

Pike Place Market: Your Age-By-Age Guide to This Seattle Destination

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Pike Place Market: Your Age-By-Age Guide to This Seattle Destination

The 110-year-old 'city within a city' has something for everyone — from toddlers to teens

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PHOTO: Pike Place offers all kinds of wonders for kids of all ages. Illustration: Alli Arnold

At 9 a.m. on a spring weekday, [Pike Place Market](#) is a hive of quiet efficiency. In the main hall, Hmong flower growers bundle bright bouquets, while local farmers artfully stack rhubarb.

You don't know Pike Place

Fix that by reading up on [the 2017 expansion](#) and [meet the Market's Miss Piggy](#).

At the north end of the market, the last few crafters crowd around a whiteboard, selecting their stalls for the day. Downstairs, 3- and 4-year-olds finish breakfast at the Pike Market Child Care and Preschool before a day of play. Outside, a few people — locals on their way to work and jet-lagged tourists — stop by Victor Steinbrueck park to enjoy the view that's emerging as clouds lift: Great Wheel, Olympics, ferries, Sound.

It's the calm before the storm. Within the next few hours, hundreds of tourists will descend and Rachel the Pig will disappear beneath a crowd. Cameras and phones will be held aloft in every corner of the Market to capture the color and chaos of the 9-acre maze of buildings, restaurants, shops, arcades and alleys that historian Alice Shorett has called “the soul of the city.”

Market speak

High stalls, day stalls, roll call — what? If you really want to navigate the Market, you need to learn its locations and lingo.

Roll call: The Market's daily morning meeting at the north end of the arcades where day-stall vendors choose their locations.

Arcades: The long, semi-open Market halls on Pike Place — lined with farmers and craft and food vendors — are what many think of as the heart of the Market.

Grandfathered day stalls: Longtime day-stall vendors at the Market who are exempt from both the daily assignment of spaces and the requirement to produce their own wares. Grandfathered stalls are marked with small, hand-painted signs.

High stalls: Permanent market stalls (for example, Frank's Quality Produce and Sosio's Produce) with angled, stacked displays. (High-stall vendors primarily sell produce, but do not have to grow it themselves.)

The Down Under: Burrowed under the Market's Main Arcade, five floors of quirky shops and novelty stores.

Pike Street: Often confused with Pine Street, Pike Street runs east-west and ends in the Market, where it intersects with the cobblestone road called **Pike Place**.

Post Alley: Running not quite parallel to Pike Place, the alley comprises three segments, including Upper Post Alley, running from Virginia to Stewart streets; Post Alley, running from Stewart to Pike Place (look for Café Campana); and Lower

Stewart to Pike Place (look for [Cafe Campaign](#)), and Lower Post Alley, which picks up on the south side of Pike Street below the Main Arcade and is home to the Gum Wall.

Sanitary Public Market: Located between Pike Place and First Avenue, this historic building opened in 1910 and is named for the fact that horses were not allowed inside. The building houses a creamery, a meat market and, on its upper floors, apartments.

Ah, the Market. It's ours, but it also belongs to the millions of tourists who visit it every year (it receives an estimated 10 million visitors annually). And though we locals love our regional icon, when we think of wading through the crowds to spend a day there with our kids, we just ... hesitate.

Families don't need to explain that hesitation to Heather Chermak. "When I suggested a field trip to the Pike Place Market for my son's preschool, all the parents said, 'No way,'" says Chermak, co-owner of [Seattle by Foot](#) tour company. Chermak leads the Seattle Kid's Tour, which shows families the Market as well as other downtown locales.

"There are crowds, and you do have to talk to your kids about safety and let them know to stay close," says Chermak, who has successfully taken her 9-year-old son, who has a sensory processing disorder, to the Market since he was 2.

But all that prep? It's absolutely worth it. "Pike Place Market is one of the things that makes Seattle unique," says Chermak. "It's a little city within a city, and it's important for kids to see that community."

In the summer, you can even find kids spending the day with their

in the summer, you can even find kids spending the day with their vendor parents, she says. “On my tours, I introduce kids to young adults who grew up at the Market and are now running their own businesses in the Market community.”

And guess what? Pike Place Market might be more family-friendly now than ever before. Recent renovations aim to make it cleaner and safer without smoothing out its homespun edges, rooted in a Seattle once populated largely by farmers and fishermen. When the MarketFront expansion opens on June 29 ([read more on that](#)), families will have more locally produced food choices and a larger, open public space.

In honor of that historic expansion, here are insider tips you need to make the most of the Market this summer and far beyond.

The littles: Short and sweet with lots of treats

“Visiting the Market with kids is all about timing and being prepared,” Heather Chermak says.

To avoid overwhelming toddlers and preschoolers, either arrive early — just as the Market opens — or at the end of the day. “It’s easier to walk through the Market and see things,” she says. Later, when the crowds arrive, “there are also hidden hallways and quiet spaces to take a breather,” Chermak says.

