

Roberta Richards

Experience Portland

Parks, hikes, and day trips

The London magazine *Monocle* listed Portland, Oregon, as one of the top 25 cities where citizens of the world might want to live, the only U.S. city to make the list. Portland received this accolade in part because of the residents' "vigorous lifestyles (one could theoretically ski and surf on the same day)." While you won't often see a surfboard and skis in our Subarus at the same time, it is true that Portlanders love to be outside. Raining or not, Oregon's verdant landscape and dramatic geography create outdoor areas begging to be explored. All that moisture has a silver lining: lush gardens and forests, sparkling streams and rivers, and the snow-capped Cascade mountains as a backdrop. Visitors to Oregon are invited to bring a raincoat and explore the outdoors.



Mt. Tabor Park, with downtown Portland in the background. Photo credit: dolanh, <https://flic.kr/p/aoRnvB>

Portland parks

Parks small and large dot the Portland map (www.portlandoregon.gov/parks), perhaps another reason a Londoner might feel at home. The closest greenspace to the Oregon

Convention Center is **Holladay Park**, just a few blocks (or two short stops on Max Light Rail) to the east, a pleasant place to grab a breath of fresh air. Some impressive parks on the east side of Portland include **Laurelhurst Park** (accessible from #14 and #20 TriMet bus lines), with lovely meadows and a picturesque pond with a small island refuge for

local wildlife. **Overlook Park** (accessible from MAX Yellow Line) is on a bluff overlooking Portland's downtown and West Hills areas.

Mt. Tabor Park (ac-

cessible from the #15 TriMet bus line) is on the site of an extinct volcano, the caldera of which is now an amphitheater for free summer concerts and plays. With its acres of hiking and biking trails, open-water reservoirs, fabulous views of downtown Portland at sunset, and eclectic denizens, who make all sorts of cre-

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ative uses of the space, Mt. Tabor is regularly voted Portland's most popular park.

Downtown Portland on the west side of the Willamette (pronounced will-AM-it) River is scattered with parks. **Waterfront Park** offers a long stretch of greenspace along the Willamette, with great views of the city's many bridges. Your downtown Portland map (www.travelportland.com/plan-your-trip/maps-of-portland/; <http://portlandmap.com/>) will guide you to other urban respites, including **Director Park, Keller Fountain Park, Terry Schrunk Plaza,** and

Chapman and **Lowndale Squares. Mill Ends Park**, which made the record books as the world's smallest park with a diameter of about two feet, is a whimsical part of downtown Portland that often attracts guerilla decoration. **North** and **South Park Blocks**, which run a combined 12 blocks between 8th and 9th Avenues, provide a tree-lined entrance to a number of cultural institutions, including Portland State University and the Portland Art Museum. In the Pearl District immediately north of downtown, home to the legendary Powells Bookstore, **Jamison Square** and **Tanner Springs Parks** are splendid public spaces where families and hipsters rub shoulders.



Eastbank Esplanade, part of a three-mile loop trail. Photo credit: Alan P. Scott.



Tanner Springs Park. Photo credit: Graham Ballantyne, <https://flic.kr/p/adsLbM>

Portland hikes

Would you like to stretch your legs without getting your feet muddy? The **Eastbank Esplanade-Tom McCall Waterfront Park Loop** trail (less than three miles, all paved) runs along both sides of the Willamette River, crossing on the Steel Bridge to the north and Hawthorne Bridge to the south ([http://rideoregonride.com/road-routes/waterfront-](http://rideoregonride.com/road-routes/waterfront-park-eastbank-esplanade-loop/)

[park-eastbank-esplanade-loop/](http://rideoregonride.com/road-routes/waterfront-park-eastbank-esplanade-loop/)). You can start the loop at any point, although it is easier to navigate your way to the river from the downtown side. In this urban river

walk, you'll encounter the many faces of Portland, including a chic dining and shopping area, a small marina, and scores of bicyclists. On the west (downtown) side, be sure to enjoy the Salmon Street Springs Fountain, which varies its intensity based on the time of day, and to admire the skateboarders under the Burnside Bridge. On the east side, you can take one of the ramps down to the boat docks right on the water. On either side, you may encounter a few colorful characters straight out of Portlandia.

