



## Monster Itinerary

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# Olympic National Park

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Pick and choose from the itinerary below to create an unforgettable family vacation.

### **Table of Contents**

- Day One:** Aberdeen/Star Wars Store; Ocean Shores; Rainforests  
**Day Two:** Rialto Beach; Go Fishing; Visit Forks, Home of Twilight  
**Day Three:** Lake Ozette; Neah Bay; Beach Combing and Tidepools  
**Day Four:** Lake Crescent; Marymere Falls; Sol Duc Hot Springs  
**Day Five:** Hurricane Ridge; Dungeness Spit; Olympic Game Farm  
**Day Six+:** Ferry to Victoria, B.C.; Whale Watching Trip; Lake Cushman and Staircase; Hiking Hamma Hamma, Dosewallups and Quilcene

**Wildlife**

**Accommodations**

**Gas and Food**

**Best Times to Go**

Olympic National Park in Washington State is not only one of the largest national parks in the U.S.A., it's also one of our favorites for the whole family. It's a place that can entertain small kids as well as offer challenges and adventures for older kids. Hike, play on the beach, sled in the snow, see wildlife, catch a fish, find sea stars, hug a tree...it's all here. Olympic National Park was created by President Teddy Roosevelt to protect the elk he wanted to hunt, but it offers much more for the rest of us.

Highway 101 circumscribes Olympic National Park and lets you enter the park at various points, so this is a road trip kind of vacation. This Travel With Monsters itinerary, which covers our favorite things to do along this route, starts at the southwest corner of the Peninsula.

If you break the loop into sections, there is an opportunity to explore and experience several spots each day. The loop is over 300 miles, but in many places the scenic and serpentine road can slow to 30-40 mph, lengthening drive times. It's worth the time: no other road trip in America gives a carload of monsters the chance to see the crashing waves of the Pacific Ocean, the scenic beauty of the deep water Lake Crescent, the snow-capped mountains of the Olympic Mountains, the inland sea of Puget Sound and Hood Canal, and the trees of the rainforest. So. Many. Trees.

## **Day One (Stay around Ocean Shores)**

**Visit the world's best Star Wars store.** When you start your adventure at the south end of the Olympic Peninsula, you'll have to first drive through Aberdeen. This is the birthplace of Kurt Cobain, but the best part about this town is Sucher and Sons Star Wars Shop. If anyone in your car is obsessed with Star Wars, then a quick stop here is a must. Right after entering town you'll cross the bridge, and the shop is on the left next to Selmer's Furniture Store. The friendly owner will help find you what you are looking for and make sure the kids leave with smiles on their faces.

**Hike into a rainforest.** The rainforests of the Olympic National Park are epic in their size, depth and moss-draped green awesomeness. Even if it is raining, you won't get too wet, as the canopy above provides significant shelter. There are actually multiple rainforests to explore, but our three favorites are: the Quinault, which has a variety of great hikes for the younger ones, the Queets, which is best for older kids because of the necessary river fording, and the Hoh, which is probably the most scenic of all. There are ranger stations near the entrance to all these trails. Pick up a map and determine which specific hike will suit your family.

**Play at Ocean Shores.** Whether you buy kites, play on the dunes or in the surf, eat taffy, race go-karts, or visit the many tourist shops, Ocean Shores is a great place to thin your wallet and keep little monsters happy when they tire of hiking. Ocean Shores has great wide, sandy beaches, but you will have to take a detour to the west of 101 to get there. This little beach town has everything you need, from great mom-and-pop fish n' chips stands to places to stay for the night; it also has the only supermarket for miles around. For food, we like Moby Dick (fast food, 788 Point Brown Avenue NE, Ocean Shores) and Bennett's Fish Shack (seafood, 105 W Chance A La Mer NE, Ocean Shores). The Pacific Paradise Fun Center is great for bumper boats and mini-golf.

**Fun Road Trip Distraction:** Count the number of wooden Sasquatches (or other Bigfoot-related signs or businesses) along the road. If the kids are older, start a philosophical discussion about the likelihood of an eight-foot ape roaming the seemingly boundless forest just beyond the road.

**Great Stop:** Scoops Ice Cream (123 W Heron Street) in Aberdeen.

## **Day Two (Stay around Forks)**

**Play on Rialto Beach.** There are many great beaches on the Olympic Peninsula, but one of the best is Rialto Beach, west of Forks. This gorgeous pebbled beach is part of the national park and features a maze of ancient driftwood trees that make for hours of fun for the kids (and great photos). The adjoining forest and river are good for day hikes, too.

