	5,429,900
Persons per motorized vehicle	1.2
Average gallons of gas consumed per car	622
Average miles per gallon	18.81
Miles of paved roads	79,802
Cost per gallon of regular unleaded gas	\$1.39
Washington state gasoline tax in 1977	11 cents/gallon
Washington state gasoline tax in 1995	23 cents/gallon
Illinois gas tax	37 cents/gallon
California gas tax	28 cents/gallon
Oregon gas tax	27 cents/gallon
Washington state gas tax revenue in 1995	\$1.2 billion
State motor vehicle excise tax revenue in 1995	\$1.39 billion

### ESTIMATED COST OF REGIONAL TRANSIT PLAN

Proposed in 1992	\$11 billion
Proposed in 1995	\$6.7 billion
Proposed (and passed by voters) in 1996	\$3.9 billion
Number of Metro riders in 1988	60 million
Number of Metro riders in 1994	81 million
Cost to ride the bus during peak hours (one zone)	\$1.10
Cost during off-peak hours	85 cents
Monthly pass (for peak hours)	\$39.50
Monthly pass (for off-peak hours)	\$30.50

Sources: City of Seattle, Metro and State Farm Insurance.



## 5. Food

Seattle restaurants offer a wide array of dining experiences, from full-course, let's-get-dressed-up-and-paint-the-town-red meals to food on the go—and there's always espresso.



New York-cut peppercorn steak dinner at Canlis	\$30.75
Emerald City halibut at the Space Needle	\$26.95
Alaskan king salmon dinner at Ivar's Salmon House	\$18.95
Prime rib dinner at Sizzler (including salad)	\$11.99
Fettuccine Alfredo at Stella's Trattoria	\$8.95
Phad Thai at Tip-Tip Thai	\$5.95
Burrito at Jalisco	\$5.05
Double Whopper and small fries at Burger King	\$4.48
Double tall latte at Starbucks	\$2.20
Cost per person of dinner for the homeless at Union Gospel Mission in Pioneer Square	\$1.50

## 6. Utilities

Some utilities are publicly owned and financed by a combination of taxes and rate payments; some are private companies that are closely regulated. In response to increasing costs and decreasing supplies, utilities have successfully managed to alter our consumptive habits.

### WATER

There are 1,800 miles of water pipe in Seattle. Since 1990, water rates have increased to pay for necessary maintenance and infrastructure replacement. (The last of our cedar water pipes, built like huge interlocking barrels and dating to the late 19th century, were replaced on Beacon Hill in 1994.) At the same time, conservation programs, more efficient fixtures and customer response to higher rates have helped keep water usage down during summer in our drought-prone city.

Comparisons to consider: 1 CCF = 100 cubic feet = 748 gallons. A low-flow toilet uses three gallons per flush; a regular toilet uses eight gallons.

1 CCF (residential) of water in winter 1996	\$1.33
1 CCF in summer 1996	\$1.33 for the first 5 CCF \$2.089 for each additional CCF

Amount of water used in Seattle in 1980	157 million gallons/day
Amount of water used in Seattle in 1995	147 million gallons/day
Service area population in 1980	1,045,751
Service area population in 1995	1,262,000
Change in service area population since 1980	+ 21%
Change in water demand since 1980	- 6%

Average daily water use per person in winter	73 gallons
Average daily water use per person in summer	120 gallons
Average monthly cost of winter residential water use	\$10.44
Average monthly cost of summer residential water use	\$20.08

### ELECTRICITY

Seattle City Light (a public company) maintains four major and several minor dams outside the area to generate electricity. Conservation and the increase in apartment buildings, which use less energy than single-family homes, account for a decline in electricity use over the last 20 years. Rates have increased due to market forces and to pay for increased infrastructure and environmental compliance. (Note: Costs are not adjusted for inflation.)



Average cost of a kilowatt/hour in 1977	1.26 cents
Average cost of a kilowatt/hour in 1995	3.92 cents
Average annual household consumption in 1977	12,500 KWH
Average annual household consumption in 1995	10,300 KWH
Average annual residential bill in 1977	\$155.95
Average annual residential bill in 1995	\$403.00

### NATURAL GAS

During the past 20 years, Washington Natural Gas has received 50 percent of its gas from western Canada and the rest from the Rocky Mountain region, piping it across thousands of miles. Natural gas is usually purchased during the summer, when rates are lower, then stored in huge aquifers under Jackson Prairie, south of Chehalis. This aquifer has 550 million cubic feet of natural gas available per day. In 1976, only 250 million cubic feet were available.

