

Life & Culture



Allen Elizabethan Theatre at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival in Ashland. *Kim Budd*

Ashland insider's guide

Headed to the Oregon Shakespeare Festival? Read up on our tips on lodging, food and theater. **PAGE 6**

OSF hires first full-time intimacy director ahead of its 2020 season, plus a guide to this year's shows. **PAGE 9**

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Ashland insider's guide

Headed to the Oregon Shakespeare Festival? Read up on our tips and suggestions for lodging, food and theater



Ashland's downtown. Bob Palermini

Janet Eastman *The Oregonian/OregonLive*

Why is arts-centered Ashland so appealing to visitors? It was designed that way.

Ashland's founders figured out quickly in the 1850s that this tiny southern Oregon settlement, on the emigrant trail and sheltered by the picturesque Siskiyou and Cascade mountains, could prosper not as a boom-and-bust gold town but one that supplied people prospecting for a richer future.

Pioneers built flour and lumber mills propelled by Ashland Creek on land that later became the lush, 93-acre Lithia Park.

They erected narrow storefronts that continue to stand shoulder to shoulder on the major downtown streets and lure travelers to the still-vital business district.

And the wide Plaza, originally designed for wagons to turn around, has never stopped being the city's social soul.

Today, 350,000 visitors arrive in Ashland each year and pretty much do what people did when the ambitious city was young: They wander from the Plaza to East Main Street, a slow-motion spec of Highway 99, and eventually amble up either South Pioneer Street or the Chautauqua Walk to a festival.

First, it was the Chautauqua festival, where for 30 summers starting in 1898, the great minds of the day spoke to an overflow of people attracted to intellectual pursuits. Since

1935, it's been the home of the Oregon Shakespeare Festival and world-class theater.

Historic preservation consultant George Kramer, who has lived in Ashland for 40 years, says this dot on the Oregon map always had big dreams and was deliberate in achieving them.

"Early on, Ashland had an attitude that people wanted to come here," he says.

Ashland has something that has survived in few cities: Although the downtown remains the center of local government and tourism, it feels authentic, welcoming.

Visitors, comfortable in casual clothes and walking shoes, sense the clock has been turned back in another way: There are no national chain stores with brand recognition, so local merchants have to choose wisely to interest window shoppers.

And restaurateurs reel in repeat customers by making the room, drinks and food memorable. Most have a Chez Panisse level of commitment to seasonal, locally produced ingredients, whether it's a quick grass-fed beef burger at Flip or an evening devoted to 10 foraged, wildcrafted courses at Mas.

Ashland is an easy place to navigate and in the heart of the city, where the speed limit is 20 mph, people slow down. One long-timer explained her relaxed attitude: Settlers

built here because of the creek and later discovered the calming benefits of the lithia natural mineral springs.

"You know," she laughs, gesturing to a bubbling drinking fountain in the Plaza, "there is lithium in the water."

Places to stay

To understand the breadth of Ashland's lodging options, consider this: U.S. presidents to Pacific Crest Trail hikers have stayed in the small city just over the California-Oregon border.

Celebrities and film directors check into the downtown jewel, the Art Deco Ashland Springs Hotel, at 212 E. Main St. (888-795-4545, AshlandSpringsHotel.com), while backpackers — like "Wild" author Cheryl Strayed — share rooms in the Ashland Hostel at 150 N. Main St. (541-482-9217, theashlandhostel.com).

The Peerless Hotel, built in 1904 at 243 4th St. in the Historic Railroad District, has high-class Victorian décor (541-488-1082, peerlesshotel.com), while newly built downtown condos are used as short-term vacation stays.

Airbnb, Vrbo and other home stay businesses are legal here, and many former bed-and-breakfast inns have become

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chicken and pimiento cheese hushpuppies worth the calories. Pair them with beer or rye whiskey (541-482-7437, birdandrye.com).

FAST MEALS

Technically, you can order takeout and grab-and-go at most eateries, but these spots have earned a reputation for tasty food when the clock is ticking.

Most of the Mexican-style restaurants like downtown Taqueria Picaro (76 N. Pioneer St., 541-708-6565) are quick and so are the Asian-style Bento East (3 Granite St., 541-488-3582) and health-conscious North Indian cuisine Taj of Ashland (31 Water St., 541-488-5900).

