

# *Alaska* BEYOND»

MAGAZINE JULY 2018

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*Kids play in the sand north of Pacific City.*

## SEASIDE SOJOURN

Exploring Oregon's Northern Coast

By Alex Pulaski

» **Some of the country's** most magnificent coastal areas are only about 80 miles or more west of Portland.

A stretch of wide beaches and rocky headlands has made the northern Oregon coast a playground for Portland residents and knowledgeable visitors for more than a century.

The following three towns are among my family's favorite Portland getaways during the summer. From outdoor adventures in Pacific City to family fun on Cannon Beach to historical places in Astoria, this coastal area is full of exciting attractions that beckon to be explored.

### Pacific City

The seaside town of Pacific City, located about 90 miles southwest of Portland, has about 1,000 people and is an easy getaway from everyday life.

The laid-back community is a place where deer bound across the road and up a hillside, and geese honk as they pass overhead, noisily signaling their presence. A lone cyclist passes me one morning with his surfboard tucked under one arm. Like most of the traffic here, he's headed to one place: the beach.

Pacific City's beach is where you'll find one of the Oregon Coast's two monoliths named Haystack Rock. While Cannon Beach's formation gets more publicity, Pacific City's 340-foot

landmark is actually taller (by about 100 feet), but it is a little farther off the coast, so it can appear smaller. Both rocks are sanctuaries for birds and other wildlife.

My wife, Mica, and I, with our 12-year-old daughter and her friend, check in to the spectacular new Headlands Coastal Lodge & Spa and then visit with Matt Goodwin, one of the lodge's adventure coaches. That is Goodwin's actual job title, and we quickly discover that we need such a guide to help us decide among all the possibilities. Should we surf the waves in front of scenic Haystack Rock? Kayak the nearby Nestucca River? Dig for clams? Fish from a dory? Hop on a bike? These are just some of the many possibilities in this town where outdoor adventures abound.

With two youngsters along, we elect to start with a tide pool exploration. We find barnacles crowding a rock archway; magenta and orange sea stars clinging to boulders; and bright-purple sea urchins huddling along with green sea anemones. "One of my favorite things is coming out here and seeing a hidden world," Goodwin says as we comb the tide pools.

Over a weekend we also cycle to a nearby park and hike sand dunes. We cruise through local waterways in a pedal kayak and stand-up paddleboard along the Nestucca River, where we see an osprey and bald eagle tangle over airspace while northern flickers and red-winged blackbirds trill from the banks.

Headlands' developers Mary Jones and Jeff Schons have been working on projects in Pacific City for the past three decades. They

originally planned the lodge as the romantic destination it is. However, they also noticed all the area cars were laden with kayaks and surfboards. "We realized this needed to be a place for active people," Jones says.

Our family detours from our explorations with a satisfying visit to the Grateful Bread Bakery in town, which is known for its many tasty baked items, including my personal favorite: a blueberry-white chocolate scone.

Other food and drink locations include the Pelican Brewing Company, with an amazing beachfront brewpub at the north end of town, and the Headlands' on-site Meridian restaurant, which offers inspired dishes such as black rockfish and grilled cauliflower, and incredible ocean views.

For Mica and me, the Headlands spa's massages mark the blissful end of our visit. Adventure never felt so relaxing.

## Cannon Beach

About 70 miles north of Pacific City is Cannon Beach, which owes part of its fame to the aforementioned sea stack that dominates the town's main beach.

Every summer, this rock is home to a few dozen tufted puffins—pelagic seabirds that nurture a single egg until it hatches in July. The stubby-winged birds attract big crowds, especially for the Great Cannon Beach Puffin Watch, planned for July 1–4 this year, which affords a great chance to see the birds flying about.

The town itself is delightful. It is home to taffy shops, bookstores, an olive oil tasting room, brewpubs, wine-tasting rooms and art galleries. The whimsy and bright colors at DragonFire Gallery, in particular, caught my family's interest. The colorful gallery focuses on paintings, ceramics, glass and metal art made by Northwest artists.



» From top: Iconic Haystack Rock at Cannon Beach is a commanding sight along the Oregon coast. A local favorite is the quaint Cannon Beach Hardware and Public House, which combines a hardware store with a bar, serving beer, wine and light meals.





