

# AN ARTFUL BRIDGE

Tacoma's amazing pedestrian bridge is anything but pedestrian.

STORY & PHOTOS BY ANNELE HUCKINS

**J**AGGED, ICE-BLUE CRYSTALS soar skyward to form two sparkling towers. The walls hold multi-hued glass sculptures in dreamy, almost mythical shapes. Above, the ceiling swarms with thousands of delicate glass forms, evoking an underwater world. These elements combine to form one unusual, artistic, and indisputably beautiful bridge.

The Chihuly Bridge of Glass crosses Interstate 705 and connects Tacoma's downtown with its waterfront, linking the Washington State History Museum to the Museum of Glass. Renowned artist and



Tacoma native Dale Chihuly, who collaborated with architect Arthur Andersson, is the artistic creator of the 500-foot-long bridge.

Its Crystal Towers, made of blue polyvitro, are like rock candy swizzle sticks that lure people to explore its wonders. As you cross the bridge, the Venetian Wall and Seaform Pavilion each contain a collection of Chihuly's signature glass pieces. The Venetian Wall is 80 feet long and houses 109 sculptures. In the Seaform Pavilion's tunnel, natural light illuminates the 2,364 freeform glass pieces that rest on the 50-by-20-foot ceiling. It is here that Chihuly mixes swirling spirals, scalloped rounds, and small balls of glass that burst with vivid color and give the illusion of being under the sea.

Be sure to access the self-guided Chihuly Glass cell phone tour, entitled "Ear for Art" and presented by the Tacoma Art Museum, to hear first-hand accounts from Chihuly himself about the work you are seeing. The tour covers four more sites within walking distance that contain even more Chihuly glass. At the Tacoma Art Museum, see a large retrospective collection of Chihuly's own glass as well as a signature installation, Ma Chihuly's Floats, that features 39 bulbous Niiijima Floats installed on the surface of a stone "wave" at the center of the museum.

The tour also takes you to Union Station (on Pacific Avenue, just adjacent to the Bridge of Glass). Built in 1911, the retired railroad station is now on the National Register of Historic Places. Its centerpiece is a huge, multicolored chandelier, pieced together with 2,000 pieces of glass. Orange glass flowers hang in the station's oversized Monarch Window, and Chihuly's drawings adorn one of the walls.

The Museum of Glass, which sits next to the bridge, showcases a variety of artists' work, Chihuly included, in



OPPOSITE: The Venetian Wall and Museum of Glass's conical hot shop provide a backdrop for one of the bridge's Crystal Towers. THIS PAGE FROM TOP: Union Station's cheerful Monarch Window is brightened by the sun's rays. More than 2,300 glass pieces adorn Seaform Pavilion. Visitors enjoy the Crystal Towers with Union Station in the background. The 80-foot-long Venetian Wall holds 109 of Chihuly's vases.

exhibitions that change throughout the year. A hot shop, housed in a 90-foot-tall stainless steel cone, offers a live look at the glassblowing process.

Tacoma is, indeed, a hot bed for seeing amazing glass creations. ■

## WHEN YOU GO

Tacoma Regional Visitor and Convention Bureau (800-272-2662; [traveltacoma.com](http://traveltacoma.com))  
Chihuly Bridge of Glass ([chihuly.com/bridgeofglass](http://chihuly.com/bridgeofglass))  
Museum of Glass (866-MUSEUM; [museumofglass.org](http://museumofglass.org))  
Union Station (253-863-5173; [unionstationrotunda.org](http://unionstationrotunda.org))  
"Ear for Art" tour (888-411-4220)