USA West

Tour : car

19 days • 18 nights • 3100 km

The Pacific Northwest





Starting from **Seattle**, on the **Pacific** coast, a colorful journey between the green of the coastal range mountains and the blue of the ocean and lakes! With **Olympic National Park** and its untouched **rainforests**, **Mt Rainier**, the **Columbia River Gorge**, **Portland**, the **driftwood** beaches on the magnificent, wild coast of **Oregon**, before a detour to the magical **Crater Lake National Park**, then the giant **redwoods** , **Mt Shasta** and all the beauty of Northern **California**'s coastline. Ends in **San Francisco**.



Day 1

Arrival at Seattle Tacoma airport. Pick up your rental vehicle and drive to downtown Seattle.

Enjoy the end of the day strolling around Seattle — a city we really like, where water is everywhere… with Mt. Rainier still looming to the south.

Overnight downtown.



Day 2

Day in Seattle, birthplace of the Grunge movement. Surrounded by water (Puget Sound and Lake Washington), it sits at the heart of a region with three national parks: Olympic to the west, North Cascades to the northeast, and Mt Rainier to the southeast.

Seattle is built on hills, like San Francisco. Beyond its green outer neighborhoods (University District, Capitol Hill, Queen Anne with its Victorian-style homes…), downtown also has plenty to offer: Pike Place Market, the aquarium, and the famous Space Needle, which provides sweeping views over the whole region.

On site, don’t miss the Chihuly Garden & Glass Museum, a real favorite,

with wonderful glass sculptures.

Nearby, we also recommend the surprising Museum of Pop Culture (MoPOP).

Overnight in Seattle.



Day 3

Short ferry crossing from Seattle to Bainbridge Island. Stop in Poulsbo, a small coastal town nicknamed “Little Norway”. For good reason: it was built by Scandinavian pioneers from the Midwest, who followed the Native American Suquamish Nation. Its waterfront is nice.

The route follows the Hood Canal, then crosses it via the large floating bridge, and makes a small detour to Port Townsend, another typical Washington harbor town, with brick façades along Water St.

Continue to Port Angeles (ferries to Vancouver Island in Canada depart from here).

You can drive up to Hurricane Ridge at 1,598 m via a lovely road (closed in winter). The panorama over Olympic National Park is superb, and there is a visitor center at the top.

Overnight near Port Angeles, at Lake Crescent or nearby.



Day 4

Head to the southern part of Olympic National Park. The road that follows the Hoh River leads to the entrance of the enchanting Hoh Rain Forest, the only rainforest of this kind still existing in the United States. Its vegetation is extremely dense (it rains nearly 4 m per year here).

Famous for its ferns and exceptional mosses, it protects rich flora and fauna, with centuries-old fir trees, red cedars and hemlocks. Elk, marmots and bears are among its residents.

Farther south, the Pacific coast is breathtakingly wild: vast beaches dotted with thousands of rocky islets and driftwood as far as the eye can see. A fragile refuge for seals, otters, whales and seabirds offshore. Ruby Beach and Kalaloch Beach are the finest examples. Several villages line the coast, home to the First Nations, who have lived here for millennia.

Overnight in Kalaloch or at Lake Quinault.



Day 5

Head to another exceptional site: Mount Rainier National Park. The route deliberately avoids the fairly dense area between Olympia and Tacoma, skirting it to the south via Aberdeen (a rather gloomy industrial town proud of being Kurt Cobain's birthplace).

While Mt Rainier National Park is a feast for the eyes, its main resident remains a concern: the volcano is considered the most dangerous in the country!

It gets crowded in summer, as it's a pilgrimage site for Seattle residents and the whole region.

After Ashford and Longmire, the road reaches Paradise, high in the park. There are great walks in Paradise Valley, pretty waterfalls (Narada, Ruby) and superb viewpoints! A bit lower, the waters of Reflection Lake mirror Mt Rainier.

Overnight in the park or nearby.



Day 6

Early departure recommended. The route follows some lovely mountain roads, including Stevens Canyon Road. Farther south rises famous Mount St. Helens, a stratovolcano of the Cascade Range (like Mt Rainier), whose last major eruption in 1980 caused the death of 57 people.

Then reach the Columbia River and follow it west via the Historic Columbia River Highway to admire the magnificent Columbia River Gorge, a World Heritage–listed area. Splendid viewpoints and impressive waterfalls, such as Multnomah Falls, dot the route.

Arrival in Portland, Oregon's main city — one we really like.

Overnight in the city.

