



WASHINGTON

OLYMPIC PENINSULA LOOP

With lush forests, waterfalls and sandy shores, this drive is a nature lover's paradise.

STORY BY **LESLIE FORSBERG**

Chlrophyll rules in the damp Pacific Northwest. Experience it firsthand on a drive around Washington State's Olympic Peninsula loop, where logging trucks have given way to SUVs loaded with bikes and kayaks. You'll easily see the green in the Hoh Rain Forest, where bigleaf maples stoop like old men under the weight of thick pads of mosses and epiphytes (plants that grow on other plants for support). And you can almost taste it in the salt-tinged air of the area's pristine Pacific shore, where hemlock and red cedar forests trail down to beaches pounded by ocean waves.

With high mountain peaks, dense forests and ocean beaches, Olympic National Park—an UNESCO World Heritage Site—is the heart of the peninsula. It's flanked on three sides by Highway 101, which ribbons through small towns on a loop drive of more than 300 miles.

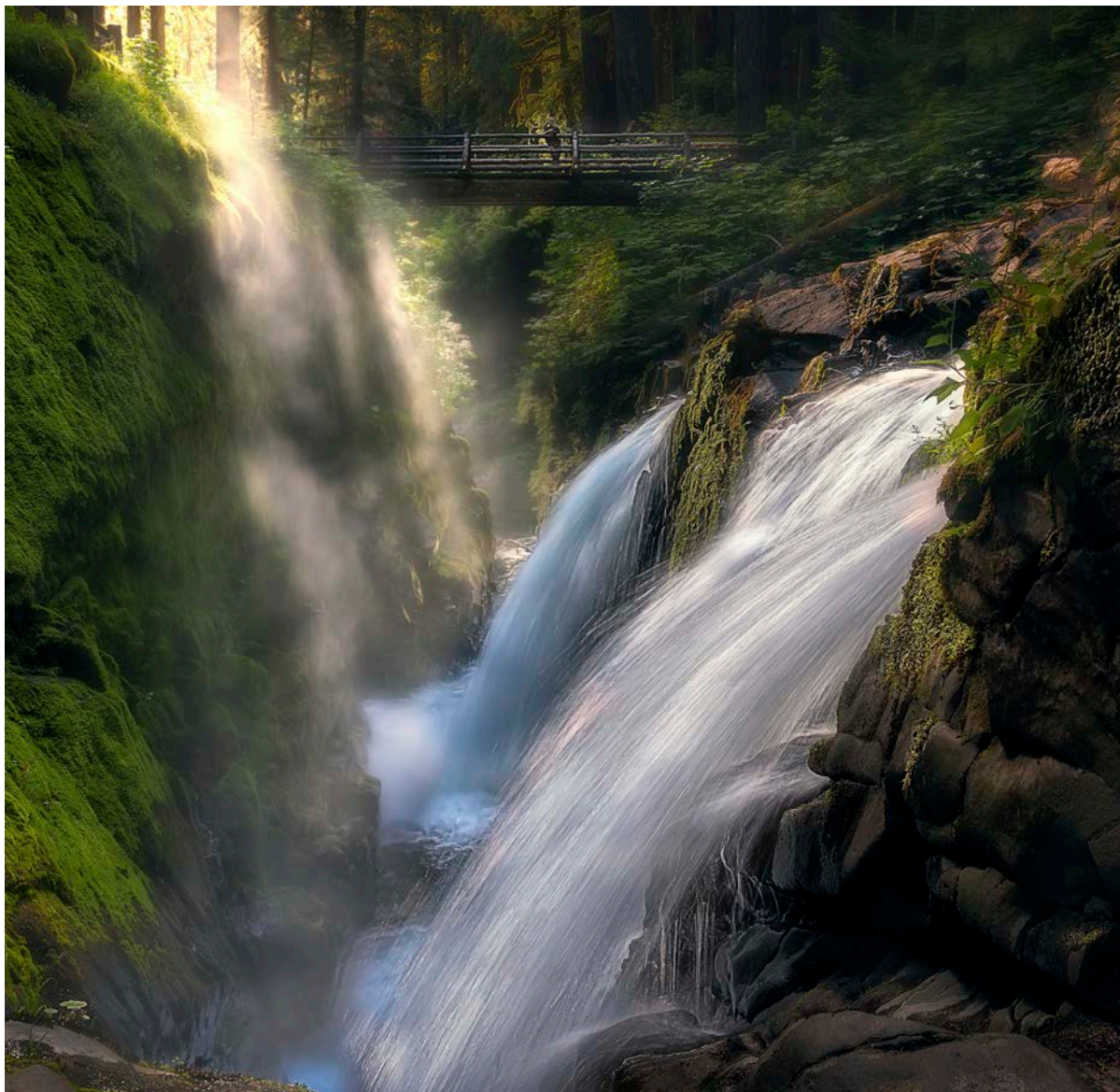
RIDE THE FERRY

When you first lay your eyes on the peninsula, it will likely be from Seattle. From there, the snow-tipped Olympic Range forms a jagged outline on the western horizon. You'll aim straight for those peaks on board a Washington State Ferry from downtown Seattle to Bainbridge Island, an exciting start to your journey.