If you don't mind a little mud, try out the multi-modal **4T (Train, Trail, Tram and Trolley)** hike, a unique way to experience the diversity of Portland's urban and natural

landscape (<http://4ttrail.wordpress.com/>). From downtown or the Convention Center, your first T is the Train—take Max Light Rail to Washington Park Station. After exploring the subterranean station, take the elevator 260 feet to ground level and then pick up the well-marked Trail. You have your choice of a 3.5 mile urban trail or a 4.1 mile forest trail, both of which climb to **Council Crest Park**, Portland's highest point with fabulous vistas. Both trails next



Columbia River Gorge. Photo credit: Alan P. Scott.

lead you to “Pill Hill” on the campus of Oregon Health & Science University for your next T, the iconic Portland Aerial Tram, which will whisk you 3,300 linear feet downhill in 3 minutes, with panoramic views of the city and the Cascade mountains. From the bottom of the hill pick up your final T, the Portland Trolley, back to the heart of downtown.

You can also skip all the T's and just walk around **Washington Park**, the crown jewel of Portland parks (<http://washingtonparkpd.org/>). This 410-acre park is home to the Oregon Zoo, the Japanese Garden, the International Rose Test Garden, Portland Children's Museum, World Forestry Center, Oregon Holocaust Memorial, Hoyt Arboretum, one of Portland's best playgrounds, and miles of lovely hiking trails. On clear days, the view from the Rose Garden of downtown Portland with Mt. Hood

in the background is unparalleled. On any sort of day, Hoyt Arboretum provides 187 ridge-top acres of well-maintained hiking trails and more than 1,400 species of trees in a setting of serene beauty. (A tip for spring hiking in Portland: be prepared for muddy trails and a persistent misty drizzle, but the lush for-

est canopy keeps out much of the rain.)

For a wilder hiking experience, visit **Forest Park** (accessible from the #15 Montgomery Park TriMet bus

line), the largest urban forest in the United States (www.forestparkconservancy.org/forest-park/). This so-called urban wilderness allows you to experience old-



Oregon trails. Photo credit Alan P. Scott

growth trees and rigorous northwest forest hiking without leaving the city limits. Forest Park spans more than eight miles of hillside overlooking Northwest Portland and the Willamette River, and includes more than 80 miles of soft-surface trails and forest roads for heart-thumping exercise in a deep forest setting.

You can access these trails at multiple locations, including the Audubon Society's beautiful **Nature Sanctuary**.

One of the access points to Forest Park, **Macleay Park**, is just beyond downtown Portland's tony Pearl District, so you can enjoy some genuine forest hiking and some world-class cuisine in the same outing.

Day trips from Portland

To get a more complete taste of Oregon's beauty, stick around a couple of days for some unforgettable day trips. The **Columbia River Gorge**, just 20 miles east of Portland on I-84, is awesome in every sense of the word. Created by the cataclysmic Missoula floods 15,000 years ago, the Columbia River Gorge is now home to dramatic landscapes, panoramic vistas, and the tallest waterfalls anywhere in the United States outside of Yosemite (www.historichthedalles.org/columbia_gorge_waterfalls.htm). Many of the waterfalls are visible right from the parking lots, and a bit of hiking will reveal new perspectives and some hidden gems. There are hikes in the Gorge for all levels of adventurers, including some intense climbs that will literally and figuratively take your breath away. Keep an eye on the ground also, as you will see banana slugs the size of a child's foot on the hiking trails.

