

Washington: Olympic Peninsula

Tour-Only Itinerary

By the great stone fireplace of your lakeside lodge, Native American storyteller Harvest Moon holds you riveted with tales of the Quinault people. Listening, you realize that each story connects intimately with the land. The very place you've been walking through on this Olympic National Park hiking tour, with its giant cedars and crashing waves, seals and whales, eagles and elk. On the Olympic Peninsula, exuberant nature is alive and well: untamed Pacific coastlines; old-growth rainforests replete with moss; thundering waterfalls, hot springs, and snowcapped peaks. A profusion of untamed landscapes, all made accessible by one of America's oldest walking trail networks. And all made cozy by historic park lodges like this. As Harvest begins a new tale, and another log blazes on the fire, let your roots sink deeper into this fertile land.

Highlights

- 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.

Activity Level

This tour is one of our Guided Walking Adventures, rated easy to moderate, with 4 to 9 miles per day. Considered one of our easier trips, 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.

DAY 1

Travel to Lake Quinault

Mima Mounds; 1.5 miles, easy. Optional afternoon walk to arrive at lodge on foot; 2-3 miles, easy

From the meeting point in Seattle this morning, you begin a scenic drive, admiring 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 the features of this habitat, as explained by your guide(s). The destination, and your home for the next two nights, is a stately lodge that has been a haven for hikers and fishermen since 1926. Magnificent old-growth forest trails surround the lodge should you decide to explore a bit before a welcome dinner in the hotel dining room.

Included Meals: Lunch, Dinner

DAY 2

Graves Creek to Pony Bridge. Quinault Valley

5-8 miles, easy to moderate

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 an astounding 58 feet in circumference. From here, you drive along the river and past waterfalls and riparian glades until reaching the end of the road at the edge of the vast Olympic wilderness. Your walk is up to 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. You won't want to miss your chance to photograph 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 colored 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, storyteller, and basket maker. She enthralls us with legends and stories of her culture in front of the lodge's stately fireplace.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 3

Sam's River Loop Trail. Independent exploration on the Kalaloch Lodge Nature Trail

3 miles, easy. South Beach to Kalaloch Lodge; 3 miles, easy

This morning, depart your lodge and travel to a trailhead at the Queets River to begin your 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 few coastal temperate rainforests in the world. 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 cross 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; here, Sitka spruce grow to a height 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, travel 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 area 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.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 4

Sol Duc Valley. Port Angeles

5-9 miles, easy to moderate

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. Follow the Sol Duc River through a broad valley, 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 more relaxed option is an enchanted walk down the Lover’s Lane Trail, which brings you to the quaint Sol Duc Hot Spring Resort. At the resort, 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 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.

There'll be time to explore on your own this evening, and the choice of dining at the lodge or visiting the nearby town of Port Angeles, with plenty of options for dinner.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

DAY 5

Hurricane Hill Trail

3 miles, easy

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.

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

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 6

Marymere Falls. Departure

2 miles, easy to moderate. Elwha River; 2 to 4 miles, easy

Start your day early with a sunrise walk to the impressive Marymere Falls. 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.

This morning we go to the Elwha River where the largest dam removal in US history took place to restore salmon habitat. Located in the heart of the Olympic National Park, the river's 45-mile course and 100 miles of tributaries are being revitalized by the returning salmon migration, a natural event crucial to the Lower Elwha Klallam Tribe and surrounding ecosystems. We have an easy walk alongside the river on a park road, abandoned after the dam was removed, to a bridge that was washed out from the force and re-channeling of the newly freed river. We see how the river has reclaimed its historic channels and learn about what led to the dam removal, how it was accomplished, and what the status of the restoration is.

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

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

What's Included

Tour Only

Exceptional boutique accommodations

15 on-tour meals: 5 breakfast, 6 lunches, 4 dinners

Local guides with you throughout tour

Local wine and/or beer with dinner

Telescopic walking sticks provided on tour