

Seattle Space Needle Receives a Makeover

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Some years ago, a friend living in Seattle gave me a present—earrings by a local artist in the shape of the Space Needle. I've visited the city's most iconic landmark several times, but recent renovations to the tune of \$100 million make the trip a go regardless of how many times you've been.

New wow features include an open-air observatory with glass walls providing unobstructed 360-degree views, a second observatory with the world's first revolving glass floor, free photos of you and your gang, and a virtual reality bungee jump. Even my twenty-something-year-old son, who came up from Portland to join me for the day and had visited the Space Needle just the year before, thought it was a blast (of course, the local craft beer we enjoyed as we took in the views didn't hurt).



Author and son in front of faux backdrop (Credit: Space Needle)

A bit of history

The Space Needle was built for the 1962 World's Fair at a cost of \$4.5 million. According to local lore, it was a sketch on a napkin that gave birth to the now-famous 605-foot-tall tower, when the fair's chief organizer doodled an image of what would become the fair's dominant structure, complete with a flying-saucer top in keeping with the fair's space-age theme.

Since then, about 60 million people have visited the pop-culture icon; newer attractions, like the [Chihuly Garden and Glass](#) and [Museum of Pop Culture](#), make the 74-acre Seattle Center complex a wildly popular destination.

The New Seattle Space Needle

Today's cutting-edge technology allows features that were impossible when the Space Needle was built a half-century ago. With glass that is now stronger than steel, entire walls, benches and floors in the tower's observatories could be fashioned from glass. In all, 176 tons and 10 different types of glass were used.

Gone is the old outdoor deck with its wire cage barrier, replaced by an open-air observation level enclosed by glass panels that provide a seamless view over all of [Seattle](#), including downtown, Lake Union (where my above-mentioned friend once lived in a houseboat), Puget

Sound with its ferries, cruise ships, barges, and sailboats, and, on clear days, Mt. Ranier. In fact, because those views are so vital and rain is no stranger in Seattle, the Space Needle employs a full-time glass-cleaning staff that cleans and maintains its more than 20,000 square feet of glass, including the application of a water repellant that causes rain to bead up and roll off the glass.

We found the glass so invisible, I'll bet that if you trained binoculars on the tower, it would look like visitors were strolling around the *outside* rampart with any protection at all.

The Experience

Elevators deliver passengers to the 520-foot-high indoor and open-air observatory in 43 seconds. After being photographed by a professional photographer against a virtual background that includes the Space Needle, Mt. Ranier, downtown Seattle and other landmarks (you can access your photo afterward online), you are drawn to the open-air observatory, where tilted glass walls let you “float” out above the city and glass benches (called Skyrisers) are good for those important selfies (though photographers wander around here, too, to snap complimentary photos).



Taking a selfie in the Space Needle (Credit: Beth Reiber)

Just below the upper deck and reached via staircase is the 500-foot-high Loupe, sporting the world's first and only revolving glass floor. Not only can you see straight down to the ground, but you can also observe the tower's mechanical device that smoothly turns the revolving floor. I got a kick out of watching people from around the world enjoy the novel experience of walking on transparent floors, some tentatively, others sprawling on the floor to get a closer look at the world below. In all, it takes about 45 minutes for a full rotation.



Glass floor in the Seattle Space Needle (Credit: Beth Reiber)



Children peer at the ground below in the Space Needle (Credit: Beth Reiber)

Included in your ticket is the virtual reality bungee jump that has you leaping off the Space Needle, which my son thoroughly enjoyed (me, not so much). And this being Seattle, there's also a café and a bar in the observatories where you can imbibe Pacific Northwest wine or beer and snacks while enjoying the views.

In late 2018, a new restaurant will debut, also with glass floors. I guess I'll just have to go back.

IF YOU GO

For more information: [Space Needle](#)

Tips

This is a great experience, especially if you have kids or grandkids in tow, but be sure to purchase tickets in advance, which are timed to reduce waiting in line.

You'll save money if you visit before 10 am and after 8PM.

READ MORE

For more on what to do in and around the Space Needle, see Beth Reiber's article:

[The Seattle Center of it All](#)

\$100M SPACE NEEDLE MAKEOVER