» **Astoria's Buoy Beer Company, above, features craft beers and views of the city's waterfront along the Columbia River. The breathtaking view, above right, from the top of the Astoria Column, is a popular city attraction. Visitors can also launch balsa-wood gliders from the column's observation deck.**

Cannon Beach's local dining options range from the tasty Nutella-stuffed crepes at Crêpe Neptune to the three-plus-hour multicourse dinner experiences presented by Bob Neroni and Lenore Emery-Neroni at EVOO Cannon Beach Cooking School.

We take a short hike through Ecola State Park, enjoying the incredible coastal views of Crescent Beach. Later, we borrow a couple of beach cruiser bikes from the Stephanie Inn, our romantic base for the weekend, which allows kids, age 12 and older. We cycle past Haystack Rock and the many beachgoers playing in the sand, flying kites and wading in the surf.



Back at the Stephanie Inn, we enjoy a dinner of asparagus soup, Dungeness crab-stuffed sole and strawberry-rhubarb tarts.

In the early evening, Mica and I take glasses of Pinot Gris outside onto the hotel balcony, prop our feet up and relax before a thrilling sunset. The moment is captured by our single expression of satisfaction, said in unison—"Ahhhh."

## Astoria

About 25 miles north of Cannon Beach, we come to the mouth of the mighty Columbia River and the historic city of Astoria.

It was about 6 miles southwest of here that the Lewis and Clark

Expedition wintered in 1805–06 in Fort Clatsop.

Astoria itself was first known for fur trading, beginning when John Jacob Astor (the source of the name Astoria) set up the Pacific Fur Trading Company in the area in 1811. The fur trade was replaced by fishing, and by the late 1800s, Astoria was considered the "Salmon Canning Capital of the World."

Today, the town's history is embraced with gusto, including by costumed park rangers, who each summer re-enact the Lewis and Clark Expedition's experiences at the Lewis and Clark National Historical Park, which includes a

## Following Oregon's Coastal Food Trail

» From line-caught salmon and halibut at Ecola Seafoods Restaurant & Market in Cannon Beach to a dipped waffle cone brimming with caramel-toffee crunch ice cream at the Tillamook Creamery, Oregon's coastal communities offer a variety of world-class foods.

You can enjoy the bounty of the Oregon Coast along the new North Coast Food Trail, which debuted in April. The self-guided food trail includes stops at breweries, farms, wineries and much more. For information on locations, visit [northcoastfoodtrail.com](http://northcoastfoodtrail.com).

## » HERE & NOW PORTLAND



**Tillamook Creamery's  
delicious ice cream cones.**

The food trail website also offers information on special events that will be happening throughout the summer at some of the more than 60 participating locations and restaurants along the coast.

Visitors can tour local farms, including Tillamook's Brickyard Farms; attend a cooking school, such as the Culinary Center in Lincoln City, and the EVOO Cannon Beach Cooking School; and peruse

farmers markets in Lincoln City (Sundays), Neskowin (Saturdays), Pacific City (Sundays), Tillamook (Saturdays), Manzanita (Friday evenings) and Cannon Beach (Tuesdays). You can catch your own dinner through charter fishing and crabbing services at Kelly's Brighton Marina and fishing charters with Garibaldi Charters, Pacific City Dory Charters and Siggie-G Ocean Charters.

This summer also marks the opening of the remodeled Tillamook Creamery Visitors Center in Tillamook. The facility opened in June and offers improved viewing of factory operations, expanded retail space and a larger ice cream counter. —A.P.

replica of Fort Clatsop.

We also visit the Astoria Column, a 125-foot tower located on a hill above the town. The column tells the local history in murals that spiral up its exterior. With our balsa-wood gliders—purchased from the column's gift shop—my family climbs to the observation deck, which offers spectacular views of the countryside and the Columbia River. We follow local custom and launch our gliders into the wind.

On the city's waterfront, we visit the Columbia River Maritime Museum, which recounts lives lost and fortunes found in local waters. One exhibit is "Crossing the Bar: Perilous Passage," which tells the history of navigating the

mouth of the Columbia River, one of the world's most dangerous bar crossings. You can also enjoy a craft beer at the waterfront's Buoy Beer Company, where, through a glass floor cutout, we watch sea lions under the pier.

From our room at the waterfront's boutique Cannery Pier Hotel & Spa—built on the site of an 1897 salmon cannery—we watch various ships pass by our window and under the nearby Astoria-Megler Bridge. This calming show is an appropriate way to end our latest coastal adventure, which has created many new summer memories. ✈

*Alex Pulaski writes about Oregon from his home in Portland.*

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