If giant slugs and strenuous hikes don't thrill you, skip the trails and enjoy some ice cream or a cappuccino along with magnificent views at the historic **Multnomah Falls Lodge**. In springtime the falling water is thunderous. If you enjoy scenic drives, make your visit to Multnomah Falls part of



Multnomah Falls. Photo credit Julius Reque, <https://flic.kr/p/5BAuJQ>



Cannon Beach. Photo credit: John Fowler, <https://flic.kr/p/8izzVM>

the 146-mile **Columbia River Highway-Mt. Hood loop** (www.columbiariverhighway.com/Mt_Hood_Loop.pdf). Start your travels by picking up the historic Columbia River

Gorge Highway at exit 17 off I-84. As you drive east you will enjoy breathtaking vistas, scores of waterfalls, quaint towns, WPA-era structures, Bonneville Dam, and more. At the scenic town of Hood River—home to world-renowned fruit orchards, windsurfers, and Full Sail Brewery—head south along Route 35 to drive along the eastern flank of the 11,235-foot Mt. Hood, Oregon's highest peak. Be sure to stop at the historic Timberline Lodge, where spring skiing (depending on weather) may be in full gear. Leave yourself time to take plenty

of pictures and sustain yourself with huckleberry pie and other local treats for the drive back to Portland.

Got another day in Oregon? Head to the coast. Most Oregonians don't say they are going to the "beach," which would imply sunbathing or playing in the warm surf the way they do in southern California.

Oregonians go to the "coast" to enjoy views of the rugged coastline, walks along misty beaches, colorful tidepools, thriving artists' colonies, and friendly coffee houses, restau-

rants and brewpubs to warm their spirits on a drizzly day. The northernmost Oregon coastal town is **Astoria** (www.astoriaoregon.com/), which fans of *The Goonies* (filmed there in the 1980s) will recognize. Visitors to Astoria can revel in local history (including Ft. Clatsop, where the Lewis and Clark expedition spent a soggy winter, and many well-preserved relics of the area's maritime and military history), shop and dine in the charming downtown area, enjoy local color at Fort George Brewery, and marvel at the expanse of rolling water where the Columbia River meets the Pacific Ocean.

Every Portlander has a favorite place on the Oregon coast, and there are plenty of gems within 100 miles or so of Portland. The fastest way to the ocean from Portland is to drive about 80 miles along Highway

26 to a little town called **Seaside**, the closest thing Oregon has to a honkytonk beach town, with taffy stands and bumper cars. Head south another nine miles to **Cannon Beach**, a picturesque haven for artists and nature lovers, and the location of the photogenic **Haystack Rock**. Other treasures on the northern Oregon coast include the towns of Manzanita and Rockaway Beach, the Tillamook Cheese Factory, and the panoramic Three Capes (Lookout, Meares, and Kiwanda) Drive. If you're looking for more than just a stroll along the beach, the northern coast also offers many wonderful trails for hikers of all levels (www.portlandhikersfieldguide.org/wiki/Oregon_Coast_Hikes).

Got a few more days? Head south a bit to the rolling hills and picturesque vineyards

of the Willamette Valley (<http://wvv.com>). Oregon's pinots are as impressive as the lovely vineyards where the grapes are grown. Or head north into the state of Washington and visit the **Mount St. Helens Volcanic Monu-**



Mt. Hood from Washington Park's Rose Garden. Photo credit: jpellgen, <https://flic.kr/p/f2NyRa>.

ment (www.fs.usda.gov/mountsthelens), where you can see firsthand the aftermath of the 1980 eruption, along with the ecosystem's recovery. Not all roads to the crater of this active volcano are open in spring, but visitor centers provide a fun and informative introduction to this dramatic landscape. Other outdoor attractions in southwest Washington include the **Gifford Pinchot National Forest** and the superb hiking on the Washington side of the Columbia River Gorge.

Summer visitors to the Pacific Northwest can be fairly confident that their snapshots

will come out like postcards, with clear blue skies and sparkling water. Spring visitors may have the good fortune to be in town on one of the glorious first sunny days of the year, when locals revel with giddy delight in the return of the sun. More often, spring visitors will experience light showers, occasionally real rain but more likely a steady drizzle, usually punctuated by heartening sunbreaks. For springtime off-road explorers in Oregon, muddy shoes are a small price to pay for the opportunity to fill your lungs with fresh, sweet forest air and experience lush, thriving natural areas. Visitors to Oregon in every season are invited to pack sensible shoes to explore the outdoor areas of the Pacific Northwest. Portland's coffee shops and brewpubs are waiting to welcome you after your hike. *ZZ*