

By the Sea

By Carla Caldwell

A family car trip is a great way to explore the Pacific Northwest, California and Alaska. Sure, gas isn't cheap these days, but once you get to your destination, there are plenty of things to do that cost little, if anything.

And the view out the window-and the memories you make-is half the fun.

In addition, the area's history is fascinating with historic sites abound. Experience the famous route taken by Meriwether Lewis and William Clark, who in the early 1800s discovered the United States' first direct route from the Mississippi River to the Pacific Ocean.

Or visit restored historic mining towns that thrived during the Gold Rush in the 1840s. And take some time along the way to get to know your new neighbors. Residents of the Pacific Northwest have the reputation of being fiercely independent, but also friendly.

After all, they come by their independence honestly. Much of the area was carved out of Wild West territory by independent-minded pioneers.

There's so much to see in this part of the country, but for the purpose of this article, we'll stick to California, Oregon, Washington and Alaska. As always, prices quoted are current as of press time. Please contact your place of interest for the most up-to-date pricing and information.

Now, let's start at the bottom - geographically speaking of course.



CALIFORNIA

Wacky? In some cases, yes. And proudly so. After all, many trends start here and eventually spread to the U.S.'s east coast. But all that aside, it's a great place to explore. California is so large and diverse that the state's tourism officials break the state into 12 regions.

To the south - there's the San Diego Region with its famous zoo and gardens.

Driving a little farther north will put you in the Los Angeles Region, and all the glitter of Hollywood and Beverly Hills. And there's the Bay Area Region, famous for San Francisco and its cable cars and Golden Gate Bridge.

For a complete explanation of all 12 regions, plus maps, visit www.visitcalifornia.com.

In the meantime, here are a few highlights:

Los Angeles Region

A must-see is the Los Angeles County area, which includes Hollywood, Beverly Hills, Malibu and Santa Monica.. It's fun to see where all those movies and television movies are filmed and, with little effort, there is a good chance you'll see a celebrity.

The area is also home to Universal Studios. It's expensive, yes, but perhaps worth the trip depending on your family's interests. The park offers everything from behind the scene tours of television and movie sets to theme park rides, shows and restaurants.

Tickets range from \$51 for ages 3-7 to \$61 for ages 8 and up. Visit www.universalstudioshollywood.com for more information.

San Diego Region

The city's world-renown zoo is not the only game in town. Take a flight through history at the San Diego Aerospace Museum. Celebrate aviation and space flight history and see artifacts, enjoy dynamic exhibits, and help commemorate the men and women who forged aerospace history.

For more information, visit www.aerospacemuseum.org.





Gold Country Region

Parents and children alike may also enjoy a trip to California's Gold Country. This famed region extends from the Sierra Nevada foothills in the west, to the mountain of the High Sierra in the east. Take a drive along historic Highway 49, along the Heritage Corridor, for a good look at restored 19th Century mining towns that were at the center of the 1840s gold rush. The Gold Country Visitor's Association promotes 321 miles along Highway 49, where you will find quaint inns, restaurants and antiques shops, along with fishing, whitewater rafting, hiking, biking and the all-important panning for gold. Try your luck—nuggets can still be found. For more information, visit www.calgold.org.

OREGON

OK, yes, it does rain here. But it's usually a drizzle and many locals wouldn't be caught with an umbrella. And the rain is among the reasons the state is so lovely and green, and perfect for all those roses and rhododendrons. Oregon, while lovely, is truly all about outdoor activities.

The Columbia River cuts through Portland—one of the state's largest cities. That makes for picturesque scenery, but the river is also a catalyst for the city's lifestyle—which includes plenty of whitewater rafting, kayaking, swimming, boating, camping and hiking. And ever present in the background is the spectacular Mt. Hood and it's snowy peak, even in summer.

Oregon, like California, is divided into regions, in this case seven, by the state's tourism officials. For more information on each, visit www.traveloregon.com.

Portland Metro Region -

The Oregon Museum of Science and Industry is one of the top science centers in the world. OMSI offers mind-expanding fun for all ages, including live sci-

ence demonstrations and planetarium shows. You also can climb aboard the USS Blueback submarine (featured in the film Hunt for Red October), or experience films in the OMNIMAX Theater. For more information, call 503-797-OMSI (6674) or visit www.omsiedu.

The Portland Children's Museum offers exhibits, art studios and live performances. Make a splash in the better and wetter Water Works. Dig into fun in the Dig Pit. Paint your face, put on a costume and see yourself on TV. Join the construction crew in Building Bridgetown. Role play in the Kid City Market and Cafe. Turn trash into treasures in The Garage. Catch a puppet show or create your own. For more information, call 503-223-6500 or visit www.PortlandChildrensMuseum.org.

