

# A BOOK-LOVER'S



## PARADISE

AN ODE TO PORTLAND'S ICONIC LANDMARK  
FOR BIBLIOPHILES.

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Being an early millennial who went to boarding school, the library was a prominent part of growing up. With a mix of eager readers and those who were constantly battling yawns, it persistently incubated an interest in books. After decades, I can't thank that deafeningly silent hall and its precious treasure that lined the walls. Even though my devotion to books might have derailed over the years, I still walk into old bookshops with alacrity and do not leave without an armload.

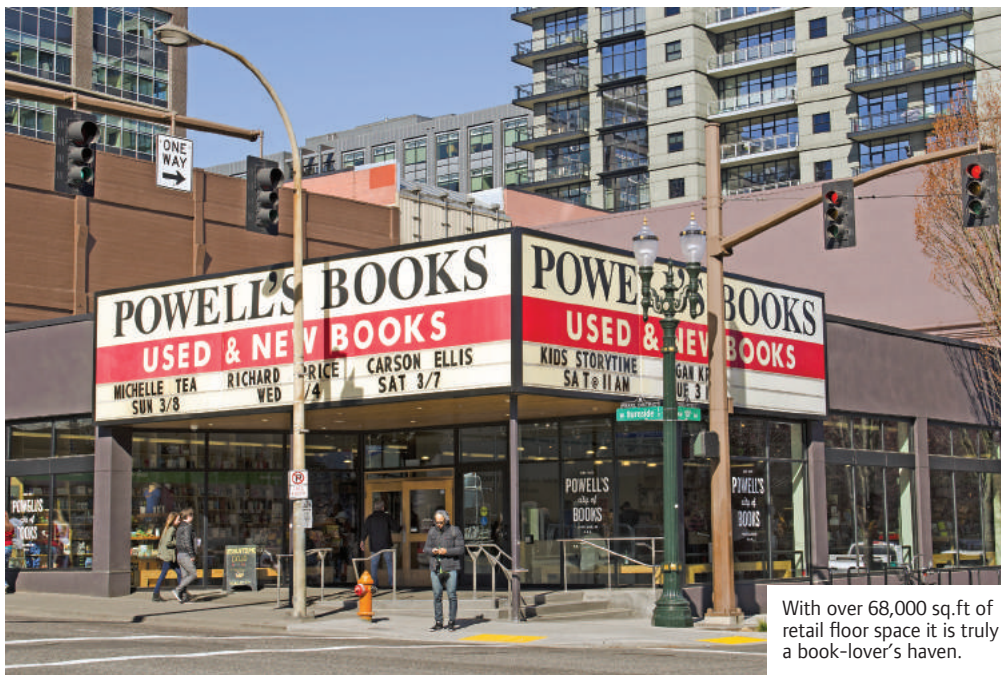
It was the summer of almost a decade ago, when I strolled into Powell's City of Books, eyes squinting at the signboard brandishing an all too familiar font. I had often seen the name on the Internet as an essential for bookworms in Portland, USA. It was my first time in the city and a trip to the legendary bookshop seemed like an ideal way to spend

the afternoon. To say that the atmosphere was divine would be preposterous – 'otherworldly' would be more befitting a description. One could practically dig up a literary cache of gold here.

### HERE AND THERE IN PORTLAND

Earlier that morning, I had been given a brief overview of Portland during a walking tour. It is a city known to have eccentric hues – in its bicycling culture, cafes, food trucks and hipster vibe – all lampooned in the unofficial tagline, 'Keep Portland Weird'. It's a city that lets you sample its neighbourhoods with ease, with no prominent showstoppers. You can walk around with coffee in hand, and park yourself in any of the blooming public gardens in summers and the day passes by easily. In fact the world's smallest park, the Mill

**Facing page:** Powell's City of Books is so large it takes up an entire city block and even has a map for easy navigation.



With over 68,000 sq.ft of retail floor space it is truly a book-lover's haven.

Ends Park, only colonises an area of 452 sq.in. When the instructor at the walk left us, he didn't forget to mention the remarkable Mecca for used, new and out of print books, Powell's.

**INTO THE CITY OF BOOKS**

So off I trundled and arrived at the Powell's. I was standing at the door of the largest independent bookstore in the world, with over 1 million books, with an Alice in Wonderland-esque curiosity in my eyes. I had only a couple of hours, so it was impossible to scour all sections. I decided to hit England, Wars, 'Indispensable' and Gifts from the 3,500 sections, announced by signboards that resemble the arrivals-and-departures signage at airports. I could see that other tourists were equally entranced by the sheer exclusivity of the experience.