**Go fishing on the beach, in a river, or on a boat.** There is no shortage of fishing opportunities around here: catch salmon and trout in the rivers, surfperch in the surf, or salmon, bottomfish, or tuna from charter boats. Do-it-yourselfers can easily keep the kids entertained with a decent casting rod, a little weight, and a small hook loaded with Berkeley Gulp sandworms — with this setup we frequently catch tasty redbtail surfperch. River fishing can give you opportunities at steelhead and cutthroat trout almost every day of the year and salmon are available from July to November, depending on the run and river. River fishing can be great for kids but dangerous, too, so plan accordingly depending on river conditions. There are a number of guides working the rivers; for around \$400 you can have a great trip and bring home some protein. There are also charter boats out of Westport, La Push, and Neah Bay that can take you out for salmon or bottomfish for around \$100-\$150 per person.

**Revisit Twilight.** Do people still care about those movies and books? Twilight was set in and around Forks and La Push, so if someone in your car still holds a candle for Edward, they will be thrilled to explore this area. Plenty of shops in Forks still cater to those seeking to connect with vampire lore.

**Road Trip Distraction:** Hey, kids, what's with those tsunami signs? What's a tsunami? Are we on high enough ground to escape a tsunami? When was the last tsunami? Miles and miles of freaking out the kids awaits...

**Great stop:** Stop at any one of the turnouts along 101 to either see a REALLY big tree (look for signs that say "the largest...") or the Pacific Ocean. Have the kids turn off the screens and stretch their legs for a minute.

### **Day Three (Stay in Ozette, Neah Bay, or Sekiu)**

This is the one day on this itinerary that takes you off the 101 loop. Lake Ozette is one of the most remote areas of Olympic National Park. Take Highway 113 off of Highway 101, which then turns into Highway 112 as it heads northwest to Sekiu.

**Lake Ozette.** At Lake Ozette, there is a great boardwalk and trail out to the ocean, which is level and great for monsters of all ages. It will take you through dark and awesome woods and then spit you out on a rocky beach with great vistas. On the beach, there are dozens of Native American petroglyphs between Cape Alvara and Sand Point.

**Neah Bay.** From here, you can go to the northwestern-most tip of the continental United States, explore the Makah Indian Reservation and their historical museum, or take a charter boat out fishing.

**Beachcombing and tide pools.** Some of the best tidepools in the state exist on a low tide on the beaches between Sekiu and Neah Bay and then again on the coastal side south of Neah Bay. At low tide, you can find starfish and sea urchins, crabs, and small fish. Bring a butterfly net and let the kids explore.

**Road trip distraction:** The Makahs harpooned and harvested a whale in 1999. Ask the kids if they would eat a whale. What other animals would they eat? What other animals might you force them to eat if they don't stop bickering in the backseat? It might make for some good threats at this point in the road trip. This distraction does not apply if your family is vegan or vegetarian.

**Great Stop:** Cape Flattery Trail. You have come this far, so you may as well walk out to the northwestern-most tip of the continental United States.

## **Day Four (Stay in Port Angeles or in Olympic National Park)**

The stretch from Forks to Port Angeles runs over rivers and through forests and hugs one of the great scenic lakes in America: Crescent Lake. Stop for an hour or two at the following spots as you wind your way along 101.

**Lake Crescent.** An amazingly cold and clear lake, Lake Crescent offers a spot to camp, swim, rent a boat, or just enjoy the beauty of a valley caused by receding glaciers 10,000 years ago. There are three main visitor areas, but it's the Lake Crescent Lodge that offers paddle board and kayak rentals along with boat tours.

**Marymere Falls.** One of the best family hikes in the Olympic National Park is Marymere Falls. A level 0.8-mile hike from the Storm King Visitor Center on Lake Crescent, the trail cuts through a mossy forest and along a creek to the waterfall. It's perfect for young families; our babies' first hikes were here. Don't miss it.

**Sol Duc Hot Springs.** Sol Duc features great hiking trails as well as hot springs, with two hot mineral pools to enjoy. The six-mile Lover's Lane loop that leads up to the Seven Lakes basin is one of the best hikes in the whole park.

**Road Trip Distraction:** Did you know that almost all national parks have a Junior Ranger Program? It's full of fun, educational activities, and upon completing it kids get badges! (I don't know about yours, but our kids will do anything for a badge.) Stop at one of the visitor stations and sign your kids up for the program.

**Great Stop:** Sol Duc Fish Hatchery. Just off 101, 12 miles from Forks, there is a small interpretive center that shows the different kinds of salmon found in the Sol Duc River (hint: it's a rare river that has every kind of Pacific salmon). You can also walk out to the adult holding pond and see about-to-spawn salmon and steelhead during the right times of year.

