

## Tacoma: A weekend of glass appreciation and great cuisine

Some towns—ones that often have working-class roots—are cursed by their proximity to a more glamorous sister city. Gritty Glasgow, for example, spent years in the shadow of twee Edinburgh. Charleston is still considered more civilized than nearby sultry Savannah. For years, Tacoma has played underdog to utopian Seattle. But so-called ugly duckling cities often emerge in Cinderella fashion. That’s certainly the case with Tacoma. Forget a single glass slipper: Tacoma boasts numerous glittering glass works from the world-renowned native son, artist Dale Chihuly. And while he’s not exactly a fairy godfather, the citizens of Tacoma, spurred by civic pride, have shaped their city into a vibrant destination.



Tacoma is no longer in the shadow of Seattle.

My friend Cathy and I arrived from Atlanta and Nashville respectively, on an early July evening. As someone who has made a dozen trips to Seattle, heading south from the airport on I-5 to Tacoma was a new experience. Our accommodation for the weekend was the Hotel Murano, smack in the middle of the clean, compact and revitalized downtown.

Taking a cue from Chihuly, Hotel Murano boasts an international collection of glass artists. The chandelier in the lobby, the front desk, even the door pulls were commissioned for the chic boutique hotel. Every time the elevator opens on a floor, new treasures are revealed, so one evening, I rode from floor to floor, checking out the pieces. My favorite, called “Homage to the Implant or Perfect Pair” was a witty sculpture of enviable breasts on the 7th floor.

Our room was snappily decorated with fire-engine red and sage green accents. There were a lot of cool touches: a pillow menu (I ordered a body pillow) and a “spiritual” menu with choices including the Koran, the Book of Mormon, the Torah and the Bible (ever read the Koran?). The mini bar included a “mobile intimacy kit” and a toothbrush made of recycled plastic.

Famished after a cross-country trip, we walked a couple of blocks downhill—Tacoma will remind you of San Francisco or Seattle with its undulating urban contours—to Pacific Grill for dinner. Seated in the handsome, brick room punctuated by artwork, our waiter steered us to terrific cocktails, including the kicky tiger lily, a concoction of black pepper-infused tequila with limoncello, fresh squeezed ruby red grapefruit juice and fresh lime strained over crushed ice and served in a tall glass. My entrée, king salmon with a fresh vegetable succotash and sugar snap pea vinaigrette, was equally creative. I tasted the region in every bite.