

MAPS & ITINERARIES

National Parks & the Hidden West Coast Parks Route



Overview

This route highlights the unparalleled natural beauty of the Western United States, supplemented by trips to the region's fantastic cities. In other words, this trip has it all: majestic coastlines, stunning mountain landscapes, beautiful farmland, incredible geologic features and cosmopolitan urban centers. You will begin in Seattle, the largest city in the Northwest region, and then head north, checking out the wonders of North Cascades National Park, then crossing the border to Canada. There you will enjoy all that the cities of Vancouver and Victoria have to offer before heading back down into Washington again. You will explore the incredible coastline and rainforests of Olympic National Park and then drive east, passing towering Mount Rainier, pristine Yakima and lovely Coeur D'Alene on the way to the great majesty of Glacier National Park. After your time in the park, you will head southwest into the vistas of Hells Canyon, followed by the plains and deserts of Eastern Oregon. You will then begin your traverse of Oregon along the Columbia River Gorge, one of the most beautiful drives on the West Coast, with many charming towns worth a quick stop. Portland is the next destination, with a side trip to the immense Mount Hood en route. After spending time in this hip and tasteful city, you will begin to work your way down the rugged Oregon coast, before cutting over to the magnificent Crater Lake National Park. You will then wind your way down into California, stopping to check out the geologic splendor around Lassen Volcanic National Park. After that, you will treat yourself in the wine country and rolling hills of Napa and Sonoma, before ending your trip in the world-class city of San Francisco.

#MYUSAPARKS

Prepared by: Matt

States: IL, KY, AR, TX, NM

Start: Chicago, IL

End: Albuquerque, NM

Total miles: 2,687

Suggested days: 18 - 26

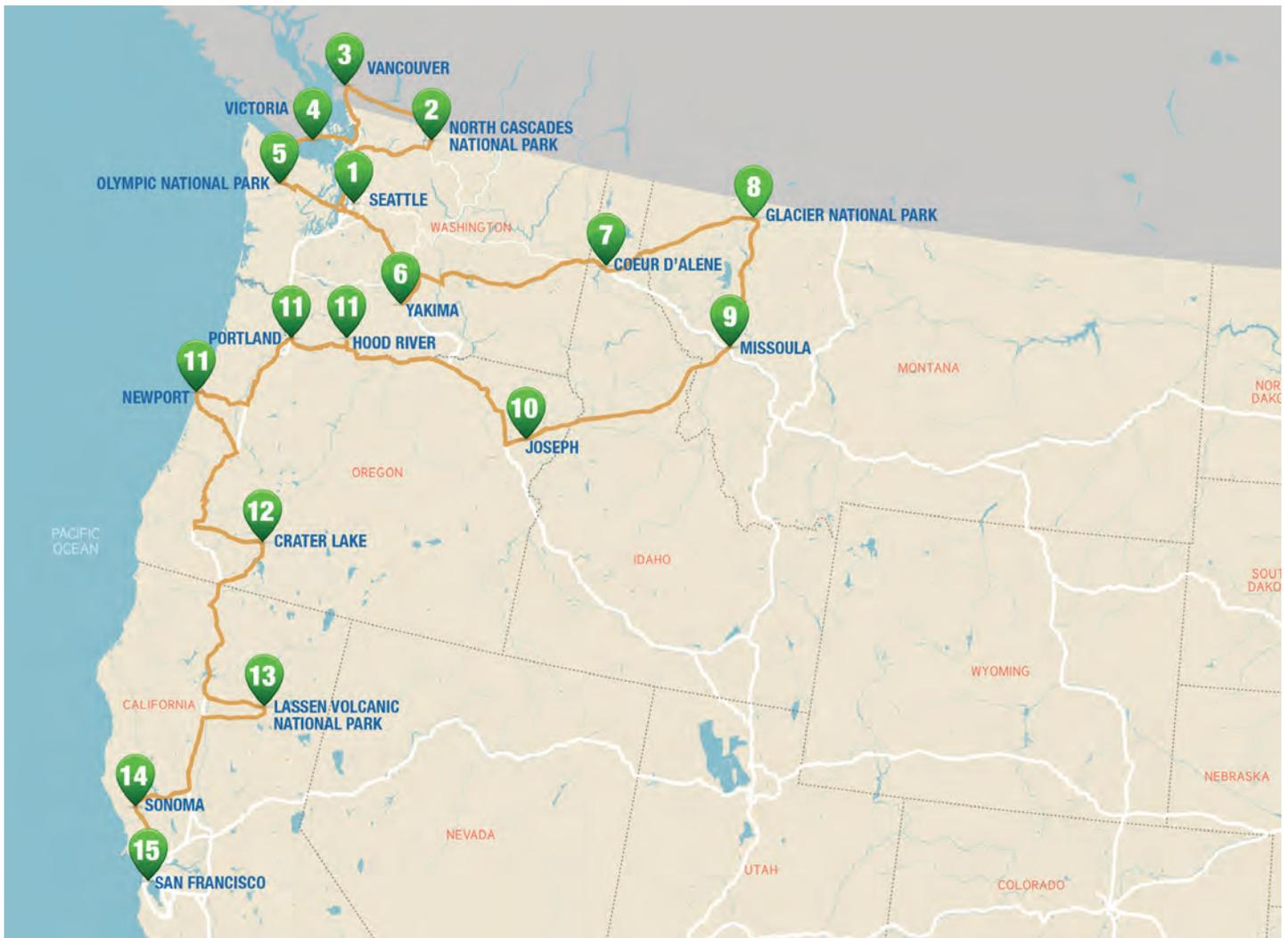
Type: scenic rural/urban road trip including national parks, cities & small towns