At the south end of town, Pangea (272 E. Main St., 541-552-1630, pangeaashland.com) has vegan and vegetarian soups plus panini and big, gluten-free chicken wraps, and the staff at Pie + Vine at 358 E. Main St. can bake wood-fired pizzas and prepare pasta dishes pretty fast (541-488-5493, pieandvine.co).

PLACES TO LINGER

Throughout the year, the storied Ashland Springs Hotel's Larks Home Kitchen Cuisine is an elegant place to enjoy an hour-long lunch for two or a joyful dinner with a group of friends that extends into nightcaps (888-795-4545, LARKSAshland.com).

Cucina Biazzi, a cozy restaurant in a converted historic house with an inviting patio at 568 E. Main St., is known for its generous portions of flavorful Italian food. Ask to customize the prix fixe menu (541-488-3739, facebook.com/cucinabiazzi) or wander to Ostras Tapas & Bottleshop on the Plaza, which offers small plates and paella for two (47 N. Main St., 541-708-0528, ostrasashland.com).

Innkeepers guide romantics to Amuse for its Northwest-French cuisine (15 N. 1st St., 541-488-9000, amuserestaurant.com) and couples traveling together to the sophisticated Peerless Restaurant & Bar at 265 4th St., 541-488-6067, peerlessrestaurant.com).

Graham Sheldon of Ashland Creek Inn (70 Water St., 541-482-3315, ashlandcreekinn.com) appreciates the fine dining at chef-owned Coquina at 542 A St. (541-488-0521, coquinarestaurant.com).

Serious foodies find their way to the fabled New Sammy's Cowboy Bistro at 2210 S. Pacific Highway in nearby Talent (541-535-2779, newsammys.com).

FRUGAL FOODIES

Ask servers to clue you in on happy hours, free wine tasting, "locals" dinner specials and other discounts that can cut down the final total on the check.

The well-liked, health-minded hot food bar at the Ashland Food Co-op allows you to scoop up as much or as little as you like or can afford (237 N. 1st St., 541-482-2237, ashlandfood.coop).

Martolli's Hand-tossed Pizza sells whole pizzas or by the slice in two locations: On the Plaza (38 E. Main St., 541-482-1918) and next to Market of Choice, about two miles south, at 1469 Siskiyou Blvd. (541-482-1913, martolli.com).

Louie's of Ashland on the Plaza is beloved for its friendly atmosphere and cheerful staff who don't mind if you want to split an \$8.99 recession classic burger with fries or order a \$5 glass of wine and a \$3 dessert. There are also tasty vegetarian and gluten-free options. Arrive early for the popular Tuesday Trivia from 7 p.m.-9 p.m. (41 N. Main St., 541-482-9701, louiesofashland.com).

Louie's, Sesame Asian Kitchen, Greenleaf and many other restaurants alongside Ashland Creek offer al fresco dining. Wander past the umbrella-shaded tables on Calle Guanajuato on most weekends and you'll also see leather goods, fiber arts, jewelry and other items made by Lithia Artisans Market of Ashland's artists and craftspeople.

EARLY RISERS

Portlanders can feel right at home waiting for breakfast at the crowd-pleasing Morning Glory Cafe at 1149 Siskiyou Blvd. (541-488-8636) across from the Southern Oregon University campus or they can hover near the downtown Plaza and enjoy Brothers' Restaurant at 95 N. Main St. (541-482-9671, brothersrestaurant.net).

Another early-morning Ashland institution is the Breadboard, a mile from the Plaza at 744 N. Main St. Satisfying comfort food includes Belgian waffles, gluten-free toast and sandwiches (541-488-0295, breadboardashland.com).

Ruby's of Ashland at 163 N. Pioneer St. has blossomed into a smooth operation with delicious breakfast burritos plus locally sourced vegetarian, vegan and gluten-free casual food. Diners cozy up in the two rooms or on the patio, which is popular in all types of weather (541-488-7717, rubysofashland.com).

WINE LOVERS

Vicki Capp of the Iris Inn Bed and Breakfast (59 Manzanita St., 541-488-2286, irisinnashland.com) sends guests to picnic or enjoy a light repast at a handful of tasting rooms along Ashland's Bear Creek countryside and dozens more throughout the Rogue Valley, which benefits from wide-ranging climates and soils.

