



Columbia River Gorge

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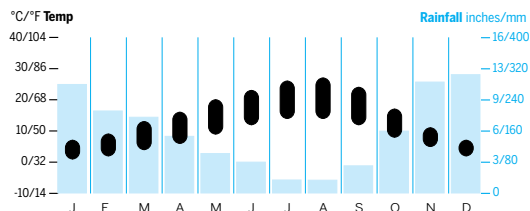
Why Go?

Cleanly dividing Oregon and Washington is the spectacular Columbia River Gorge, which was carved some 15,000 years ago by cataclysmic glaciers and floods. Driving east from Portland on I-84 (or on the scenic Historic Columbia River Hwy) has you passing high waterfalls and nearly vertical mountain walls, all the while paralleling the mighty Columbia.

Hikers have plenty to keep them busy in the gorge, which features many steep, lovely trails that lead through fern-lined canyons, and across wildflower fields to grand vistas. Summer wind sports are legendary – the gorge channels westerlies inland against the current, creating world-class windsurfing and kiteboarding conditions. There are also mountain-biking and rafting possibilities, especially around Hood River.

Not into strenuous activity? The gorge offers highlights such as lovely waterfalls, agricultural bounties (don't miss the cherries in July!) and fine wine tasting. This is a special place, so take time to enjoy it.

When to Go Hood River



Feb–May Waterfalls are at their gushing best, thanks to incessant winter and spring rains.

Jun–Aug Ripe cherries, great hiking weather and hot westerlies for kiteboarding.

Sep–Oct Luscious apples and pears, plus Hood River's Harvest Festival.

The Western Gorge & Columbia River Highway



Finished in 1915, the Historic Columbia River Hwy winds its scenic way between Troutdale and The Dalles. Also known as US 30, this thoroughfare was the first paved road in the Northwest and America's first scenic highway; it was also the last leg of Lewis and Clark's Corps of Discovery expedition and the hellish finale for Oregon Trail pioneers.

The Columbia River Hwy offers access to gushing waterfalls in spring, wildflower displays in summer and awe-inspiring views all year round. Hikers have plenty of trailheads to choose from, and cyclists can cruise two stretches of the old highway renovated for nonvehicular use. It's slow going on busy weekends, however, and windy enough that trailers are not recommended.

Sights

Vista House



MUSEUM

( 503-695-2240; vistahouse.com;  9am-4pm, to 6pm May-Sep) **FREE** Crown Point, which marks the western edge of the gorge, offers amazing panoramic views across the gorge. Here, the 1916 Vista House observatory, an art-nouveau-style rotunda, houses a visitors information center, gift shop and snack stand.

Sleeping & Eating

Ainsworth State Park

CAMPGROUND \$

( 800-551-6949; www.oregonstateparks.org; tent/RV sites \$17/24;  Mar 15-Oct 31) This campground near I-84 caters more to RVs – there's definitely highway noise – but there are six walk-in tent sites with a little more peace and quiet, and very easy access to hiking trails. Hiker-biker sites are a mere \$5.



McMenamins Edgefield

HOTEL \$\$



( 503-669-8610; www.mcmenamins.com/54-edgefield-home; 2126 SW Halsey St, Troutdale; dm \$30, s/d with shared bath from \$50/140; ) This former county poor farm, restored by the McMenamin brothers, is now a one-of-a-kind, 38-acre hotel complex with a dizzying variety of services. There's a wine-tasting room, cinema, glassblowing studio, pitch-and-putt golf course (beer-in-hand), live music, gardens and restaurants. Rooms are European-style (no TVs or phones, wi-fi in common areas), some with bathrooms down the hall.

Multnomah Falls Lodge

AMERICAN \$\$

( 503-695-2376; www.multnomahfalls lodge.com; 53000 Historic Columbia River Hwy; dinner mains \$15-24;  10am-6pm Mon-Thu, 8am-8pm Fri-Sun) The Multnomah Falls Lodge offers a fine Northwest-style dining option right at the base of Multnomah Falls, with dishes like sesame-miso baked Coho salmon and a vegetarian Moroccan stew, plus a Sunday brunch (\$25 per person). If a berry pie is on the dessert menu, save room.

Information

US Forest Service Visitors Center ( 503-695-2372; 53000 E Historic Columbia River Hwy, Multnomah Falls Lodge;  9am-5pm) This info center inside Multnomah Falls Lodge is staffed by the Friends of Multnomah Falls and the US Forest Service; it has books, trail maps, and local information about hikes and bicycle routes, and you can buy a Northwest Forest Pass here.

Getting There & Away

The Historic Columbia River Hwy is best explored by car. To reach it, take exit 17 or 35 off I-84.

Cascade Locks

 541 / POP 1148

An early transportation center, Cascade Locks (at exit 44 off I-84) gets its name from the navigational locks, completed in 1896, that cut through the treacherous rapids here (now submerged). The town flourished throughout the 1930s, when the area was home to thousands of Bonneville Dam construction workers. At the locks, note the wooden Native American fishing platforms.

Sights

Eagle Creek Recreation Area

PARK

The beautiful, 13.2-mile **Eagle Creek Trail** is the gorge's most popular hike; on summer weekends, get here early to snag a parking spot. Early gorge promoters engineered this historic trail in 1910 to coincide with the opening of the Historic Columbia River Hwy. The trail passes a dozen waterfalls as it meanders up wooded slopes and sheer rock walls through a narrow basalt canyon.

From the trailhead it's 6 miles to **Tunnel Falls**, which crosses a dizzying bridge over a 150ft chasm before reaching a tunnel carved behind a waterfall. Backpack overnight at 7.5 Mile Camp to turn a tiring day hike into an