



WANDERLUST

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View from the Top

The Space Needle goes high-tech to show off Seattle.

EVER SINCE IT OPENED, at the 1962 Century 21 World's Fair, the Space Needle (206-905-2100; www.spaceneedle.com) has symbolized Seattle's cutting-edge thinking. Today, in the actual 21st century, the tower provides not only a 360-degree panorama of the Seattle area, but now an informational overview of the entire region—even on an overcast day.

Installed in 2007, SkyQ, an interactive computer program that's part of a recent \$25 million renovation of the Space Needle, is displayed on kiosks within the glass-enclosed portion of the structure's 520-foot-high Observation Deck. Some kiosks let viewers zoom in on anything they can currently see outside; another displays computerized renderings of the tower's views at any minute of the day or night. Still other touch-screen kiosks employ video and audio feeds to help inform visitors about attractions, neighborhoods, and local legends from Hendrix to Starbucks.

"It was intended to enhance the view, to bring people closer to the city of Seattle, and to draw them into the community," says Peter Beck, the Space Needle's chief operating officer, of the SkyQ system. "It adds to the experience, giving visitors more to see."

On most days, of course, SkyQ plays second fiddle to the view. No other Seattle viewpoint provides an expansive perspective to rival that of the Space Needle's cable-enclosed outdoor deck. Visitors can also take in the surroundings from the Space Needle's restaurant, which revolves 360 degrees as diners sample sumptuous fare. On the clearest days, Mount Baker to the north and Mount St. Helens to the south are visible, both about 120 miles away. Mount Rainier and the Cascades look close enough to touch.

The Observation Deck is open every day, including holidays. A ticket allows two visits within a 24-hour period for sweeping daytime vistas and romantic nighttime views. —MIKE GREENSTEIN

PHOTOGRAPH BY AMOS MORGAN