Offering a spectacular view of the "City of Roses," the International Rose Test Garden in Washington Park is one of the largest and oldest rose test gardens in the country. The Rose Garden Gift Shop (adjacent to the rose test garden) offers many rose-related items. There are also two other major rose gardens in Portland: Peninsula Park Rose Garden, a formal sunken garden located in North Portland at the intersection of North Ainsworth and Albina; and Ladd's Addition Garden in the historic southeast Portland neighborhood of the same name. For more information, call 503-823-3636 or visit: www.portlandonline.com/parks/fin.

Mt. Hood/The Gorge Region

Drive south of Portland to Oregon City for a look at what the state was like when pioneers reached the end of the Oregon Trail.

Beginning in the 1840s, more than 300,000 dreamers began their Oregon Trail journey, living and writing their stories, one day at a time. Share in these stories with a visit to the dynamic End of the Oregon Trail Interpretive Center, which offers living history presentations. "Bound for Oregon," an experience in digital cinema, exhibits of artifacts and heirlooms from the trail, and pioneer living activities provide a unique and one-of-a-kind experience of the perilous journey. For more information, call 503-657-9336 or visit www.endoftheoregontrail.org/



WASHINGTON

The state's history is fascinating—think pioneers and Indians—and the scenery is majestic from Mt. Rainier to the Columbia River. Families surely will love the state's parks. Here are a few you won't want to miss:

Olympic National Park

Pacific Ocean beaches, rainforest valleys, glacier-capped peaks and a stunning variety of plants and animals are just a few features of this lesser-known national park. Roads provide access to the outer edges of the park, but the heart of Olympic is wilderness; a primeval sanctuary for humans and wild creatures alike. Ninety-five percent of Olympic National Park is Congressionally designated as Wilderness. The park's Web site advises that weather has damaged some roads. It's best to call ahead to check road and weather conditions -360-565-3131. The cost to enter the park is \$5 per individual or \$15 per vehicle for a seven-day pass. Children 15 years old and younger are admitted free. For more information, visit www.nps.gov/olym/.

Mount Rainier National Park

This national park encircles one of the tallest mountain peaks in the United States. Mount Rainier is an active Cascade volcano encased in over 35 square miles of snow and glacial ice. The 14,410-foot mountain is surrounded by lush, old-growth forests, spectacular meadows and a National Historic Landmark District. The entrance fee is \$15 for a private, non-commercial vehicle or \$5 for each visitor 16 and older entering by motorcycle, bicycle, horseback, or on foot. For more information, visit www.nps.gov/mora/.

North Cascades National Park

Jagged peaks, deep valleys, cascading waterfalls and over 300 glaciers adorn the North Cascades National Park Service Complex. Three park units in this mountainous region are managed as one and include North Cascades National Park, Ross Lake, and Lake Chelan National Recreation Areas. These complementary, protected lands are united by a contiguous overlay of Stephen Mather Wilderness. There is no fee to enter the park, but there are fees for some services including camping. For more information, visit www.nps.gov/noca/.

Driving Tours

One of the best ways to explore the state's beauty and rich history is a guided driving tour—but you don't have to make any extra room in your vehicle. Northwest Heritage Resources, a non-profit organization that promotes the state's culture and history,

ALASKA

Our 50th state is also our largest state (656,425 sq miles), and, yet, Alaska is one of our least populated with just less than 650,000 people, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

Due to this state's size and vast areas of wilderness, "flightseeing" is often preferred to the traditional road trip. Throughout the state there are pilots who offer airplane tours with stops in various areas. According to one site promoting the trips, travelers can "Circle majestic Mt. McKinley, land on a glacier and go exploring, access backcountry wilderness, visit a remote village or drift peacefully in a floatplane past bears as they feast on summer salmon." Prices vary. For more information on flightseeing, visit www.TravelAlaska.com.

Some of the natural wonders you will want to see while in Alaska include:

Mount McKinley

Mount McKinley's 20,320-foot peak makes it the tallest mountain in North America. It is located in the Denali National Park and Preserve, which covers 6 million acres and is the largest protected ecosystem in the world, with 750 species of flowering plants, 165 bird species and 10 species of fish. It's not unusual to see caribou, grizzly bears and moose on a trip there. In addition to wildlife viewing, the park is also popular for hiking, camping, rafting, backcountry travel and fishing.

Costs range from \$10 per individual to \$20 per vehicle for a seven-day admittance pass. For more information, visit www.nps.gov/dena/.

Fairbanks

The state's second largest city (Anchorage is the largest), is a popular site to view the aurora borealis, which illuminates the night sky from September until the beginning of April. Fairbanks is home to sled dogs and popular mushing races, including the Yukon Quest International Sled Dog Race, which takes place in February. The Open North American Championship occurs in March, as does the Limited North American Championship, which attracts top sprint mushers from North America and beyond.

Also in March, ice sculptors from all over the world come to compete in the World Ice Art Championships. Teams turn blocks of crystal clear ice, "The Arctic Diamond," into beautiful creations from the traditional to the abstract.

The city celebrates its rich heritage with the World Eskimo-Indian Olympics in July. This traditional com-