Recommended for: road trippers, motorcycles, honeymooners, families

Suggested season:
March - November

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Trip Details

We recommend at least two-and-a-half weeks to encompass all of the possible offerings that are suggested in this itinerary. A lot of distance is covered here, so it would be ideal to spend a couple of days in, say, Glacier National Park after driving many hours to and from there. (Of course, the drives themselves are wonderfully scenic, so it won't feel long at all! The journey is the destination, as they say.) Many of the drives are relatively short – many are only around three road hours between stops – while at least two of the drives will take a good portion of your day, so plan accordingly. (These longer drives could be broken up into segments, too.) The weather in the region is generally predictable: somewhat chilly in the early spring, quite hot in the peak summer months, crisp and cool in the fall. In Montana, Idaho, Washington and Oregon, it can occasionally snow in the later fall months, so pack intelligently. This trip could be done almost any time of year, but possible heavy snow in November through February can make driving in those more mountainous areas rather dangerous. Aside from frequent rain in the winter, the coastal regions would be fine at any time.



DAY 1: Arrival in Seattle

Fly into Seattle-Tacoma International Airport and pick up your rental car. The city is relatively easy to navigate by car, though it may be best to avoid driving in the late afternoon, as the freeways and roads can be horribly gridlocked around rush hour. (There is a decent bus system, as well.) Like many West Coast cities, Seattle is fairly spread apart, so it's best to pick a few neighborhoods and explore from there. Downtown has the iconic Pike Place Market, as well as the Seattle Art Museum, the Seattle Aquarium and the first ever Starbucks Coffee, all within easy walking distance. Other great walkable neighborhoods worth checking out include Ballard, Fremont and Capitol Hill.

Legendary tourist attraction:

Pike Place Market

Best architectural wonder:

the Space Needle

Best city view:

Kerry Park

Best seafood:

- Elliott's Oyster House
- Pike Place Chowder

Recommended hotel:

Inn at the Market

DAY 2: North Cascades National Park

(driving time: 2 hours)

In the morning, grab a coffee at Storyville Coffee Company, Victrola Coffee Roasters or any other number of excellent coffee roasters in this renowned coffee-loving city. Your next destination is North Cascades National Park, a fantastic wilderness just over 2 hours away from Seattle. The park boasts 300 glaciers, 9000 feet of vertical relief and over 1600 species of plant species, much of it explorable through a wide network of backcountry trails. Highway 20 cuts through the width of the park, which makes for a beautiful drive. Much of the territory expands far to the north and south of the road, so one can gauge how much time they want to devote to exploring the park accordingly.