Once you’ve parked (tips on that above), head to the south end of the Market, near Pike Street, where, if you’re lucky, the cash-only [Daily Dozen Doughnut Company](#) won’t have a long line. Give your little ones a boost so they can watch the doughnut robot make the delicious morsels. Order a mixed bag and eat the contents as you

watch the fish-tossing show at nearby [Pike Place Fish Market](#). While you're there, play tourist and take some pics of your kids on [Rachel the Pig](#).

Head to nearby [Seattle Watercolors](#) (in the Economy Market Building on Pike Street), which sells a Pike Place Market coloring book drawn by the owner's daughter.

In the arcades, take time to enjoy the buskers (if you tip them, let your child put the money in their jars) and taste every available sample. Browse the Main Arcade for a fun souvenir and look for day-stall vendors who sell their wares with their babies strapped to their backs (the San Nicolas Book Art stall is one). Also keep an eye out for [Adorable Seattle](#)'s handmade stuffed animals.

When it starts to get crowded, cross Pike Place to the Sanitary Public Market Building. Look at the ostrich eggs at [Pike Place Creamery](#) and give your little ones time to play on the rocking horses in front of the display case. Check out the live crabs in the neighboring tanks and take Post Alley to [Beecher's Handmade Cheese](#) to watch cheese being made in 10,000-gallon vats.

Need a break? Head to the 2,000-square-foot rooftop [Urban Garden](#) (follow signs to Maximilien, then turn left before you get there). Here, your kids can run around and decorate the chalkboard replica of Rachel.

[Local Color](#) (corner of Pike Place and Stewart) is a good spot for a coffee fuel-up. The spacious gallery/coffee shop makes a great latte and has plenty of room to park a stroller.

Find a play stop at [Boston Street Baby Store](#) (Post Alley at

Stewart), which boasts a train set children can play with while adults browse. Sugar up next door at [The Chocolate Market](#), which sells traditional candy, fudge and unique treats like huckleberry popcorn and chocolate slugs.

On your way back to the car, explore the MarketFront plaza (open in June) and enjoy the view of Elliott Bay. Peek through the windows at [Old Stove Brewing Co.](#)'s automatic bottler and [Indi Chocolate](#)'s conveyor belt. But don't push it: Unlike tourists, you don't have to fit everything into one visit.



Pike Place isn't just for tourists: These spots offer fun for all ages. Illustration: Alli Arnold

Grade-schoolers: Exploring 9 acres of

adventure

If 100 elementary school classrooms can pull off field trips to Pike Place Market every year, you can do it with a grade-schooler or two. Scott Davies knows. As education program director at the Market, he's an expert at engaging kids in its history. "With second-graders, we talk about community. Older students learn about history, too, and by fifth grade, we talk about business and entrepreneurship."

Take your cue from Davies and prep kids about what they'll see. Younger kids may be more likely to try a new fruit (all those samples!) when they know the vendor had a hand in growing it. Older kids are ready to understand the difference between chain stores and market stalls, and that each vendor runs their own small business.

Start your day with school-age kids by fueling up on coffee and cocoa (don't miss the marshmallow bar) at [Ghost Alley Espresso](#), next to the [Gum Wall](#) in Lower Post Alley. (Ghost Alley also conveniently sells gum.) Look for the nearby tiny pocket park and the dangerous-looking art fence surrounding a power substation at the south end.

Shop the Main Arcade, and try samples on offer including [Pappardelle's chocolate fettucine](#) (high stall No. 8). Among the crafts tables, keep an eye out for [Planet of the Puppets](#) and fiber art fish from [Rachael Just Creates](#) among the crafts tables.

When it gets crowded, head "Down Under" to explore five floors of quirky shops and candy stores, possibly more of interest to kids of

this age than the farmers market. Bring quarters for the [Giant Shoe Museum](#) (Lower Level 4, part of [Old Seattle Paperworks](#)) and coin-operated fortune tellers scattered throughout the lower levels. Kids are drawn to the preserved bugs and samurai swords at F & J Great Western Trading Co., and the stuffed-animal zoo and cat-themed everything at [Merry Tails](#).

[Golden Age Collectables](#) serves the desires of fandom of all ages with everything from Funko Pop! dolls to movie scripts, alongside its comic book collections. [Market Magic and Novelty](#) is a must-visit. And kids will think they've truly found Diagon Alley when they see the bulk herbs and singing bowls at [Tenzing Momo](#) in the Economy Market Building.

For lunch, walk north on the cobblestones of Pike Place to the Soames-Dunn Building between Stewart and Virginia. There you can find Chinese street food — noodles and flat bread — and a quiet courtyard at [Country Dough](#). For a treat, find out whether [Turkish Delight's](#) signature treat lives up to its Narnian hype (just south of Virginia on Pike Place), or quaff Rachel's ginger beer instead of butterbeer. Take your selfies at [Victor Steinbrueck Park](#) before exploring the new MarketFront.