Capp schedules special wine and food pairings, without the Napa Valley crowds, snootiness or high prices, at scenic Irvine & Roberts Vineyards five miles from downtown at 1614 Emigrant Creek Road. No reservations are required (541-482-9383, irvinerobertsvineyards.com).

Some restaurants have no corkage fee nights, which encourages people to pop open the estate Pinot noir or Chardonnay bottle they bought that day at a winery or at the downtown Ashland Wine Cellar at 38 Lithia Way (541-488-2111, ashlandwinecellar.com).

Taking home Oregon wine is easy for Alaska Airlines Mileage Plan members who are allowed to check a case for free (ask wineries for packing tips).

CRAFT BEER

If you came to Oregon for fine craft beer, you'll find it at Caldera Brewing Company near the I-5 or roll into downtown to the venerable Standing Stone Brewery or newer, patio-centric The Growler Guys (one of the very few chain businesses in the city). Craft beer-loving locals also gather at Gils and the RedZone Sports Bar N' Grill.

COFFEEHOUSES

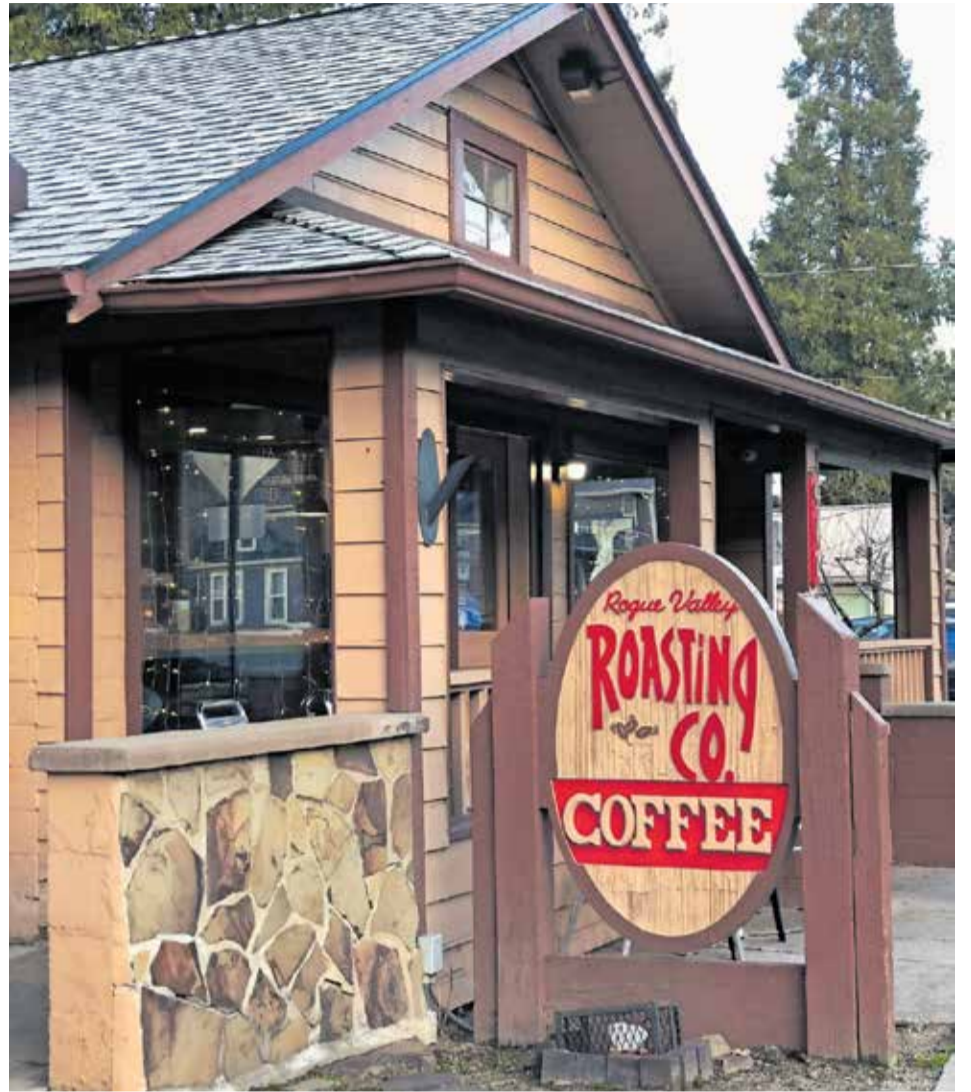
Sit down. Open a book or daydream. And take your sweet time at one of Ashland's independently owned coffeehouses, where caffeinated beverages are served without the hustle and bustle of a crowded chain.