Great hikes:

- Thorton Lake Trail (moderate)
- Sourdough Mt. Trail (strenuous)

Recommended sweet treats:

5b's Bakery in Concrete

Dinner options: both in Marblemount

- Mondo (Korean)
- Marblemount Diner

Recommended lodging:

- Ross Lake Resort in Rockport
- North Cascades Lodge at Stekhein



DAY 3: Northwards to Vancouver

(driving time: 2.5 hours)

Your next segment will take you over the Canadian border and into the lovely cities of Vancouver and Victoria. The most populous city in the province of British Columbia and the third most populous in all of Canada, Vancouver is a fantastic city with no shortage of things to do. As a major metropolitan area nestled between ocean, mountains and forest, Vancouver has enough nature and culture to occupy visitors for many days. The best way to experience the city would be to do a little bit from each of those categories, whether that would be shopping at the Granville Island Public Market or on Robson Street, going to the world-class Museum of Anthropology or the Vancouver Aquarium, and wandering around the lush woods of Stanley Park.

Best urban island to explore:

Granville Island

Best urban beach:

Kitsilano Beach

Recommended dinner:

- Tuc Craft Kitchen
- The Flying Pig

Recommended hotels:

- Fairmont Pacific Rim
- Loden Hotel



DAY 4: Ferry to Victoria

(driving time: 3.5 hours)

Try to grab breakfast at the popular Medina Café in downtown Vancouver before hitting the road again. You'll next be taking the BC Ferry from Vancouver to Victoria, the capital of British Columbia. (The scenic ride over the Strait of Georgia takes about an hour and a half.) Located on the southern tip of Vancouver Island, Victoria is the southernmost city in Western Canada and is ranked as one of top cities in the world for high quality of life standards. Though the metropolitan region only has around 350,000 residents, this diverse city has the second oldest Chinatown in North America (after San Francisco's), a thriving Coast Salish First Nations community and a large student presence due to several universities and colleges in the city. Due to this wide-ranging population, "The Garden City" has numerous offerings for tourists.

Best museum:

Royal B.C. Museum

Best city park:

Beacon Hill Park

Best castle:

Craigdarroch Castle

Strangest attraction:

Miniature World

Recommended dinner:

Brasserie L'école

Recommended Hotel:

Abigail's Hotel

DAY 5: Down to the Olympic Peninsula

(driving time: 2.5 hours)

You will take another ferry to get back down to Washington, this time a trip from Victoria to Port Angeles. (This ride, also quite scenic, takes just over two hours.) In Port Angeles, there are a number of charming shops and cafes where you can while away a part of the afternoon. Your primary destination on the Olympic Peninsula, though, should be the Olympic National Park, a stunning mountainous rainforest in the corner of the United States. The main visitor center is in Port Angeles, so be sure to check in there before you head into the park proper. The Olympic National Park, which contains nearly a million acres of wilderness, has a huge diversity of ecosystems: wild coastlines, old-growth rainforests and snow-capped mountains. At the visitor center, plot which of these regions appeals most to you and plan your time accordingly.