Understanding the terminology: A therm is a unit of heat equal to 100,000 BTUs (British Thermal Units). A natural-gas stove-top burner left on for ten hours would consume one therm of natural gas. (Figures are for fiscal years.)

Average cost of 1 therm of natural gas (1976)	25 cents
Average cost of 1 therm of natural gas (1996)	56 cents
Average consumption per household (1976)	1,501 therms
Average consumption per household (1996)	1,091 therms
Total Seattle area consumption (1976)	308 million therms
Total Seattle area consumption (1996)	380 million therms

### SEWERS

Our 243 miles of sewer pipes carry industrial and household waste and storm water to chemical treatment plants before discharging the effluent into Puget Sound.

Cost of Seattle's first sewer system (1890)	\$190,000
Cost to upgrade West Point Sewage Treatment Plant to secondary treatment in 1991-1996	\$562,903,197



### BASIC TELEPHONE and CABLE

Monthly cost of US West residence line	\$10.50
Monthly cost of access charges, taxes and surcharges	\$5.43



Monthly cost of TCI basic and expanded service in Seattle in 1991 (33 channels)	\$20.00
Monthly cost in 1996 (35 channels)	\$22.35
Monthly cost of Viacom standard service in Seattle in 1991 (31 channels)	\$20.70
Monthly cost in 1996 (44 channels)	\$26.94



#### CLEANING UP

Gallons of paint used to cover graffiti in 1995	2,525
Gallons of paint donated from Household Hazardous Waste program with Solid Waste Utility	2,400
Gallons of paint purchased by city	125
Cost per gallon	\$8
Annual cost of "graffiti rangers" program to remove graffiti	\$150,000
Annual number of graffiti removal volunteers	2,000

Sources: Seattle City Light, Washington Natural Gas, TCI CableVision, King County-Metro, City of Seattle and American Gas Association.

## 7. Public Employees

A sampling of Seattle employee salaries follows:

Mayor	\$112,731
City Council member	\$73,377
Chief of police	\$93,600
Police officer (first year)	\$37,150
Fire chief	\$91,416
Firefighter (first year)	\$37,752
Superintendent of schools	\$150,000
Average high school teacher	\$45,000
Senior civil engineer	\$50,689
Street maintenance crew laborers	\$26,520
Transmission line worker for City Light	\$54,184
Municipal court judge	\$79,240
Bailiff	\$28,953
Minimum wage (at \$4.90/hour)	\$10,192

Seattle city budget for 1996	\$1.87 billion
Proposed Seattle city budget for 1997	\$1.83 billion
Anticipated reduction from 1996	\$40 million
Number of city jobs lost due to this reduction	300

Source: Seattle Office of Management and Budget, Public Safety Civil Service, Seattle Times.)

## 8. Schools

Because baby boomers tend to marry and have children later in life, our school population decreased in the 1980s, but has begun to boom again.

Schools are primarily financed through logging sales from state land as well as local bonds and levies. In recent years, to finance capital improvement and maintenance, local school districts have taken to holding special elections in hopes their issues won't drown in a flood of other ballot initiatives.

Number of Seattle public school students in 1976-'77	62,913
Number of Seattle public school students in 1996-'97	47,085
Number of teachers in 1976	unavailable
Number of teachers in 1996	2,359
Number of primary/secondary schools in 1976	111
Number of primary/secondary schools in 1996	97

1976-'77 school budget	\$118 million
1996-'97 school budget	\$321 million

Cost to hold the special election for King County school bonds (February 1995)	\$951,950
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Source: Seattle School District and King County.

## 9. Parks and Open Space

Since 1903, when the Olmsted brothers first planned a series of interconnecting parks and greenbelts, Seattle has supported open space and parks. The city's 6,189 acres of parklands and recreational facilities comprise more than 300 parks and playgrounds and represent 10 percent of Seattle's total land area.

Comparisons: An acre is 43,560 square feet, equivalent to two football playing fields.

