

City in the Clouds

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It's advice I hear often – travel during the off-season. The tourists are gone; the locals are less guarded. Deals are to be had. Sure, this works well in some cases. I picture a storybook winter Prague, everything draped just so in picturesque snow.

But would this pan out everywhere? For instance, I live in Seattle. The summers here are notorious - sun, water, low humidity, mountains, and a deeply cultural city to explore. There is an atmosphere of play among the locals, and the playground is impressive. The problem is, the off-season is even more notorious.

How many times have I answered the question, “does it really rain all the time there?” Sometimes I just say yes, and roll my eyes to illustrate the woe. Poor Seattleites, dripping wet most of the time. We are the weather martyrs of the US, putting up with perpetual damp in exchange for the beauty of the place.

This is a convenient myth, but it's not quite true. A check of stats reveals that Seattle does average just 58 days of sun a year (woe!) but, surprisingly, it rains more in New York and Boston (hmm).

This morning, I pulled back the curtains to see, yes, grey skies, but also a gentle fog. What could seem gloomy to one eye could also be seen as a bit otherworldly and romantic to another. I'm solidly in the last camp. When an especially heavy fog descends, the tops of our skyscrapers disappear. Seattle is already so distantly placed from the rest of the US that these fog days leave me imagining that we've made the final break, and are now a city floating in the clouds.

When it does rain, it's not bad. Often, it's a drizzle or a pitter patter. Deluges are seldom, and many of us walk around in the rain without umbrellas. Hooded jackets are de rigueur. At Halloween this year, while protecting a costume, a friend announced “this is the first time I've used an umbrella in 12 years!” Perhaps Bumbershoot, the local music festival, should be renamed “Hoodie.”

Life here happens despite the weather. The soccer games at the nearby park are never ending, rain or shine. While at the beach recently (bundled up in a down jacket and a scarf), I saw a man swim by in a full, hooded wetsuit.

A small secret is that many of us miss the rains by the time autumn comes around. “I don't mind” and “I kind of missed it” are phrases I've heard more than once, and I've even found myself uttering similar things. When I wake up to a delicate drumming on my roof, the bed seems exponentially more comfy. At night, the streetlights make the little droplets on everything wink like diamonds. The bus windows steam up, and we are a little army of squeaky shoes, wool beanies and coffee cups. Perhaps not many visitors would venture the off-season, but the over-hyped rain need not keep away all.