

Escape



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Nature's trailblazer

Go wild in Oregon

Inside: Author Andrew O'Hagan, human jukebox genius Jeff Buckley, and Cheggers

Road trippin' through Oregon

Wild and spectacular, Oregon is every bit as interesting as its Californian neighbour, writes **Kylie McLaughlin**.

Pocket-sized Oregon is perfect for a seven-day road trip. Fringed with wild, empty beaches, it contains some of the best breweries and restaurants in the US, mild weather, welcoming people and scenery that will take your breath away, it's no wonder Californians holiday here in droves. Want to go shopping? In Oregon state, it's sales-tax free.

Oregon's furthestmost point, Astoria, is the first on my seven-day itinerary from Portland and may be most famous as the setting of *The Goonies* (which, I am horrified to learn, just celebrated its 30th anniversary). But that's not the only point of interest.

Breweries such as Buoy Beer line Astoria's historic waterfront, and on a sunny day there could be few things better than sipping on a cold craft beer and whale-watching from the brewery's seafront deck.

Astoria is also home to the noisiest sea lion colony I've ever heard. They're barking, dogs being walked nearby are barking, and the racket can be heard all the way up to the Astoria Column on Coxcomb Hill – the best spot from which to gaze at the astounding 6.6-kilometre-long Astoria-Megler Bridge, which connects Oregon with Washington over the mouth of the Columbia River.

Oregon's Pacific Coast starts here with Fort Stevens State Park – think quiet, white sandy beaches and the atmospheric Peter Iredale shipwreck. Things get much busier closer to popular holiday townships such as Seaside and stunning Cannon Beach, overlooked by Ecola State Park, where a friendly visitor hands me his park pass on his way out. A short, windy drive through forest gives visitors a spectacular overview of Oregon's most photographed strip of coastline: Cannon Beach and Haystack Rock.

The temptation to stop at every corner during the drive south is strong. My destination for the night is Newport, signalled by

Oregon's oldest lighthouse at Yaquina, and as I drive out to the headland the sun dips into the Pacific to leave a faint orange glow across the land, where wild winds have beaten the coastline flat and hillside trees bend at alarming angles.

It should have been a warm evening, but for the wild winds, and from my hotel the view of Nye Beach is best from alongside the room's heater, glass of red wine in hand, listening to the ocean's roar. The two charming ladies who check me in inform me smoked salmon chowder is served in the evenings at 5pm and at 8pm, it's freshly baked cookies, and the yen to stay in is significant.

However, Newport is also home to Oregon's famed beer export Rogue and renowned restaurant Local Ocean Seafood, both on the foreshore of the town's sheltered bay, which is filled with boats and more noisy seals. The restaurant is heaving on a Monday night for good reason: it serves top-notch Pacific Northwest-style seafood – creamy, flavoursome chowder; zesty fish tacos; and my new favourite dish, Dungeness crab cakes.

Rogue Ales Public House is a short hop down the road, and despite the fact I arrive an hour or so before closing on a Monday evening, its small but perfectly formed bar is lined with lively patrons. I perch in a quiet corner but a young, friendly bartender spies me and plies me with generous "sample" sizes of the famous brew. I declare a mead with jasmine notes to be my new favourite beverage, before I realise the bar has emptied and I'm no longer in any state to be driving home.

It's with a heavy heart I leave Newport the next morning, cursing and nursing my Rogue headache, to head south along a magnificent stretch of coastline dotted with historic lighthouses, caves of sea lions, arched bridges, rocky outcrops and river mouths until Florence, which marks the beginning of a spectacular 80km



The 6.6km-long Astoria-Megler Bridge over Columbia River connects Oregon with Washington.

stretch of sand dunes along the Oregon coast.

Oregonians have come up with some pretty novel uses for these sandhills. I am delivered to a place that offers rides on a four-seater sand rail, like a dune buggy. The vehicle set before me had more bling than a stretch limo carrying loaded rappers and I should have wised up to the kind of journey I was in for when I was handed a pair of goggles and strapped in like a mummy; the driver looking like he'd just stepped off a *Mad Max* set. This vehicle was designed to tear around the sandhills like a carriage on a roller coaster; every time I opened my mouth to scream I was silenced by a gobful of sand, and of course I instantly regretted taking my camera and iPhone along. Exhilarated, terrified and relieved, I left the bespoke buggy with the hangover jolted from my bones and sand clinging to every inch of skin.

It was time to take a detour inland, following the picturesque Siuslaw River to the sporting city of Eugene in central Oregon, a culinary destination in its own right, before heading south to one of Oregon's premier attractions, Crater Lake. I stayed the night in the university town of Medford, a 90-minute drive from the lake.

