

The train stops at Goose Hollow, Beaverton Creek, Willow Creek and Hawthorn Farm, among other such whimsically named places. As I look back and forth between the window and the transit map, I expect Portland to resemble a scene from *Wind in the Willows*.

It doesn't.

At first sight, warehouses, empty lots and steel bridges reflect an industrial, blue-collar past that's anything but rustic. The only thing greyer than the January sky is the Willamette River, which separates downtown Portland from its eastern neighbourhoods.

But during the short walk to my hotel I begin to appreciate Port-

land from the sidewalk level. Many of those empty lots are filled with food carts selling cheap eats; cuisines from Venezuela to Vietnam, Poland to Peru. It's said that Portland's great restaurants of tomorrow get their start here. They need to be good because competition's fierce.

I immediately head out for breakfast. Two blocks away, the lineup for Voodoo Doughnuts is down the street, but then in Portland, Voodoo is an institution. Customers don't come only for the Bacon Maple Bar or the Triple Chocolate Penetration, some actually get married here!

I don't do lineups and I'm too hungry to make the trip to northeast Portland for Voodoo's other outlet,

so I walk back to Stumptown Coffee for a jolt and a browse of the magazine rack. I'm briefly engrossed in *Bitch Magazine's* story about Justin Bieber's role as a lesbian hair icon. Then my stomach leads me next door to Bijou Café.

It's the omelette that bears repeating: wild mushrooms and melted goat cheese wrapped in the lightest egg duvet with an organic pork sausage on the side.

It may have been a bit much before a bike tour called Bites by Bike. But the best way to get your bearings quickly in a new city is by bike.

And like its coffee and its beer, Portland does bicycling exceptionally well.

"Motorists here are probably the most courteous in the country," says Scott Klees, a Louisiana native who moved to Portland about six years ago. "That doesn't mean you should assume they'll all stop for you, though."

Klees guides for Pedal Bike Tours. Over the course of the next four hours, he leads me on a tour that's low on miles, heavy on calories.

Outside Cacao DrinkChocolate next to the Zoobomb Pile, a tower of miniature bikes piled high around a girder.

It seems like a fitting landmark at which to wrap up the tour, but it's not just some bizarre street art.

"All these bikes are actually used

on a regular basis," explains Scott.

Zoobombing is a weekly event in Portland, usually conducted well into the night. Zoobombers ride transit to Washington Park station near Oregon Zoo and hurtle en masse downhill at up to 35 miles per hour.

It's all a little anarchic, and I'm reminded of it later that evening as I stroll to Tugboat Brewing. In six-foot letters on the side of a building reads a sign: "KEEP PORTLAND WEIRD".

I'll drink to that.

For bike tours and rentals in Portland, visit pedalbiketours.com/ bike-tours/portland, or call 503 243-2453.



Best way to get around Portland is by bike, especially if you fancy a quick coffee. And don't think that bike pile is just for show. Bikes can be acquired from there — and returned. — SUBMITTED PHOTOS



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