

Medford, Oregon

A rich cultural life and plentiful outdoor activities surrounded by the beauty of the Northwest.

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When Harold Dee retired from the aerospace industry in 1999, he and his wife Doris were living on the 48th floor of a tony Chicago skyscraper. They had season tickets to the Lyric Opera and were members of the Art Institute of Chicago. Three years and 2,000 miles later, life for the Dees is, well, a little different. How different? Says Doris: "I can't get the deer to stop eating my garden."

That's because the Dees traded in their high-rise lifestyle for something simpler and cheaper: an 11-acre spread on the banks of the Rogue River near Medford, Ore. Both the winter blizzards and humid summer days of the Midwest are a distant memory. And despite the Northwest's rainy reputation, the Dees' southern Oregon locale draws only 18 inches a year, compared with the 60 or so inches that drench the northern part of the state.

On top of it all, they've had to sacrifice far less in terms of culture than you might think. Ashland, 15 miles to the east, is home to the celebrated Oregon Shakespeare Festival, which runs from February to October. And nearby Jacksonville hosts the 40-year-old Britt Music Festival, featuring artists as diverse as Ray Charles, the Beach Boys, jazz trumpet master Arturo Sandoval and pianist Andre Watts.

Wildflowers rule in Rogue Valley

Roughly midway between San Francisco and Seattle, Medford lies just north of the California border, surrounded by the Siskiyou and the Cascade Mountains. The Pacific is about a two-hour drive west, but with all the rivers and lakes in the vicinity, you don't need to go that far for amazing fishing, boating or river rafting. There are five golf courses and several wineries near Medford, and the old-growth forests of Crater Lake National Park are only an hour away.



Medford, Oregon

- Population: 64,249
- Nearest big city: Portland (221 miles)
- Sunny days a year: 213
- High July temp: 88
- Low January temp: 28

Medford's downtown was recently named a National Historic District. Extensive urban development and preservation projects are taking root, including the conversion of the city's 1910 train station into a high-end restaurant. "Medford is just on the verge of really discovering itself," says Doris.

The Dees were also amazed at how friendly the locals are to strangers -- and how much less it costs them to eat out (\$9 or \$10 each). And, oh yes, no more pumping gas. "It's illegal to pump your own gas in Oregon," explains Doris. "We're big fans of that law." ■