



Country Walkers

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Washington: Olympic Peninsula

Walking Vacation Only

Experience the enchanting beauty of the rainforest paired with dramatic ocean vistas and mountain peaks on an Olympic National Park hiking tour that features the best of the West Coast. Trek past giant ferns and moss-covered trees, looking up to marvel at towering Sitka spruces and watching for soaring eagles. Perhaps you'll spot otters by the riverside or a majestic elk in the subalpine meadows. On beaches scattered with driftwood, look towards the ocean where seals bask on distant rocks. Throughout your tour, dine on delicious meals that showcase the region's fresh, organic fare and local wines, and stay in comfortable lodges or cabin-style wilderness accommodations. This hiking tour of Olympic National Park is a chance to immerse yourself in a truly unforgettable landscape.



Cultural Highlights



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- Gain a fascinating perspective on Native American culture as a Quinault elder shares her stories and legends with you over a glass of wine
- Explore the enigmatic Mima Mounds Natural Preserve as your guide shares theories on the creation of this vast prairie of six-foot-high earthen hummocks
- Marvel at majestic Sol Duc Falls, then descend to Sol Duc Hot Spring Resort for a relaxing soak followed by a cold beverage

What to Expect

This tour is one of our Fully-Guided Walking Adventures, rated easy to moderate, with 4 to 9 miles per day. This is one of our easier trips because there are few elevation gains, although two walking options with lovely views do have significant elevation gains (up to 1,550 feet). Some may find the longer options, even though on fairly flat terrain, a challenge due to the distance. We have designed shorter options for this purpose. Walks take place on wooded trails, rocky beaches, and dirt trails that may have loose rocks and exposed roots. Three distinct ecological zones: seacoast, rainforest, and mountains present serene walks, stunning views, and rare wildlife.

Tour Duration: 6 Days

Group size: 16 max

DAY 1: Transfer to Lake Quinault

Your guide(s) will meet you at The Westin Seattle at 8:30 a.m. in the lobby. Your guide(s) will be wearing a Country Walkers shirt. Please be dressed for walking.

From the meeting point in Seattle, you begin a scenic drive, enjoying picturesque views of the Olympics, Mount Rainier, and Seattle's skyline. You soon travel into another landscape altogether; one with majestic forests of Douglas fir, western hemlock, and western red cedar. You stop en route to enjoy a picnic lunch and warm-up walk around the Mima Mounds Natural Preserve, where you explore the enigmatic prairie of six-foot-high mounds that cover the region.

An optional second walk of the day allows you to arrive at the lodge on foot. This walk is your first encounter with the temperate rainforest, and provides an excellent orientation to some features of that habitat as explained by your guide(s). The destination and your home for the next two nights is a stately



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lodge that has been a haven for hikers and fishermen since 1926. The lodge is surrounded by magnificent old-growth forest trails, should you decide to explore a bit before a welcome dinner in the hotel dining room.

Accommodation: Lake Quinault Lodge, Quinault

DAY 2: Graves Creek to Pony Bridge / Quinault Valley

Today's exploration of the temperate rainforest starts with a visit to the world's largest Sitka spruce tree. It has stood guard over the Quinault River for almost 1,000 years and is 58 feet in circumference. From here we drive along the river and past waterfalls and riparian glades until we reach the end of the road at the edge of the vast Olympic wilderness. Our walk is up either the Quinault's East or North Fork (depending on seasonal trail conditions), allowing you to pursue a glimpse of Roosevelt elk or migrating salmon. You ramble through a magnificent forest of giant firs and cedars, passing huckleberry bushes as well as queen's cup and bunchberry dogwood. As you approach Pony Bridge the river plunges through a narrow gorge walled by layers of slate and sandstone. Bring your camera, as you won't want to miss this quintessential rainforest view with its dramatic play of light and cascading water.

You enjoy lunch by the tranquil waters of the river, which are an icy blue from sediment of glacial silt. After lunch, those with more energy can continue farther along the Quinault Valley, marveling at the alder groves along the way.

This evening, before dinner, you meet Harvest Moon—a Quinault elder, story teller, and basket maker. She enthralls us with legends and stories of her culture in front of the lodge's stately fireplace.

Accommodation: Lake Quinault Lodge, Quinault

DAY 3: Sam's River Loop Trail

This morning, you'll depart your lodge and transfer to a trailhead at the Queets River to begin your morning hike along Sam's River Loop Trail. The waters of the Queets River flow from the glaciers of Mt. Olympus, and your trail this morning will follow along the riverside. This hike is a chance to immerse yourself in the enchanting coastal rainforest, one of the only coastal temperate rainforests in the world.