Remodel of Green Lake perimeter trail (1996)	\$2.6 million
Construction of Ship Canal bike trail (south of ship canal) per mile	\$500,000
Acquisition of land (per square foot)	\$9-\$16
Money allotted for parks and trails by the 1989 King County Open Space and Trails Bond and other open space projects	\$89.2 million
Amount spent to date	\$74 million
Acreage acquired by purchase or donation	414
Additional acreage targeted for purchase or transfer	131
Current acreage of developed parks	5,343
Current acreage of undeveloped parkland	846

Source: Seattle Parks Department.

## 10. Sports

As budgeting for infrastructure gets tighter, building sports arenas with tax dollars has become controversial throughout the country. Critics object to the use of public monies to construct "sports palaces" for private business. Politicians argue that sports are good for the economy and bolster civic pride. Many residents—especially sports fans—agree with this assessment, particularly if they don't have to pay for the construction with higher property taxes.







## TICKET-TICKET

Despite our reputation for rain and webbed feet, Seattleites can proudly boast that neither sun nor rain will keep them from getting out of the house when there is something worthwhile to attend.

First-run movie at Harvard Exit Theatre	\$6.75
Bargain matinee	\$4
Seattle International Film Festival season pass	\$275
Individual SIFF ticket	\$7
Number of movie theater tickets sold in 1992	1,167,320
Ticket for a Seattle Fringe Festival play in 1997	\$8
Adult ticket to Seattle Children's Theatre	\$17.50
Child's ticket	\$11.50
Seattle Symphony ticket	\$14-\$42
Ticket to the 5th Avenue Theatre	\$20-\$65
Adult ticket to Pacific Northwest Ballet	\$65
Child's ticket	\$45
Ticket to a Mariners game	\$7-\$20
Ticket to a Husky football game	\$13-\$28
Ticket to a Seahawks game	\$19-\$46
Ticket to a Sonics game	\$15-\$85
Parking ticket	\$20
HOV violation ticket	\$66

1993 impact on state economy from the Mariners	\$142 million
Team revenue	\$56 million
Non-team revenue	\$86 million
1995 impact on state economy from the Seahawks	\$129.2 million
Team revenue	\$64 million
Non-team revenue	\$65.2 million

Mariners player payroll (1993)	\$41 million
Seahawks player payroll (1995)	\$47 million
Sonics player payroll	Will not disclose
Husky football player payroll	\$0

Attendance for Mariners (81 games, 1996)	2.7 million
Attendance for Seahawks (10 games, 1995)	437,985
Attendance for Sonics (41 games, 1995)	701,100
Attendance for Husky football (6 games, 1995)	445,896
Total attendance for four teams	4.3 million fans

Cost to build Kingdome in 1976	\$67 million
Cost to renovate roof in 1995	\$67.5 million
Outstanding debt	\$127 million
Projected cost (1996) to bring Kingdome up to NFL standards	At least \$197 million

Kingdome annual income	\$10 million
1995 rent collected from Mariners and Seahawks	\$3.2 million

Key Arena annual income	\$14 million
Rent collected from Sonics	\$6.8 million
Rent collected from other sources	\$3.2 million
Cost to remodel Seattle Center KeyArena in 1996	\$93 million
Contributed by Sonics	\$15 million

Estimated cost to build the new Pacific Northwest ballpark per 1996 King County Ballot issue	\$285 million
Cost assumed in 1996 legislation authorizing stadium construction, prior to site selection and design	\$320 million
Estimated cost as of December 1996, based on site selection and design issues	\$363 million

Sources: Seattle-King County Sports and Events Council, King County, University of Washington and individual sports teams.

## 11. The Arts

Seattle is considered the number-one theater town on the West Coast, surpassing our larger metropolitan neighbors to the south. Quality productions are one reason; another is our dedication to providing quality venues. Interest in music and the visual arts is equally high. Artists and administrators worry that this healthy community is on the brink of decline as more public monies are directed toward sports arenas.

A number of Seattle theaters have been built or remodeled in the last few years, with the public picking up at least a portion of the costs.