Recommended side trip:

Port Townsend, known for its quaint Victorian houses and wooden boatbuilding community

Recommended hike:

Sol Duc River Trail

Best dinner:

Kokopelli Grill in Port Angeles

Recommended lodging in Olympic National Park:

Kalaloch or Lake Crescent Lodges



DAY 6: Eastwards to Mount Rainer & Yakima

(driving time: 4.5 hours)

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Great Rainier hikes with stunning mountain views:

- Shadow Lakes Trail
- Naches Peak Loop Trail

Best wine spots:

- Bonair Winery
- Portteus Vineyards
- Hyatt Vineyards

Recommended dinner:

Cowiche Canyon Kitchen and Icehouse

Recommended hotel:

The Hotel Maison in Yakima

DAY 7: To Beautiful Coeur D'Alene

(driving time: 3.5 hours)

Your next stop as you head east is the lovely Idaho town of Coeur D'Alene, nestled on the banks of the massive 25-mile-long lake of the same name. The town's proximity to two major ski resorts and generally tranquil natural setting has made it a destination for outdoor-oriented travelers. Camping, hiking, kayaking and skiing are all within a short trip from the center of town. As this is still the Pacific Northwest, there are the usual quality-of-life perks, even in this relatively small town: fine coffee, plenty of microbrews and a wide array of stellar places to eat.



Best lake-side stroll:

Independence Point

Recommended off-the-beaten-path tourist trip:

Seven Stars Alpaca Ranch

Recommended dinner:

Crafted Tap House and Kitchen

Recommended hotel:

The Coeur D'Alene Resort

DAY 8: Onwards to Glacier National Park

(driving time: 4 hours)

Get a coffee at local favorite Grumpy Monkey and hit the road towards Glacier National Park, a stunning four-hour drive

from Coeur D'Alene. As this is your furthest point east, and separated by long drives on either end, it is recommended that you plan on spending at least a few days in the park. There is more than plenty to do and the landscape is absolutely like no other, so it's definitely worth devoting enough time to experience Glacier. Considered the "Crown of the Continent," the park is set just beneath the Canadian border and encompasses over 1 million acres of wilderness, including two mountain ranges, over 1,000 plant species, and hundreds of animal species. A 700-mile network of trails runs through the park – hiking and backpacking are some of Glacier's primary attractions – and this is undoubtedly the ideal way to take in the otherworldly mountain views.

Best hikes:

- Apgar Lookout
- Ptarmigan Falls
- Grinnell Glacier Viewpoint

Best sightseeing by water boat tours:

- Lake McDonald
- Many Glacier and others

Recommended dinner:

Ptarmigan Dining Room at Many Glacier

Recommended lodging:

- Lake McDonald Lodge
- Apgar Village Lodge



DAY 9: Down to Missoula and Further South

(driving time: 2.5 hours)

After your stay in Glacier, you will begin to work your way down towards the eastern edge of Oregon. It's a long ten-hour drive, though, so you probably should do it in two parts. The best place to stop for an afternoon and evening would be Missoula, home to the University of Montana and considered to be the cultural hub of the state. At the confluence of the Bitterroot and Blackfoot Rivers, Missoula is, like many smaller Western cities, also home to many outdoor enthusiasts; you can find hiking trails and river fun within a short drive. It's also likely your last chance to enjoy find excellent dining options and possible shopping opportunities until you get to Portland, a few days away yet.

Best old-fashioned amusement:

A Carousel for Missoula

Best elk sightings:

Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation

Best local beer:

Big Sky Brewery

Recommended dinner:

Plonk or Biga Pizza

Recommended lodging:

Hilton Garden Inn



DAY 10: Onwards into Eastern Oregon

(driving time: 6.5 hours)

Your drive to Oregon is fairly long – nearly eight hours until your next destination – but it is also unparalleled in its natural beauty, as you traverse through several wilderness areas and national forests. Right on the border between Idaho and Oregon is the Hells Canyon National Recreation Area, one of the more incredible wilderness areas in the state. You can get amazing bird’s-eye views of the region’s mountain valleys from the Hells Canyon Overlook, so make sure you at least stop there. If you want a more extended time to stretch your legs, there are numerous trails for hiking in the area. Plan on spending the night in Joseph, a quaint town in the northeastern corner of Oregon. Joseph was once a booming lumber town, but the region hit a long lull when many of the mills went out of business in the 1980s. Today, however, it is home to thriving bronze foundries and many ex-pat artists from Portland who are creating a niche in the town. Joseph would make a great base for exploring the natural wonders in this part of Oregon. The Wallowa Mountains, the Zumwalt Prairie and Wallowa Lake are all relatively close and worthy of your time.