Note: you can add a second night in Portland to enjoy the city and its surroundings (the Willamette Valley vineyards, etc.).



Day 7

Head to Astoria, at the mouth of the Columbia River. It was here, in 1805, that explorers Lewis and Clark emerged at the end of their journey to the West. Take a short walk along the Riverwalk and enjoy excellent seafood — from ocean to plate.

The impressive Astoria–Megler Bridge (6.5 km long) marks the border between Oregon and Washington. One option is to cross it to reach Cape Disappointment.

At the far end, a short walk lets you admire a beautiful little cove, then continue to the North Head Lighthouse and immerse yourself in the Lewis & Clark odyssey through the excellent Interpretation Center exhibition.

Back to Astoria, then a detour via Ecola State Park for stunning views, notably over the Tillamook Rock Lighthouse.

Overnight in Cannon Beach (subject to availability, as it is very popular) or nearby.



Day 8

A relaxing day to enjoy this pleasant seaside town, its beaches and surroundings. You can go up to Ecola State Park, a short drive north: the walks and views are magnificent! We'll also give you the address of an excellent wine shop — the owner is also a local winegrower nearby…

Overnight in Cannon Beach (subject to availability, as it is very popular) or nearby.



Day 9

A full day along the Pacific. After beautiful Manzanita Beach, followed by a few other seaside resorts (Rockaway Beach…), the route passes through Tillamook, known for its interesting naval aviation museum and for its… cheese factory.

Drive the very scenic Three Capes Loop, a winding coastal road of about 50 km connecting the three capes of Meares, Lookout and Kiwanda. The landscapes and viewpoints are absolutely worth it!

After Proposal Rock and the magnificent Neskowin Beach, you reach Lincoln City and then Depoe Bay.

At the end of the bucolic Otter Crest Loop, the Devils Punchbowl Arch is a giant "punch bowl" where waves crash in spectacular fashion.

Don't miss the short walk to the Yaquina Head Lighthouse, before a small detour through historic downtown Newport, on Yaquina Bay.

Overnight in Yachats or nearby.



Day 10

Head south via the very photogenic Heceta Head Lighthouse, which you will reach after a short walk.

The view over Cape Cove and the ocean is magnificent!

A bit farther on, you can go and see the sea lions at the Sea Lion Caves, a gigantic sea cave (paid entrance).

After Florence and its nice little waterfront, you leave the coast — only to come back to it later — and drive toward one of Oregon's gems: Crater Lake National Park.

It is the deepest lake in the United States, at 592 m.

This absolutely unique and magical site was born from the collapse, 6,000 years ago, of Mount Mazama, which then rose to 3,650 m.

Overnight in the park (subject to availability) or nearby (Prospect or farther south toward Upper Klamath Lake).



Day 11

Spend the day discovering the magnificent and haunting Crater Lake National Park.

The lake's waters are so pure and clear that you can see up to 30 m deep with the naked eye!

On the western side rises a cone-shaped volcanic island, whose summit is almost always snow-covered: Wizard Island. The scene is simply magical.

The park's pine forests shelter abundant wildlife: bears, elk, coyotes… It's naturally a hiker's paradise.

The must-do is to drive the 53 km Rim Drive, which circles the lake (summer only). Boat tours are currently suspended due to reconstruction work on the dock, planned until at least the end of 2026.

Overnight in the park (subject to availability) or nearby (Prospect or farther south toward Upper Klamath Lake).

Day 12

After Fort Klamath and refreshing Upper Klamath Lake, you enter



California. This is a fairly mountainous region — still within the Cascade Range.

Before reaching Mt Shasta (4,322 m), the route offers a wonderful detour to Lake Britton. This is where you'll find one of Northern California's hidden gems: the fabulous McArthur–Burney Falls, little known because of their remote location.

It's neither Iguaçu nor Niagara, but what a surprise. Walk down to the base of the falls: first to feel the refreshing breeze (and, if you're not cold-sensitive, try a quick dip…), then to stroll the trail that circles the site. Pure joy!

Then continue to Mt Shasta.

Overnight in Mt Shasta (or in the very cute village of McCloud).



Day 13

The first part of the route winds along a small green mountain road, with, among others, Mt Eddy (2,754 m).

A few beautiful views toward the summit, and very few people to enjoy them. We like the hike to the Deadfall Lakes.

Follow the twisting Trinity Lake (with some great picnic spots) before reaching Weaverville, in the "Trinity Alps".

It's a small town born of the California Gold Rush in the 19th century.