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Other temperate rainforests can be found in Tasmania, Scotland, Japan, and on the Kamchatka Peninsula of Russia. Make your way through a landscape teeming with life – even out of death, massive “nurse” logs of fallen trees serve as starting ground for new seedlings, providing nutrients and moisture to nourish new life as they decay. Keep your eyes open as you make your way across elk pastures, where you might catch a glimpse of these magnificent animals through trees dripping with moss and licorice ferns. Everything grows two to three times faster in the rainforest than on dry land; here, Sitka spruce grow to heights of 300 feet and as wide as 23 feet, and are considerably larger than in their namesake Alaskan home.

After a savory lunch along the Queets River, you transfer to the trailhead at South Beach, where you’ll delight in your first glimpse of the Pacific Ocean on a beach walk. The coast, part of the Olympic National Park, is pristine and virtually undisturbed by humans. You may spot otters, eagles, seals, whales, and even follow deer tracks in the sand. This is also a prime spot for birding—keep an eye out for pelicans, cormorants, and oystercatchers along the way. The trail ends at Kalaloch Lodge, where you can take time to relax or explore the one-mile Kalaloch Lodge Nature Trail before dinner.

Tonight, you are warm and comfortable in newly refurbished log cabins with cozy wood stoves, overlooking the Pacific.

Accommodation: Kalaloch Lodge, Forks

DAY 4: Sol Duc Valley / Lake Crescent

After breakfast overlooking Kalaloch Creek and the beach, you set out on a two-hour scenic drive, passing through the logging town of Forks, recently made notable in the Twilight series of books and films. After following the Sol Duc River through a broad valley, you climb up into the mountains to road’s end and begin your walk through giant western hemlock trees to the iconic Sol Duc Falls. From here you are offered two walking options. The easier option is an enchanted walk down the Lover’s Lane Trail, which brings you to the quaint Sol Duc Hot Spring Resort. Here you have the opportunity to soak in the healing mineral springs, or enjoy a beverage at the outdoor café next to the Sol Duc River (this option is four miles in length). Those looking to challenge themselves with a 1,500-foot climb through changing forest zones, wetland orchids, and stunning views of cascading Canyon Creek will set out for Deer Lake. Upon arrival you take in the majestic beauty of this tranquil jewel nestled below subalpine meadows and high



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ridges.

Afterward you move on to Lake Crescent, carved out of the mountains by glaciers. Over eight miles long and over 600 feet deep, it is one of the largest lakes in the state. Here, you stay at a famous lodge whose past guests included Franklin Roosevelt. Appropriately, he stayed here prior to negotiations which led to the creation of Olympic National Park.

Accommodation: Lake Crescent Lodge, Port Angeles

DAY 5: Hurricane Hill trail

After a brief visit to the National Park Service Visitor Center, you head for Hurricane Ridge for a walk on the Hurricane Hill Trail. Here, you take in the sweeping grandeur of the Olympic Mountain Range to the south, with the San Juan Islands and Vancouver Island to the north. Massive peaks, one after another, form a striking skyline. According to Native American legends, these peaks were once a single, large mountain where the Thunderbird, creator of lightning and thunder, dwelled. En route you stop for a picnic lunch surrounded by subalpine meadows. Because the Olympic Peninsula was isolated by glaciers 10,000 years ago, these meadows were also isolated—they now include endemic species of flora and fauna found nowhere else on earth, such as the Olympic Mountain daisy, Flett's violet, and the Olympic marmot.

This afternoon you proceed to the banks of the Elwha River, which has undergone the largest dam removal project in US history and is being restored to bring back one of the Northwest's most incredible salmon runs. You walk into the former Elwha Dam site, which is being reclaimed by nature and now regularly sees massive king salmon swimming by to their ancient reclaimed spawning grounds upriver. Located mainly in the heart of the Olympic National Park, the river's 45-mile course and 100 miles of tributaries are being revitalized by returning salmon migration, crucial to the Lower Elwha Klallam Tribe and surrounding ecosystems.

After this full day of walking, you begin the return trip to the lodge in anticipation of a hearty farewell meal.

Accommodation: Lake Crescent Lodge, Port Angeles



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DAY 6: Marymere Falls

From Lake Crescent, a final, brief walk to Marymere Falls is a breathtaking farewell. The dramatic 90-foot plunge is named for Mary Alice Barnes, sister of Charles Barnes, a cartographer who produced the first map of the interior of the Olympic Peninsula on the famous yet perilous Seattle Press Expedition of 1889.

You depart for Seattle via the Bainbridge Ferry, stopping en route to enjoy a special lunch provided by your guides.