Recommended canoe trip:

Wallowa Lake (rentals at the marina)

Best local museum:

Wallowa Band Nez Perce Interpretive Center in Wallowa

Recommended dinner:

Cheyenne Café or Embers Brew House

Recommended hotel:

The newly renovated Jennings Hotel

DAY 11: Along the Columbia Gorge

(driving time: 4.5 hours)

Your distant destination is Portland, on the opposite end of the state, but it’s best to take your time there. Much of your scenic drive will be along the Columbia Gorge, but on the way there, you will pass through a handful of charming towns that are worth at least a quick stop. As you wind your way along the edge of the Columbia River, there are many places to pull off and take pictures or stretch your legs. To break up the drive, though, a recommended stopping point would be the town of Hood River. This small town has seen resurgence in recent years, largely due to its status as one of the windsurfing capitals of the country, along with other sports opportunities. There are some stellar dining and shopping options here for a town of its size, not to mention all of the high-quality wineries in the area.

Best local museum:

Western Antique Aeroplane & Automobile Museum

Recommended local beer:

Full Sail Brewery

Recommended dinner:

Celiilo Restaurant and Bar

Recommended hotel:

Columbia Gorge Hotel



DAY 11: Rolling into Portland

(driving time: 1 hour)

On your way to Portland from Hood River, you might want to take a detour down to snowcapped Mt. Hood, the largest mountain in the state and host to some of the more incredible hiking and sightseeing around. After that, wind your way into the city. In the past several years, Portland has been considered the nation’s epitome of cool, a town where twenty-somethings from all over move to relax and retire. Though this has been a deterrent to some, it is for good reason that the city has been given so much attention. A scrappier version of semi-nearby Seattle, the quality of life in Portland is incredibly high: excellent



culture, wonderful local foods, an easy transportation system and a funky local identity that has remained intact despite the large influx of out-of-staters that have moved here. One could easily spend a few days in Portland without scratching the surface, so feel free to gauge how much time you’d like to devote to the Rose City. The Pearl District is a higher-end neighborhood with many fine shopping and dining options, while across the river in Northeast Portland is where many of the younger generations are creating innovative food, art and culture.

Best flowery city stroll:

The International Rose Test Garden



Best tea time:

Portland Japanese Garden

Best urban hike:

Forest Park

Recommended dinner:

- Screen Door
- Pok Pok
- Le Pigeon

Recommended hotel:

Kimpton Hotel Monaco Portland

DAY 11: Driving Along the Oregon Coast

(driving time: 2.5 hours)

Before you leave Portland, the coffee capital of the country, try to grab a cup at the famous Stumptown Roasters. Next, you will begin to wind your way down the coast of the state. Unlike the summery beaches of California, the coastline in Oregon is windswept, rugged and often quite chilly, even in the summer. The effect, though, is incredibly dramatic and picturesque. You will see strange geologic formations poking through the water, tree-lined hills descending into waves and, if you're lucky, teams of sea lions lounging on the sand. Start your coastal drive by driving west from Portland to Tillamook (home of the eponymous cheese) and drive south from there. You'll drive through a number of towns, some of which are worth stopping in and some of which are not. A place to spend the night would be Newport, home

to the Sylvia Beach Hotel, which has rooms decorated according to the styles of famous authors.

