

# Olympic Peninsula & Washington Coast



Hidden away in the nation's extreme northwest, Washington's spectacular coastline and heavily forested interior showcases over 350 miles of wild, storm-lashed beaches along with some of the country's most untainted and pristine rural ecosystems.

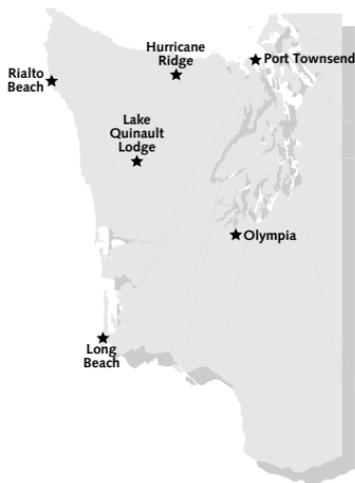
The jewel in the crown is the unique Olympic Peninsula and its eponymous national park, a remote and rugged amalgamation of glacier-coated mountains, misty cliffs and lush, temperate rain forest that encases a vast primeval wilderness where human habitation has been kept to a minimum. Untouched in over a millennium lie placid, sapphire lakes, ancient cedar and spruce forests, and steep, craggy mountain slopes that govern one of the wettest microclimates in the US – a weather system that dumps up to 200in of rain and snow annually on the Olympic's western mountains. Isolated from the rest of the state, the biodiversity astounds with a rich variety of plants offering a thousand different shades of green.

While the population centers in this region can't compete in size with the likes of Seattle and Spokane, cities such as Olympia, Port Townsend and Vancouver are colorful and distinct, encompassing everything from alternative music and Victorian architecture to the pioneering history of the British Hudson Bay Company.

East of this verdant Eden, the region is bordered by the craning Cascade Mountains and the arterial I-5 while, to the south, expansive beaches and small-scale resorts pepper Washington's premier coastal playground.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Discovering a precocious new band on a nighttime romp around Olympia's innovative **music scene** (p135)
- Watching inclement weather roll in over stormy **Hurricane Ridge** (p139)
- Seeking solitude on mist-enshrouded **Rialto Beach** (p153)
- Relaxing after a bracing hike in front of a fireplace at the **Lake Quinault Lodge** (p143)
- Remembering a bygone age at Port Townsend's nostalgic **Victorian Days festival** (p147)
- Flying a kite on expansive **Long Beach** (p158)



## Geography & Climate

Rain, rain and yet more rain! It will come as no surprise to regular visitors that parts of the precipitous Olympic National Park are among the wettest places on earth. If you thought Seattle's 37 annual inches was hard to bear, try snapping open your umbrella in the Hoh Rain Forest where 200in of rain/snow is the norm. There are a few bright spots, however, most notably Sequim in the Northeast of the Olympic Peninsula where a marked rain shadow effect has resulted in the growth of a popular retirement community.

## National Parks

The Olympic National Park is headquartered in Port Angeles and protects 922,561 acres of mountains, forest and coast. Earmarked as a national monument by President T Roosevelt in 1909, the area officially took on national park status in 1938 under President FD Roosevelt. It became an International Biosphere Reserve in 1976 and in 1981 was designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Seven years later its protection was further assured by the formation of the Olympic Wilderness area.

## Getting There & Away

Greyhound buses ply I-5 daily, stopping in Vancouver, Kelso, Centralia, Olympia, Tacoma and Seattle. Amtrak trains follow approximately the same route. Daily ferries from Victoria, Canada, serve Port Angeles in the north while the quickest access from Seattle and Sea-Tac International Airport is a ferry-bus combo via Bainbridge Island and the Hood Canal Bridge.

## Getting Around

Getting around the Olympic Peninsula by public bus is surprisingly easy given that it's a wilderness area, and you won't face the car-only mentality that you often encounter out east. Given that local buses can also carry up to two bikes, two-wheeled transport is another viable option. The coastal resorts in the southwest are a little more difficult to negotiate without a car although inter-town buses do run. Check out the **Grays Harbor** ([www.ghtransit.com](http://www.ghtransit.com)) and **Pacific County** ([www.pacifictransit.org](http://www.pacifictransit.org)) websites for schedules.

## OLYMPIA

pop 43,330

Small enough to be a town but large enough to boast the dynamic cultural life of a more

populous city, Washington's engaging state capital is full of unexpected surprises. Aside from being home to the magnificent State Capitol, Olympia sports other eye-catching architecture, a formidable oyster restaurant, an enlightened student population, a cluster of excellent brew pubs, numerous independent coffeehouses and a music scene that has helped define everything from grunge rock to riot grrrl feminism.

Characterized by its cool urban energy and revered for its close proximity to the scenic wonders of Mt Rainier and the Olympic National Park, Olympia has been attracting both indoor artists and outdoor adventurers for decades. Grunge pioneers Nirvana played some of their earliest gigs in the bars and pubs of downtown; Matt Groening, creator of *The Simpsons*, once edited the campus newspaper at progressive Evergreen College; and pioneering brewer, Leopold Schmidt chose the artesian water of nearby Tumwater to craft his smooth and flavorful Olympia beer. Under the circumstances, Olympians could be forgiven for being a little smug about their culture-defining city heritage. From its neo-Romanesque Old State Capitol Building in placid Sylvester Park to its exciting clutch of DIY musicians who enliven the nightspots of 4th Street, Washington's charismatic capital is a city that fully lives up to its grand, classical-sounding name.

## Orientation & Information

Olympia is at the southern end of Puget Sound (an arm of the Pacific Ocean). I-5 passes through the town, running north to Seattle (60 miles) and south to Portland (114 miles).

Olympia is dominated by the Washington State Capitol campus, which rises on a bluff above Capitol Lake (formed by damming the Deschutes River). The fingerlike intrusion of Budd Inlet is Olympia's outlet to the sea and a docking area for boats and pleasure craft.

The **State Capitol Visitor Center** (☎ 360-586-3460; cr 14th Ave & Capitol Way) offers information on the capitol campus, the Olympia area and Washington state. Backcountry permits for wilderness camping in Olympic National Park can be obtained from the **USFS office** (☎ 360-956-2300; 1835 Black Lake Blvd), west of town.

## Sights & Activities

Looking like a huge Grecian temple, the **Washington State Capitol** complex dominates the