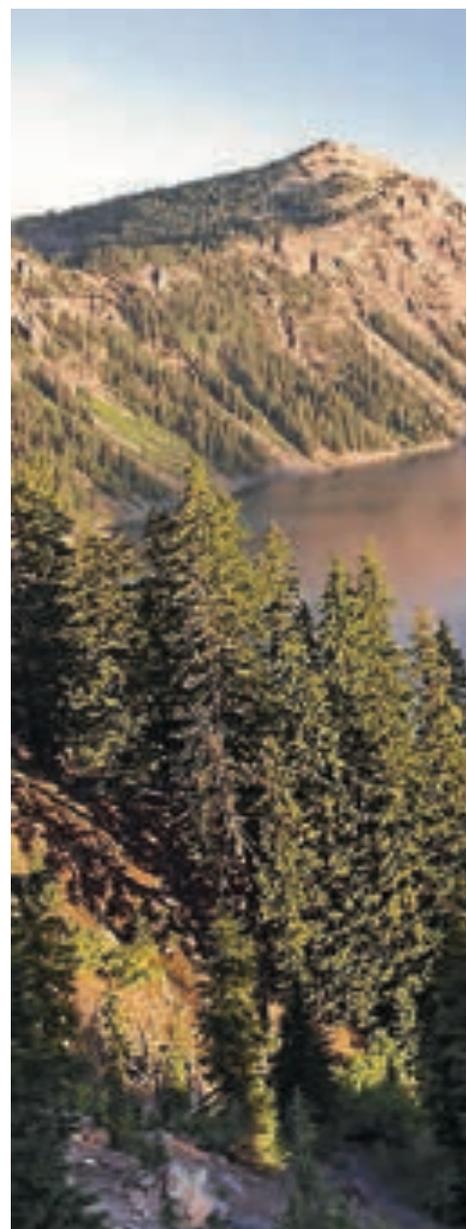
It's mid-morning at the lake's

rim and one of those gorgeous blue-sky days, if a little chilly. Stunning, deep blue Crater Lake is the deepest lake in the United States, and the 10th deepest in the world. A trip around its 53-kilometre rim takes about two to three hours, depending on how many photo stops you make, and there are 26 official viewpoints. An enthusiastic ranger assures me the view is different around every corner as the scene, the light and the mood change. In summer months you can take boat trips across the lake and even swim – if you dare. The water is freezing.

On the least-visited eastern side lies the "Phantom Ship" – a tiny, angular island so named because it's hard to spot and can completely disappear from view. Because of its appearance, visitors often ask if it's the tip of Mount Mazama, which erupted about 5677BC. No, is the correct answer. Crater Lake sits in its caldera.

The beautiful historic lodge on the Lake's rim offers great views across the lake and, importantly, lunch – the trout from the lake's pure water is delicious. First constructed in 1915, the lodge was not built for the annual heavy snowfall – about 4.5 metres – and was left unfinished, without private bathrooms for guests, to suffer years of neglect. The National Park Service considered it too expensive to maintain, but in 1991 work started on its reconstruction. It cost a whopping US\$15 million to rebuild, with very little of the original building kept, and opened for business in 1995.

There are not many towns not known for their craft breweries in Oregon, but the outdoorsy, youthful Bend boasts the most. Two hours north of Crater Lake, the town has a whopping 26, and a tour is recommended. Mine starts in an "electric cruiser car" from Boneyard Brewing, a standing-room-only, backstreet shed serviced by rockabillies. A new brewer has saved old favourite Silver Moon, fun to visit as the locals struggle to locate it, and relative newcomer Crux Fermentation Project, owned by a former Deschutes brewer who



Oregon's oldest lighthouse at Yaquina.

snared a prime piece of elevated land with a sunset view that I arrive just in time for. Clearly Bend's brewery of choice right now, they've run out of glasses and serve me a sampler in full-sized schooners. It's a good thing I'm not driving.

Sure, you can burn off the beer calories kayaking down the Deschutes River – but sipping a top-notch brew from a cooler while gently floating down it on a hot summer's day seems like a much more sensible idea to me.

Bend's population is exploding – from 20,000 in 1980 to close to 90,000 now, with most newcomers employed by the minimum-wage tourism industry – so ironically, the most popular beer in town remains the cheaper, blue-collar brew Pabst Blue Ribbon.

Close by lies one of Oregon's "seven wonders". Smith Rock's facade looks fairly unremarkable from the main road. But curving away from casual view, its giant, sheer cliff face is dotted with rock climbers, its iconic curve twists



The overhanging cliff of Monkey Face in the Smith Rock area is popular with climbers.



The stunning, deep blue Crater Lake is the deepest lake in the United States. With 26 official viewpoints, there is a different view around every corner. Photos: 123RF



Phantom Ship Island on Crater Lake is a tiny angular island so named because it's hard to spot and can completely disappear from view.

around a mirror-like river that presents excellent hiking opportunities and unparalleled views of the mountainous countryside. On this warm, sunny September morning, it's packed full of Oregon's fittest folk and energetic schoolkids on tour.