A network of broad and narrow aisles criss-crossed over the span of the store, and could

only be maneuvered with the help of a map that I had grabbed at the store. Intrigued by the Rare Book Room pinned on the map, I bargained some time from the Wars section and headed there as well. Dark wood shelving, moody lighting, traces of antique furniture and selected works of art picked with discretion lined the 1,000 sq.ft room. It's here that the most valuable books were enshrined.

I had legged a fair portion of the 68,000 sq.ft store and sat down in one of the aisles to read the brochure, which had accompanied the map. It revealed that Powell's was certainly the best thing that had happened to the city in the 20th century. Walter Powell started it in 1971, after unexpected success of his son's bookshop in Chicago, which he opened in 1970. While Michael Powell had sowed the seed, Walter enjoyed the experience of working with his son for a summer and took the idea to Portland. Walter saturated the original location by buying every marketable used book. He finally moved the operation into a former car dealership on Northwest Burnside, which remains the headquarters even now. The building has undergone several transformations, but holds few remnants of its automotive lineage. In 1979, Michael joined his father, creating a bookstore that would keep every imaginable variety – used, new, hardcover, paperback – all on the same shelf and would remain open 365 days a year. Only genuine book-lovers would find a job here. It's been four decades and the ethos is intact.

Finally, it was time to pick a souvenir book, one that would have a hand-written recommendation by a staff member. I chose the Henri Charrière classic, *Papillon* and made my way to the Coffee Room to leaf through it with a warm cuppa.

**HERITAGE BOOKSTORES IN INDIA**

- Higginbotham's, Chennai**  
Open since 1844, this majestic store is one India's oldest bookshops.
- Strand Book Stall, Mumbai**  
A shrine of discounted books (old and new) for book-lovers to escape to from the city's cacophony.
- Bahrisons Booksellers, New Delhi**  
One of the best-stocked bookshops in the national capital.
- Cambridge Book Depot, Mussoorie**  
This bookshop is much loved by locals and tourists alike. Well-known author Ruskin Bond stops by here once a week.
- College Street, Kolkata**  
A street full of old, used, new, treasured books. Get ready to lose yourself here!

## LITERATURE

I was wondering if the advent of rapid democratisation of reading – thanks to e-books, tablets and now apps on phones – would ever put a dent in Powell's sales, when a bunch of 10-year-olds settled on the table next to mine. Excited about their new acquisitions, they put doughnut wagers on who would finish theirs first! With such enthusiasm for print, I can only imagine that Powell's City of Books is here to stay for centuries.

### IF YOU PLAN TO GO...

**Address:** Powell's City of Books;  
1005 W. Burnside St. Portland, OR  
97209, USA

**Contact:** +1 800-878-7323

**Store hours:** 9 a.m.–11 p.m. daily  
(July 4: 9 a.m.–9 p.m.).

**Sell your books:** 9 a.m.–8 p.m. daily.  
**Rare Book Room:** 11 a.m.–7 p.m.  
daily.



**Above:** The Rose Room has books on parenting, and children's and young adult sections.

**Below:** The massive store divides its vast inventory among nine colour-coded areas and even a Rare Book Room!



## LITERATURE

### ALSO, DON'T MISS IN PORTLAND

**Hug a tree:** Having been identified as a republic of tree huggers, walk to Forest Park with your arms stretched out and give a tight one to your favourite tree. We bet morning joggers won't bat an eyelid. Find more details on [www.forestparkconservancy.org](http://www.forestparkconservancy.org).

**Sign up for a bike tour:** You cannot miss the cycling inclined culture in Portland. So the best way to tune in to the city is to take a Cycling Tour. Try the [www.portlandbicycletours.com](http://www.portlandbicycletours.com).

**International Rose Test Garden:** The hotspot of marriage proposals, visit the 1917 established rose garden, which was set up during WWI to preserve species of European roses. The garden is open from 7.30 a.m.-9.00 p.m. daily, and is best visited in June. There is no entry fee.

**Eat at the food carts:** Local kitcheneers-turned food-cart-entrepreneurs are raging a gastronomic storm in Portland. Pay not more than a buck for a variety of creative dishes at SW 10th Avenue and Alder Street, SW 5th Avenue, Oak Street and SE 12th Avenue and Hawthorne Boulevard, where the food cart business is flourishing. ■



### QUICK FACTS

#### GETTING THERE

Jet Airways operates regular flights to London's Heathrow Airport and Paris from major Indian cities. You can fly with codeshare partner Delta Air Lines to Portland from these destinations.

#### ACCOMMODATION

Marriott and Kimpton have luxury hotels across Portland. For a bit of adventure and quirk, check out Caravan – The Tiny House Hotel, charming, custom-made tiny houses on wheels in size from 120–170 sq.ft

#### FOR MORE INFORMATION

Visit [www.travelportland.com](http://www.travelportland.com) or [www.visittheusa.com](http://www.visittheusa.com)

