

Slipless in Seattle? Don't believe it

The Arizona Republic Sept. 5, 1999

Emerald City boasts about 500 houseboats

By Shana McNally

Associated Press

SEATTLE – Boaters don't go slipless in Seattle.

Seattle has one boat for every five people, and many people call them home. The Emerald City boasts one of the largest concentrations of houseboats in the United States, almost 500 of them, says Jeri Callahan, a resident houseboater.

Callahan offers visitors an unusual tour of her floating neighborhood. The hour trip, in a motorized skiff, features vintage cottage-style houseboats floating on virgin-growth cedar logs and newer, more elegant styles, some with underwater cellars and multiple stories, built on Ferrocement and Styrofoam.

Callahan starts at the southern end of Lake Union, a booming area filled with restaurants, marinas and condominiums, and moves along the shore to clusters of floating homes, entertaining her passengers – a maximum of seven – with tales about houseboats in Seattle.

Callahan knows her stuff – she's completing a book on the history of houseboats in the city. Now 64, she moved to Seattle in 1958 and has lived on a houseboat for the past 11 years. In addition to the tours, she works as a substitute teacher, renting out her houseboat for five months every winter while she migrates to Mexico.

"Everyone needs to have a passion, and houseboats are mine," she told passengers one recent weekday morning.

Seattle's houseboat community reached its peak in the 1940s, when a transient population occupied 2,000 houseboats on Lake Union. Pollution concerns ousted the floating homes from Lake Washington in 1937.

Prices and lifestyle choices have changed since then. Most houseboats now are occupied by well-to-do professionals. The city's average houseboat owner is age 42, and most are single.

Houseboats range from 250 to 2,500 square feet. Prices can reach



There are about 500 houseboats in Seattle. In the 1940s, there were about 2,000. Houseboats, which range from 250 to 2,500 square feet in the Emerald City, often are described as large barges with living quarters.

Photos by Barry Sweet/Associated Press



Melinda Dequina (left) of Seattle, Therese Cavanaugh of Philadelphia and Tim Allen of Nottingham, England, take the one-hour Lake Union houseboat tour.

millions, with location and parking key considerations. Some residents own their houseboat and pay moorage fees; others own not only their houseboat but the water space 150 feet below their slips.

In Seattle, houseboats are traditionally defined as large barges with living quarters. Those who live in them differentiate between live-aboards, which can move, and house

barges, which cannot.

Many who take Callahan's tour had their curiosity piqued by the 1993 romantic comedy *Sleepless in Seattle*, which was filmed in Seattle and is given prominent mention on the tour.

Callahan started conducting the tours in 1990 and has since ferried around 2,500 people, half from Washington state.

"It's a look at a side of Seattle most people don't even know exists," says Dorothy Lennard, 55, of Seattle, who brought friends Neal and Sharon Guthrie of Stephenville, Texas, for the tour.

"It was interesting to see the different styles of houseboats," said Neal Guthrie, also 55. "If I were younger, I could see living on a houseboat."

IF YOU GO

Houseboat tour

WHERE: Discover Houseboating is based at 1177 Fairview Ave. N., Seattle.

WHEN: Tours are offered from April through October. In July and August, there is one tour daily at 10 a.m., in other months by appointment. Cost is \$25 per person.

DETAILS:
1-(206)-322-9157.