A few minutes further north, I pull up at a viewpoint over Crooked River Gorge, which is signposted to warn of the number of pet dogs that have jumped to their death there. As I cautiously approach to peer dubiously over the magnificent canyon's edge, a poker-faced man says: "Don't look down there. There's a lot of dogs."

Kidder. He eyes my horrified face with a sly look before laughing uproariously.

I continue the drive north to Timberline Lodge on the top of Mount Hood, Oregon's iconic mountain that can be seen in the distance from Portland. It's one of those epic American drives, passing farmland that stretches for miles to the snow-capped peaks of mounts Jefferson and Washington.

As the climb up Mount Hood commences, the landscape changes to thick forests dotted with trees that are already turning crimson for autumn. As the landscape changes, so does the weather: warm sun is eventually covered in clouds, and by the time I summit it is raining. At Timberline, the rain has stopped altogether and the sun's rays break magnificently over the mountains.

Timberline may have inspired *The Shining* – and it's this hotel that features in the movie's establishing shots – but locals will tell you the story of the work that went into its detailed construction during the Depression is much more interesting.

Coming back down the mountain, the drive to Hood River is spectacular – waterfalls, fall foliage and little traffic on which to concentrate. As you start to enter Hood River county, Oregon's fruit bowl, around bends appear orchards attached to delightful old-fashioned cideries, with colonial-style barns painted white



Multnomah Falls, a huge double waterfall, in Columbia River Gorge.

standing brightly against the greens, yellows and reds that dominate the landscape.

At dusk, the sun sets the landscape on fire and its burning orange glow takes my breath away. Too soon, I'm at the river's junction and Hood River town. Picturesque against the wide expanse of the Columbia River, this area is renown for windsurfing and has a healthy number of Oregon's trademark breweries from which to choose. I elect

Pfriem, just in time to sample its delicious, fruity Belgian-style wheatbeer before it closes for the evening.

I retire to the old-world charm of the Columbia River Lodge; complete with no mod-cons and a delightful antique telephone, the hotel is near a thundering waterfall en route to what is arguably Oregon's most spectacular drive – Columbia River Gorge.

It took a full 10 minutes for me to realise my mouth was still agape

Trip notes

Astoria

Buoy Beer; buoybeer.com
Blue Scorcher Bakery and Cafe; bluescorcher.coop

Newport

Elizabeth Street Inn; elizabethstreetinn.com
Rogue Ales Public House; rogue.com/roguemeetinghalls
Local Ocean Seafoods; localocean.net; info@localocean.net

Florence

Sand Dunes Frontier; sanddunesfrontier.com

Medford

Inn at the Commons; innatthecommons.com
Elements Tapas Bar and Lounge; elementsmedford.com
Bricktowne Brewing Company; bricktownebeer.com

Crater Lake

Crater Lake Lodge; craterlakelodges.com

Bend

Tetherow Lodge; tetherow.com
Tumalo Creek Kayak & Canoe; tumalocreek.com
Bend Brew Tour; thebendtourcompany.com

Mount Hood

Timberline Lodge; timberlinelodge.com

Hood River

Columbia Gorge Hotel; columbiagorgehotel.com
Pfriem Family Brewers; pfriembeer.com

after catching first sight of the gorge. Running alongside Highway 84 that leads straight into Portland, it's like a massive inland sea has cut a path through the landscape, deftly separating Oregon and Washington state. It's enormity has to be seen to be believed.

Bridge of the Gods at the town of Cascade Lock is a grand spot, recently put on the map by Cheryl Strayed's memoir *Wild*. It was here she ended her Pacific Crest Trail trek after months of soul-searching.

A diversion from busy Highway 84 onto old Route 30 takes you back in time to covered bridges, tunnels through rocky hillsides and old white picket barriers alongside the extremely narrow roads. It's easy to imagine vintage cars rattling along at a leisurely pace. This is also Oregon's waterfall trail; find the best a short hike from Route 30, including the most heavily photographed – Multnomah Falls, a huge double waterfall.

Three of the gorge's best lookouts fall at the end of the trail. Drive past the weddings and day trippers to the third, a 22km trip to the top of Larch Mountain that makes the gorge look like a splinter in between miles and miles of dense forests and snow-capped mountains from Mount Hood – a mere 35km away – to Mt St Helens in Washington, 160km north.

About half an hour's drive later you find yourself, unbelievably quickly, among the hubbub of afternoon traffic in the city of Portland. Although I love Oregon's quirky capital, I silently wish I had a little longer to linger in its countryside.

Traveller

■ The writer was a guest of Travel Oregon.