Make Port Townsend your first stop. This historic seaport features a fleet of painted ladies—beautifully restored and painted Victorian homes. Its downtown is filled with boutiques in old brick buildings. On its northern flank, Fort Worden Historical State Park is the site of year-round arts and culture festivals, and its

TEN BRIDGES lead hikers to the wonders within the glorious forests of Olympic National Park.





lovely sand beach is marked by the 1914 Point Wilson Lighthouse.

After rounding a couple of tranquil bays, you'll arrive at the lavender capital of North America: Sequim (pronounced *Skwim*). Spring and summer bring sweet scents to visitors strolling the grounds of the area's lavender farms. Many of the farms have gift shops where you can buy elixirs, potions and culinary items made from the fragrant herb.

Port Angeles, the largest town on the peninsula, is the gateway to Olympic National Park and a good spot to pull in for the night and have a leisurely dinner. Next Door

Gastropub, known for using fresh and local ingredients, is one of my favorite establishments.

Just beyond town, kick into low gear for the 17-mile climb to the 5,242-foot Hurricane Ridge. Here you'll experience jaw-dropping vistas of glaciated mountains. Alpine meadows are the home of blacktailed deer and Olympic marmots—adorably chubby rodents with shrill whistles.

INTO THE RAINFOREST

Farther west, Highway 101 hugs the curves of the 12-mile-long Lake Crescent, whose cobalt depths are legendary. Also

sparkling stories is Lake Crescent Lodge, an arts-and-crafts-style resort perched on the shoreline. Some say President Franklin Roosevelt's overnight stay here in 1937 played a role in the creation of Olympic National Park.

Across the highway, a short hike leads to Marymere Falls, a 90-foot cascade in a rock alcove draped with delicate maidenhair ferns. A few miles farther, the Sol Duc Hot Springs beckon with thermal soaking pools and a spectacular nature walk through a mossy old-growth forest to Sol Duc Falls.

Just past the former timber town of Forks, the Hoh Rain Forest



WATERFALL: JUAN MARIA COY VEGARA/GETTY IMAGES; LIGHTHOUSE: JEFF GOULDEN/GETTY IMAGES; KAYAKS: YINYANG/GETTY IMAGES; SEAL: MLIHARING/GETTY IMAGES

owes its existence to moisture-laden weather systems rolling off the Pacific that drop an average of 12 feet of rain annually. You see the rain's effect along the Hall of Mosses nature trail, where you will find massive, primeval trees covered with moss, and every square foot hosts an exuberant tangle of plant life.

Highway 101 finally reaches the Pacific at Ruby Beach, one of the crown jewels of Olympic National Park. The sensory experience here is full-on, with the tang of salt air, sea gulls mewling over the roar of the ocean and a broad sandy beach to sink your toes into. It's a visual

SOL DUC FALLS is surrounded by a forest of 200-year-old hemlock trees. Continuing clockwise: Point Wilson Lighthouse near Port Townsend; kayaks rest on the shore of Lake Crescent in Olympic National Park.

feast as well, as seabirds swirl about sentinel-like sea stacks and brilliant anemones and sea stars glisten at the bottom of tide pools. The sun-bleached driftwood piled high (perfect for an impromptu game of teeter-totter) is just one more reminder of the vast forests on this verdant thumb of land jutting into the Pacific Ocean. 🌊

POINTS OF INTEREST

Kayaking, hiking, beachcombing, biking—the Olympic Peninsula offers an astounding array of outdoor fun.

Wildlife Watching

Stroll the sands of the **Dungeness Spit Recreation Area**, home of the nation's longest natural sand spit at 5.5 miles. The spit is part of the Dungeness National Wildlife Refuge, which lies on a migration route known as the Pacific Flyway. clallam.net/parks/dungeness.html

Explore the Shore

Paddle out of Freshwater Bay to sea caves and harbor seal haul-outs with **Adventures Through Kayaking**. Rent equipment or take a guided tour. atkayaking.com



Native Heritage

Take a side trip to Neah Bay to learn about the Makah tribe. The renowned **Makah Museum** tells of the tribe's history and culture. makah.com

Pedal Power

Roll along the **Olympic Discovery Trail**, a bike path that goes past farmland, forest and ocean. olympicdiscoverytrail.org

Plan your visit at olympicpeninsula.org