



# Central & Eastern Washington

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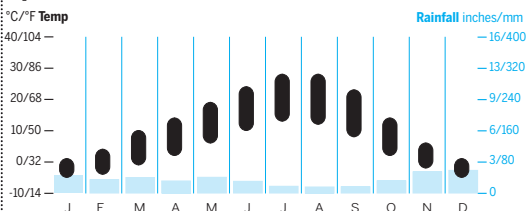
## Why Go?

If states were delineated purely by geography, Washington east of the Cascade Mountains would be an entirely separate entity. While the west breeds evergreen trees, liberal cities, perennial rain and gourmet coffee, the east is the polar opposite; a land of sunbaked hills and big blue skies stuffed with private vineyards, rodeo towns and huge Native American reservations.

The east's geographic identity is intrinsically linked to the mighty Columbia River, which has transformed both the landscape and the economy. This once-parched rural region now features gargantuan dams and ambitious irrigation projects that have converted barren valleys and scrubby steppe into a veritable Garden of Eden. The metamorphosis has had a knock-on effect for tourism. Man-made lakes have provided a nexus of outdoor recreation, while the rich, irrigated soil has propelled the region into an enological rival to California, producing some of the nation's youngest, fruitiest and most promising new wines.

## When to Go

### Spokane



### July & August

Wall-to-wall sunshine for wine-tasting trips in the Columbia River Valley.

### September

Ellensburg's Labor Day Rodeo is Central Washington's biggest show.

### December

Hit Bavarian Leavenworth for the picturesque Christmas Lights Festival.

## CENTRAL WASHINGTON

Caught in the foothills of the grandiose Cascade Mountains, central Washington is a geographic crossroads where dramatic alpine peaks fold with eerie suddenness into a barren steppe-like desert broken only by the winding presence of the Columbia River and its irrigating manmade dams.

Wenatchee and Leavenworth are the most interesting urban centers here and both are popular stopping-off points on the scenic Cascade Loop drive. Aside from Leavenworth's Bavarian bonhomie, outdoor adventures are the main draw.

### Leavenworth

POP 2074

Blink hard and rub your eyes. This isn't some strange Germanic hallucination. This is Leavenworth, a former lumber town that underwent a Bavarian makeover back in the 1960s after the rerouting of the cross-continental railway threatened to put it permanently out of business. Swapping wood for tourists, Leavenworth has successfully reinvented itself as a traditional *Romantische Strasse* village, right down to the beer and sausages, and the lederhosen-loving locals (25% of whom are German). The classic *Sound of Music* setting helps; as does the fact that Leavenworth serves as the main activity center for sorties into the nearby Alpine Lakes Wilderness and Wenatchee National Forest.

#### Sights

Leavenworth's small Bavarian hub is centered on Front St, where gabled alpine houses nestle in the shadow of the craggy peaks of the North Cascade Mountains in scenes reminiscent of Bavaria. A leisurely stroll through this diminutive, if distinctly surreal, alpine community, with its European cheese-mongers, dirndl-wearing waitresses, wandering accordionists and neatly stacked log piles, is one of Washington state's oddest, but at the same time most endearing, experiences.

#### Nutcracker Museum

MUSEUM

(www.nutcrackermuseum.com; 735 Front St; admission \$2.50; ☺2-5pm; 📞) If you have a penchant for obscure, highly specialized museums, stop by the Nutcracker on Leavenworth's main drag, which specializes in nutcracker dolls. Ebony, metal, boxwood,

ivory and porcelain, there are numerous varieties here; 5000 of them in fact, along with a shop downstairs where you buy your very own nut-cracking souvenirs.

#### Waterfront Park

PARK

Tucked out of view but surprisingly close, this green area provides Leavenworth with access to the Wenatchee River. Wander down 9th St and follow the leafy domain over a footbridge and onto Blackbird Island, where you can catch a glimpse of Sleeping Lady Mountain ringed by a border of green foliage. Interpretive signs furnish the route and help explain the local plant and animal life.



#### Leavenworth National Fish Hatchery

HATCHERY

(12790 Fish Hatchery Rd; admission by donation; ☺8am-4pm) Of three thriving fish hatcheries on the Columbia River, this is the largest and, quite possibly, the most interesting. Created to provide a spawning ground for salmon that had been blocked from migrating upriver by the construction of the Grand Coulee Dam in the 1930s, the ongoing fish-rearing project produces some 1.6 million Chinook salmon a year. The young smolt are released into Icicle Creek each spring from where they migrate to the Pacific.

From the hatchery, you can hike the mile-long **Icicle Creek Interpretive Trail** and learn about the local ecology and history.



#### Activities

##### Hiking

Leavenworth offers ample opportunities for hiking. The most diverse selection of trails can be found in the nearby Alpine Lakes Wilderness and vary from an easy 3.5-mile river loop to a challenging two- to three-day backcountry slog. Pick up a trail map at the chamber of commerce.

##### Skiing

The area around Leavenworth has some diverse skiing opportunities, including downhill skiing, cross-country skiing, tubing, snowshoeing and even ski jumping. A number of hotels rent skis and equipment, or you can enquire at **Der Sportsman** (837 Front St). The **Leavenworth Winter Sports Club** (www.skileavenworth.com) is a local umbrella organization, and its website contains a wealth of local ski information. The club helps maintain 26km of mostly level trails at Icicle River, Waterfront Park and **Leavenworth Ski Hill** (day pass adult/child \$15/12; ☺3-7pm Wed & Fri & 9.30am-7pm Sat & Sun late Dec-Feb). The Hill