Owners Mary Reimer and Shanna Barber of the McCall House boutique inn inside an 1883 mansion (153 Oak St., 541-482-9296, mccallhouse.com) recommend intimate Hither Coffee & Goods at the south end of downtown (376 E. Main St. (541-625-4090, hithermarket.com), across from the Andrew Carnegie-funded Ashland Library.

Other must stop coffee spots: Noble Coffee Roasting coffeehouse and roastery at 281 4th St. is open 7 a.m. to 4 p.m. daily (541-488-3288, noblecoffee.com).

Bloomsbury Blends on the second level of revered Bloomsbury Books at 290 E. Main St., is open 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. Monday-Saturday and 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. Sunday (541-708-0608, bloomsburyblends.com).

French-style Mix Bakeshop at 57 N. Main St., is open 7 a.m.-8 p.m. Sunday-Thursday and 7 a.m.-8:30 p.m. Friday and Saturday (541-488-9885, mixashland.com), and ReMix Coffee Bar, serves Stumptown coffee



Rogue Valley Roasting Co. Courtesy photo

and hot pressed sandwiches at 1602 Ashland St. (541-488-0101, remixcoffee.com/newsletter-signup).

Rogue Valley Roasting Co. at 917 E. Main St., is open daily 6:45 a.m. to 6 p.m. (541-488-5902, ashlandcoffee.com).

Oregon Shakespeare Festival tickets for less

People who only think of going to the theater at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival are missing out. The name makes it clear: This is a festival and over nine months, there are revealing backstage tours, insightful presentations about plots before the curtains rise and intimate discussions with actors after matinees.

During summer and fall, there are also free Green Show performances on OSF's Courtyard Stage in front of the two largest theaters.

And just like at any festival, people gather to talk to fellow fans about what brought them together.

OSF's top ticket prices of \$120 are out of reach to many theater supporters, but adults can plan ahead and buy the lowest priced C seats for \$40 throughout the season (Feb. 28-Nov. 1) or jump into discounts offered closer to the performance date.

Tickets for 6- to 17-year olds are always about half off in all seating sections of the Angus Bowmer, Thomas and outdoor Allen Elizabethan theaters.

Ticket prices in the spring and fall are reduced for OSF members with membership starting as low as \$35 a year.

Members also have no-cost refund and exchange privileges, and are invited to special events and into the Gertrude Bowmer Members' Lounge.

Here are other ways to buy higher-priced OSF tickets at a discount:

- 5 tickets for \$200: A Flex Pass, sold Jan. 29-March 31 at the box office, can be redeemed for seats offered on designated performances. The pass can be used for a

single seat at five performances throughout the 2020 season or for individuals attending the same performance. Visit the box office at 15 S. Pioneer St. or call 800-219-8161 (cannot be purchased online at osfashland.org).

- Rush tickets: Text OSFRUSH to 41411 to get the daily list of rush shows in which \$40 tickets (\$15 for students) are sold at the box office an hour before curtain (OSF members can call 800-219-8161 at 11 a.m. to book rush tickets).
- Family Days: Seats are \$30 and include a prologue event for 6- to 17-year olds and their family and friends. Performances are listed at osfashland.org/en/plan-your-visit/visitor-info/family-days.
- Web specials: Limited-time discounts for performances are announced on Thursdays throughout the season on the Web Specials page (osfashland.org/en/web-specials) or via email if you register and opt-in to receive information about Ticket Specials.
- U.S. military, National Guard members, veterans of the armed services, Red Card personnel (firefighters) and their immediate families receive a 15% discount at the box office on available tickets.
- Oregon Trail, CalFresh or other SNAP card holders can buy \$5 tickets at OSF Connects-eligible shows. The list of shows is updated at osfashland.org/en/osf-connects on Mondays.
- AAA members can receive 10% off up to two adult-price tickets per season to Sunday through Thursday performances.
- Many Ashland innkeepers can offer guests discounts — up to 75 percent off OSF ticket prices — and make all the arrangements.

LEARN MORE

Want more tips and suggestions? You can read all of our Ashland insider guide stories at bit.ly/2vI4JA8.

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