Recommended beach walk:

Siletz Bay National Wildlife Refuge

Best clam chowder:

- Mo's in Lincoln City
- Newport

Recommended dinner:

Local Ocean Seafoods

Recommended hotel:

Sylvia Beach Hotel

DAY 12: More Coast & Across Crater Lake

(driving time: 4 hours)

You will continue your drive down the coast – make sure to check out the towns of Yachats, Heceta Beach and Florence – until you get to Coos Bay. This will be a good place to grab lunch before you drive inland again. Your next destination is the majestic Crater Lake National Park, about four hours east of Coos Bay. Once you arrive, you will be stunned by Crater Lake. It is unbelievably picturesque. A magnificent body of water within a the crown of a defunct volcano, the lake is the deepest in the United States and one of the most pristine on the planet. There is hiking to be found around the perimeter, but the best activity to do is to drive around the circumference of the crater and take in the views.



Best Oregon lighthouse:

Heceta Head

Worthwhile tourist spot:

Sea Lion Caves in Florence

Best lunch in Coos Bay:

Blue Heron Bistro

Recommended dinner & hotel:

Crater Lake Lodge



DAY 13: California Bound

(driving time: 4.5 hours)

From Crater Lake, you will work your way south into California, with San Francisco as your eventual destination. There is a lot of ground between here and there, though, with plenty of fantastic sights to take in. The first of these is Lassen Volcanic National Park, home to the largest “plug dome” volcano in the world and the southern-most volcano in the Cascade Range. There is a lot of neat geologic activity to look at while you're here: hot springs, mud pots and stinking fumaroles are all around. There are also many hikes to be found, as while as boating and scenic day drives.

Recommended hike:

Bumpass Hell

Recommended night time activity:

Starry Night ranger program

Recommended dinner & lodging:

Drakesbad Guest Ranch



DAY 14: A Tour of Wine Country

(driving time: 3.5 hours)

No trip to Northern California is complete without visits to the wine country of Napa Valley and the rolling hills of Sonoma County. Though only a short drive from the bustle of San Francisco, these regions feel genuinely rural, with their beautiful farmlands, forested hillsides and charming towns. Begin in the Napa and do any shopping that you've been missing over the past few days. The town attracts many luxury travelers, so you will be able to find whatever you're looking for, from designer furniture to sleek new clothes. The main attraction of the region, however, is the surrounding world-famous wine country. There are many vineyards to be found around the town, so you can follow your nose to whichever ones look interesting. Your next stop for the day is Sonoma and you will see many vineyards between the two towns. (You have more driving to do today, though, so don't visit too many in

one afternoon...) Wandering around the idyllic country roads in a car is one of the main draws of the area, so feel free to get a little lost on purpose.

Recommended Napa wineries:

- Artesa Vineyards
- Judd's Hill
- Jarvis Estate

Best museum:

Charles Schulz (creator of Peanuts) Museum in Santa Rosa

Recommended Dinner:

- The Girl and The Fig
- La Salette in Sonoma

Recommended hotel:

Inn at Sonoma

DAY 15: Ending in San Francisco

(driving time: 1.5 hours)

Your final segment of this road trip will begin by your driving down the 101 and over the landmark Golden Gate Bridge. (It is a wise idea to park in the lot at the north end of the bridge before crossing into the city, so that you can take a leisurely stroll and take photos at the bridge before getting sucked into the stream of traffic just on the other side of the bay.) You will end your time on the West Coast in San Francisco, one of the region's truly world-class cities. There are an unbelievable amount of activities to fill your time in this famously photogenic hilly city. Many of them you



likely already know: the Painted Lady houses, Alcatraz Prison, Lombard Street, North Beach, Chinatown, the Embarcadero. Those are all great and worth your time, but make sure you save room for the more hidden neighborhoods, those less-traveled by tourists, like the Mission, the Richmond, Nob Hill and the beachy Outer Sunset. Getting around the city by MUNI (bus) or BART (subway) is much easier than driving, so be sure to find a long-term parking lot to leave your car in.

Best view:

The top of Twin Peaks

Best urban park:

Golden Gate Park

Best art museum:

Newly renovated SFMOMA

Recommended Dinner:

- Zuni
- Greens

Recommended hotel:

The Inn at Union Square