## **Day Five (Stay in Port Angeles or Sequim)**

**Hurricane Ridge.** Whether you take a short hike or just enjoy the view from the Visitor Center, on a clear day the views from Hurricane Ridge cannot be beat. Want to see deer from three feet away? The rather tame deer here are numerous. Want to see a bear in the wild? You can often find black bears grazing in the little valleys down below the ridge on grubs and grass. The best part about Hurricane Ridge is its versatility: you can go on a very short hike or as long and strenuous as your monsters can handle.

**Dungeness Spit.** The Dungeness National Wildlife Refuge is located on a 6.8-mile-long spit that makes a great hike. The trail starts in the forest and ends up along a great beach perfect for little monsters to explore.

**Olympic Game Park.** Hokey? Yes. Able to make kids scream in joy and fathers panic about the car's paint job? Absolutely. The Olympic Game Park is a privately run drive-through wildlife park that lets you feed the park's animals bread through your car windows. If you have ever longed to have a giant yak stick his head in your window looking for food, this is the place. On a road trip of magnificent vistas and abundant wild fauna, this zoo will probably be the highlight of the trip for the kids. Bring wipes. Bring lots of wipes.

**Road Trip Distraction:** If you have a marine or fish lover in the bunch, the Feiro Marine Life Center in Port Angeles is a good spot for an hour or two.

**Great Stop:** Frugal Burgers in Port Angeles. Simply the best drive-thru on Highway 101.

## **Day Six and Beyond**

**Whale Watching Trip.** There are lots of whale watching boats that leave from Port Angeles. You can skip this if you are taking a boat out fishing or a ferry; whales can often be spotted during those activities, too.

**Ferry to Victoria.** Considering a side trip to Canada? Yes, do it! Victoria is a great city to explore. Buy the kids some European chocolate and enjoy the architecture and museums. Take the ferry from Port Angeles (you can either drive on or walk on) and disembark in another country. Just don't forget your passports.

**Lake Cushman and Staircase.** There is a great family-friendly trail at Staircase that ends in an awesome over-the-river bridge that kids will love. It's another great Olympic National Park trail that allows the family to get close to nature. Lake Cushman is also a great underrated lake to fish, especially for tasty kokanee.

**Hamma Hamma, Dosewallups, and Quilcene.** Each of these little rivers has a trail and campgrounds. There are fewer crowds here, as they are more remote on the southwest side of Olympic National Park. This is a great place to hike, and the weather can sometimes be better as the mountains offer a bit of a rain shadow.

**Road Trip Distraction:** Animal bingo could be fun both on the road and on hiking trails. Include elk, deer, salmon, raccoons, black bears, ants, eagles, hawks and every day dogs on your bingo boards.

**Great Stop:** At this point, some parents may be in desperate need of a strong drink. Hoodspout Winery is right on Highway 101 in Hoodspout. Leave the kids in the car with the other parent and run in for a sample.

## **Know Before You Go**

**Wildlife to see:** Second only to Yellowstone, Olympic National Park offers a great chance to see elk and blacktail deer throughout the park. The best place to see elk is probably the Hoh river valley, but you can try and spy them in meadows anywhere along the road during your drive. There are also lots of black bears, but if you spot them from a trail most likely you will only see them from a distance, grazing on grass (don't worry, the last person killed by a bear in Washington State was in 1974). Whales, seals, and dolphins can sometimes be seen from land, but are best encountered in a boat. There are lots of birds and invertebrates to be seen along the coast as well as fish, otters, and beavers in the rivers. Butterflies, frogs, salamanders, and bugs are around for kids to catch. We recommend traveling with a butterfly net!

**Accommodations:** At the height of summer and during weekends in the fall, it is important to make reservations as hotels and campgrounds fill up quickly. There are very few chain hotels along the way, and most of the accommodations are dated, so don't expect luxury on this trip. Hotels are far more affordable than in Seattle, however, and VRBO and Airbnb are worth looking at too.

**Gas, food, and other necessities:** The entire Olympic Peninsula is rural. The main grocery stores and medical facilities are in Aberdeen, Forks, and Port Angeles; otherwise it's slim pickings. There is a gas station every 50 miles or so. Check the gauge before leaving civilization. Cell phone coverage can be spotty in parts.

**Best time of year:** Each season offers something for the curious traveler, but June through September is the best time for families and the least rainy. Olympic National Park has some of the highest precipitation totals in the world. Due to the marine flow, it never gets very hot; if your last packing decision is another tank top or a sweatshirt, pack the hoodie. In fact, just bring a rain jacket. Even in August. You'll thank us.