If older kids are ready to explore on their own, borrow one of Davies' many scavenger hunt ideas, such as an A-to-Z food hunt or a stuffed pastry challenge: "Every culture has its own version," he says.



One of Pike Place's better known destinations, the Gum Wall is in Lower Post Alley. Illustration: Alli Arnold

Teens: Foodies in training, indie identities and busking

Teens are primed to explore the Market's many subcultures. "Many Market businesses are so unique that they appeal especially to teens . . . they can find goods that express their personalities, their interests, their styles," says Davies.

If you can get your teens out of bed early, have them watch a few minutes of the daily roll call, which is how the Market swings into action 363 mornings a year. Called up in order of seniority, day-stall craft vendors pick the location where they'll sell that day.

Before exploring, build an itinerary with your teen based on their interest. If your teen's a foodie-in-training, point them to [Sur La Table](#) — yes, it's a national chain, but it began in 1972 on Pine Street as Seattle's first kitchen store. For inspiration, explore one of

four spice shops ([MarketSpice](#) near Rachel is a favorite) and ethnic grocery stores scattered throughout the Market. Consider timing your visit around an Atrium Kitchen program, where many of the events are free. All are listed in the Market's [online events calendar](#).

The lower levels are a collector's paradise. Every day is Halloween at [Orange Dracula](#), a self-proclaimed "Woolworths for weirdos" with a pinball machine and black-and-white photo booth. [Holy Cow Records](#) offers quality crate digging, while [Chin Music Press](#) sells Enfu posters alongside its own chapbooks and Asian-themed publications.

The north end of Down Under's third level opens to Western Avenue, where the Market continues with more shops. Don't miss [Ugly Baby and La Ru](#), your one-stop shop for laser-eyed kitten T-shirts and roller-skating unicorn needlepoint kits.

Introduce budding leftists to the shelves at the anarchist collective [Left Bank Books](#) at 92 Pike St., where the inventory makes a political statement. Fuel gap-year dreams with cartographic art, guidebooks and travel literature at [Metsker Maps](#) on First Avenue.

Also, don't miss one of the newest Market tenants: [Eighth Generation](#). The gallery, located just above the Gum Wall, is owned by local artist Louis Gong, whose unexpected interpretations of native art traditions on goods ranging from sneakers to phone cases address questions of identity.

Lunch can double as a history lesson: Wade through the crowds in the Main Arcade to get to the [Athenian Inn](#), which has served seafood at the Market since 1909. Or cross cultures and find

[Farvahar Persian Cafe](#) in the almost-secret food court tucked behind [Rachel's Ginger Beer](#) in Post Alley.

Finally, if your teen performs, he or she can actually join the Market community for a day (or more). Busking permits are available to anyone with any kind of performing talent for only \$30 per year from the Market office. Busking, in the spirit of the Market, is a summer job without a cubicle or a time card.

Fresh tips

In the summer, Wednesdays are the best day for visiting the Market. Cruise ships don't stop in Seattle on Wednesdays, and an afternoon farmers market aimed at serving local families runs on Wednesdays from 3–7 p.m., through September.

Consider taking public transportation, but if you do drive, park in the [Public Market Parking Garage](#) at 1531 Western Avenue. The newly expanded, multilevel garage is one of the cheapest downtown. It is attached to the new MarketFront and connects to the main Market by a pedestrian bridge.

Before you do anything at the Market, grab a foldout map at the information desk at First Avenue and Pike Street. (Tip: Kids who ask nicely may receive a souvenir button with their map.)

Download one of the themed [Pocket Guides](#) online, including a handy public art cheat sheet. You can also use the [Stary app](#) to find iconic artworks at the Market.

If it happens to be raining when you're ready to take a break,

head to the public seating in the waterfront viewing area near Sound View Café. If it's sunny, head to the new MarketFront plaza where there will be lots of room to sit.

The [Urban Garden](#) is a peaceful spot for a picnic, but don't pick the produce; this is a giving garden — all the food is grown for donation to the [Pike Place Food Bank](#).

Just opened last year, [Shug's Soda Fountain & Ice Cream](#), on First Avenue, is a fun stop for an old-fashioned treat, as well as a coin-operated pony ride.

Reminder: Always ask before taking photos of vendors or their products — craftspeople can be protective of their designs — and always tip buskers if you take their photo.

Take a tour from the pros: Seattle by Foot's two-hour [Seattle Kid's Tour](#) is a behind-the-scenes intro to the Market and its community (\$100/family).

On Saturdays in the summer, [Friends of the Market](#) offers an art and history-focused tour of the Market that welcomes families (adult \$15; age 6-12 \$8; under 6 free; reservation required).

If your highest priority is still to avoid crowds, go on a rainy weekday and not in the summer. But you already knew that, right?

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