The town once had some 2,000 gold prospectors from China! Its porch-lined Main Street is very charming.

Follow the Trinity River, pass through Willow Creek, then gradually reach Arcata and Eureka on the Pacific.

Overnight in Arcata or Eureka.



Day 14

Drive the beautiful "Avenue of the Giants", a narrow road lined with redwoods in the heart of Humboldt Redwoods State Park, famous for its immense redwood forest. It's magical!

You can even drive through the hollowed-out trunk of the "Chandelier Tree" — a fun experience, though touristy.

Highway 101 runs near the Lost Coast, one of the wildest and hardest-to-

access areas of the northern California coast. It’s a paradise for hikers. At its southern end, you can detour to Shelter Cove, with a few (expensive) hotels and a small airport for a lucky few.

Coastal Highway 1 follows the ocean to Fort Bragg, then passes Point Cabrillo Lighthouse, which houses a small, interesting museum. Arrival in Mendocino, a charming town popular with Californians (and others) in good weather.

Overnight in Mendocino or nearby.



Day 15

Besides browsing boutiques and art galleries, you can walk through Mendocino Headlands State Park, along the Big River.

After the beautiful, wide Irish Beach, make a small detour to the viewpoint of Rocas and to the Point Arena Lighthouse. You’ll enjoy lovely views over the coast and the ocean. This is where the famous San Andreas Fault reaches the ocean.

After Salt Point and its pretty coves, stop at Fort Ross, a former Russian fort established in 1812 by the Russian-American Company. Its wooden architecture — especially the Orthodox chapel — is surprising in this setting. Many place names reflect the Russian presence, starting with the Russian River, which flows toward the nearby vineyards of Sonoma Valley.

Arrival in Bodega Bay.

Note: you can add a second night in Bodega Bay to enjoy the beautiful coastline and Sonoma vineyards.



Day 16

Charming villages follow one another along this wild coastline. South of Bodega Bay, drive along beautiful, rugged Tomales Bay, with a bit of a Scottish feel (the main town on the southern side is even called Inverness).

The route includes a wonderful detour to the Point Reyes Lighthouse, in the heart of Point Reyes National Seashore. The viewpoints are superb and, with a bit of luck, you may spot elephant seals… and maybe whales in season.

Before crossing the famous Golden Gate Bridge, the road winds and climbs to Muir Woods National Monument, home to a forest of redwoods and red cedars, less than 20 km from San Francisco. A stop in Sausalito,

a cozy seaside town north of the San Francisco Bay, is recommended — go see the famous “houseboats”.

Arrival in San Francisco. Return your rental car at the airport (or the next morning) and take a private shuttle to your hotel (included). Overnight in San Francisco.



Day 17

Consider an excursion to Alcatraz (“The Rock”), which in its last life — until 1963 — was the famous prison made legendary by inmates such as Al Capone.

On the west side, toward the Pacific, wander through vast Golden Gate Park on foot, by bike or on rollerblades: visit the “Conservatory of Flowers”, have tea at the “Japanese Tea Garden”, or explore the California Academy of Sciences, a tropical-forest bubble that hosts nearly 40,000 animals.

Hop on a “cable car” and explore Nob Hill, Russian Hill, Pacific Heights or Telegraph Hill with its Coit Tower. If the twists of Lombard Street didn’t make you dizzy, continue to Fisherman’s Wharf and Pier 39, lined with shops and restaurants — and don’t miss the sea lions putting on a show near the docks.

Nearby you’ll also find the USS Pampanito submarine, now a museum.

Overnight in San Francisco.



Day 18

South of the famous colorful houses of Alamo Square (the “Painted Ladies”), Haight-Ashbury was once a major hub of the Hippie era.

Nearby, we really like the Mission District and Castro neighborhoods. Relax on the lawns of Dolores Park, a must, with a great view over the San Francisco skyline.

If San Francisco’s streets haven’t worn you out yet, stroll through Chinatown, the largest Asian community in the United States, then Union Square, the heart of the city. Most museums are in the area, including the excellent San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA).

If the bridge is calling you, rent a bike at Fisherman’s Wharf and cross the Golden Gate to Sausalito (one lane is reserved for pedestrians and bicycles). You can return by ferry, with your bike.

Overnight in San Francisco.



Day 19

Depending on your return flight time, transfer by private shuttle from your hotel to San Francisco airport (included).

Return flights to Europe (1 stop).

Arrival the next day.

Extension in San Francisco or itinerary adjustments: contact us

Accommodation