Building of Benaroya Hall (Seattle Symphony)	\$109 million
Amount from public sources (projected)	\$45 million
Building of Seattle Rep's Second Stage	\$8.7 million
Amount from public sources	\$1.6 million
Building of Seattle Children's Theatre	\$11 million
Amount from public sources	\$5.6 million
Remodeling of Group Theatre	\$900,000
Amount from public sources	\$254,000
Remodeling of Kreielsheimer Place (ACT)	\$26.7 million
Amount from public sources	\$4.5 million
Remodeling of Paramount Theatre	\$37 million
Amount from public sources	\$3.8 million
Total spent to build or remodel local theaters	\$193.3 million
Amount of public money	\$60.6 million
Percent covered by public money	31

Operating income of 96 King County arts organizations	
In 1993	\$72 million
In 1995	\$82 million

1995 cumulative attendance of 96 major King County arts organizations	4.7 million
Actors Equity salary	\$300-\$700/week
Number of people employed in the arts in Seattle	More than 7,000

Sources: League of Fringe Theatres, Seattle Symphony, King County Arts Commission, Seattle Arts Commission and Corporate Council for the Arts.



## 12. Health Care and Insurance

The increasing costs of medical, dental and auto insurance have become political hot potatoes. Concerns about who is and who isn't insured, what is available and affordable, and whether it is the responsibility of government to guarantee or provide insurance are questions of concern to us all.

Cost of a physical checkup	About \$350
Average monthly cost of individual managed-care health insurance for 40-year-old male, nonsmoker (\$500 deductible)	\$99
Average monthly cost for managed-care health insurance for a family of three (\$500 deductible)	\$259
People in Washington without health insurance	625,000
Percent of population that represents	12.2
One night in a hospital (semi-private room)	\$526.81
Cost of teeth cleaning twice/year	About \$150
Average monthly dental insurance	\$50
Annual insurance for a 1996 Jeep Grand Cherokee	\$884.40
Yearly cost of operating a car, including gas, maintenance and insurance	\$9,000

Sources: Washington Health Care Policy Board, State Farm Insurance and Washington State Hospital Association.

## 13. Law and Order

We want criminals to pay for their crimes, but we are not always aware what it costs to try a case and incarcerate the guilty. Seattle contracts with King County for its municipal jail services and these costs are rising to pay for the new criminal justice facility in Kent.

Cost to book someone into jail	\$109.00
Each day in jail	\$68.05
Average cost per case to provide public defenders	\$345
Average cost per case filed to prosecute	\$144
Annual budget of the criminal division	\$4.8 million
Compensation for jury members	\$10/day
Number of municipal court noncriminal charge filings in 1994	722,832
Number of municipal court criminal charge filings in 1994	31,600
Number of municipal court jury trials in 1994	422
Number of municipal court bench trials in 1994	202
Number of municipal court magistrate (traffic) hearings in 1994	85,457
Number of municipal court contested hearings (most are traffic related) in 1994	3,403

## 14. Miscellaneous

When the end of the month rolls around and you examine your checking and credit card balance, there's always a large chunk of miscellaneous, or unexplainable, expenses. But isn't that what makes life so grand—not being able to find a reason for everything? Here's a mixture of one-time costs and those nagging little fees we're always paying for and then forgetting about.

Getting married (license)	\$37 (cash)
Having a baby in the hospital—normal birth	\$4,000–\$6,000
Buying an interview suit at Nordstrom	\$450 +
Feeding a meter downtown	\$1/hour
Parking in a downtown lot	\$3.50–\$4.50/hour
One night's accommodation for one at Best Western	\$70
One night's accommodation for one at Ramada Inn	\$110
One night's accommodation for one at Four Seasons Olympic Hotel	\$155–\$215
Average per-use ATM transaction fee	\$1

Sources: Washington state and AAA.

## 15. Last Words

The final cost we have to worry about is the cost of dying. It may seem insignificant today, but history has shown that prices in the funeral industry double every ten years.

Cemetery plot, including endowment care	\$995–\$1,995
Niche in a mausoleum	\$500–\$9,500
Casket base in a mausoleum	\$2,500 +
Top-of-the-line coffin	Up to \$17,000
Funeral and all traditional services	\$2,800 and up
Flexible, low-cost cremation, including container	\$698.28

Author's note: For anyone who believes that bureaucracies are nameless, cold and impersonal, take note: The many public and private employees who supplied the above information were helpful and informative. They were forthcoming when they didn't know the answers and invariably were able to steer me in the right direction. You can't put a price on that. ■