

The International District

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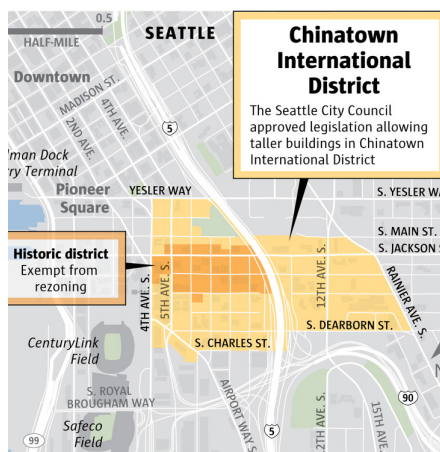
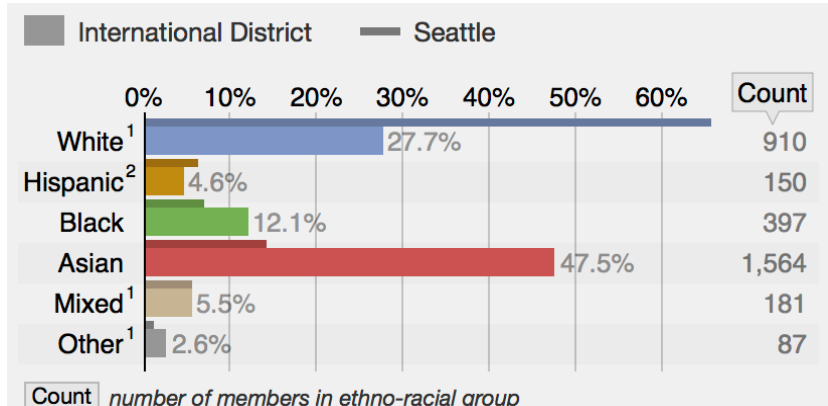
Minority & Ethnic Populations and Their Culture

The International District represents one of the most diverse communities in Seattle. For many decades the district has been a landing ground for immigrants across the world and the diversity of the community has not stopped growing since its creation. In particular, the prevalence of minority and ethnic populations in the International District is seen through the art, cuisine, and retail stores found in the district. The International District has been home to the Asian community since the late 1800s and many of the features of the International District have roots that extended to a Asian history and culture.



The District's History

Beginning in the 1880s, Seattle's International District started as part of the surrounding railroad development. The district first emerged when Chinese immigrants were brought into to help lay the first railroad tracks, to dig coal mines, and can salmon harvests. While the Chinese immigrants were first welcomes, they soon were met with resentment as the recession of the 1880s hit Seattle. During this time period around 300 Chinese residents were forced out of Seattle, however the community gained strength towards the end of the decade. In the early 1990s Chinatown started to become much more commercialized as hotels were built for railroad passengers and workers. Chinatown continued to grow through the 1930s as both the Chinese and Japanese populations in the district grew. However, the district faced another challenge in the 1940s during WWII as Japanese residents were rounded up and sent to internment camps. During this time period many African Americans arrived in Seattle for military duty and many found residence in the Chinatown. In 1951 in response to the growing diversity in the community, Seattle's mayor began to promote a new name for the neighborhood: the International District. Over the last few decades the diversity of the International District has continued to grow and new additions have been made including Seattle's two stadium and the district's light rail station.



Top left: the infamous arch of the International District; top right: our group picture from our visit; center left: the demographics of the International District; above left: a grandmother and her granddaughter walk through the district; above right: a map of the district.

The District's Economy

The diversity of the International District has played a key role in its economic growth. With businesses that specialize in selling products from various cultures, the International District has become a tourist shopping hotspot. One such business is the Uwajimaya grocery and retail store. Created in 1928 by Fujimatsu Moriguchi, a young Japanese immigrant, the Uwajimaya store has preserved through financial hardship and even the forced relocation of Moriguchi's family to a Japanese internment camp in 1942. Throughout the years the Uwajimaya store has grown and developed into a company with four stores that employ almost 500 people. Being one of the International District's largest employers, along with one of the biggest supporters of organizations within the community, the Uwajimaya company has majorly impacted the economic development of the district. As a whole, the company's history can be considered a prominent symbol of the entire community's economic perseverance throughout hardships.

The Built Environment

The built environment of the international district combines the Asian ethnic ties with the modern city of Seattle. The first thing noticed when one steps into the district is a 45 foot arch known as the historic Chinatown gate. After stepping through this gate one sees the many international cuisine restaurants including: Maneki, Green Leaf Vietnamese Restaurant, Fuji Bakery, and Oasis Tea Zone. In addition to these restaurants, there are many little shops that contain a mix of asian and European goods. Some of the more common shops would include: Momo, Kinokuniya Bookstore, and Uwajimaya. Finally, there are sources of entertainment, such as the Wing Luke Museum, Seattle pinball museum, and Hing Hay park.

Demographics

The demographics of the International district represents a very unique and diverse composition in comparison to the rest of the city. The International district has the highest percentage of non-white at 73.5%-81.1% when comparing to the city's average of 29.9%. The average household income of this district is around \$13,057, significantly lower than the city average of \$45,736. About half of the population lives at or below the poverty line. Out of the 73.5%-81.1% that identifies as non-white, the large majority are of Asian origin. The large majority have Chinese-origin, followed by Vietnamese, Phillipinos and Japanese. About 56% of male adults and 64% of female adults have completed at least high-school level education, comparing to the national average of about 87% (accounting both sexes). 26% of the residents in the International District are within the age range of 65 or older, which is higher than the city's average of 12%.

Observations & Community Health Conclusion

During our visit to the International District we observed a diverse, commercially thriving, tourist and local friendly community with restaurants down every sidewalk and artwork and historical landmarks sprinkled throughout. We believe that the International District is very healthy as tourists continue to visit and restaurants, markets, other commercial stores continue to bring in revenue and the population and diversity of the community continue to grow as new housing developments are built.

Right, from top: a photo of the storefront of Uwajimaya market; the red arch of Hing Hay Park, an important public space in the International District; a dragon mural seen in Hin Hay park; a local sits and relaxes in Hin Hay park.





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