



Six of the scenic San Juan Islands are accessible via ferry, and are popular destinations for recreation and relaxation.



Wondrous Washington By Leslie Forsberg

Washington is one of the most geographically diverse states in the nation—from wild, mist-bound Pacific Ocean beaches pounded by surf to a placid archipelago; from a moss-blanketed rain forest, where it can rain more than 14 feet a year, to the sage-covered desert of Eastern Washington, where it rains only 7 inches a year; from clam flats to majestic Mount Rainier. These natural treasures attract visitors and locals alike for outdoor recreation ranging from hiking and biking to kayaking and sailing. On the west side of the state, Seattle, Bellevue and Tacoma draw visitors to museums, shopping districts and Northwest-cuisine restaurants. And on the east side of the Cascades, winding country roads lead to hundreds of wineries in the Columbia Valley AVA, while Spokane offers shopping, dining, cultural and family attractions.

Savor the Harvest in Washington's Wine Country

The rich soils and abundant sunshine of Eastern Washington yield agricultural bounty such as sweet corn and wheat, but the star attraction of this region is wine grapes. In fact, Washington's wine industry is second only to California's in volume. With a latitude similar to that of Burgundy, France, Washington's wine terroir supports Chardonnay, Riesling, Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon and Syrah grapes, among other varieties, in 11 appellations (10 of them in Eastern Washington). A visit to the rolling hills of the Columbia Plateau offers myriad opportunities to sample the best of the harvest.

Vineyards comb the hillsides around sapphire-blue Lake Chelan, the state's newest AVA (American Viticultural Area). Its delights include wineries with dining patios and fabulous wine-based cuisine in scenic locales high above the lake. The Walla Walla Valley AVA, located in the southeastern corner of the state, supports more than 100 wineries. The city of Walla Walla is popular among oenophiles for its historic brick downtown—presided over by the elegantly

restored Marcus Whitman Hotel—and for its galleries, boutiques, wine-tasting rooms and restaurants that draw foodies. For more information, visit www.washingtonwine.org.

Fly a Kite on the Long Beach Peninsula

With the roiling Columbia River to the south, the estuaries and tranquil waters of Willapa Bay to the east and the surging Pacific Ocean to the west, 28-mile-long Long Beach Peninsula enjoys a dynamic location. The peninsula is rich with history: Cape Disappointment, a headland at the southern tip of the peninsula, is where Lewis and Clark and their Corps of Discovery first laid eyes on the Pacific Ocean.

The peninsula draws visitors year-round to its unbroken expanse of Pacific Ocean beaches; it's the longest continuous sand peninsula in the United States. Yet there's much more to this slender slip of land and the handful of tiny towns—six of them—strung along Pacific Highway.

During a visit here, you can learn about the famous early explorers at the Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center, hike to two operating



The Long Beach Peninsula (top) is ideal for kite flying due to its long stretch of beach and ocean breezes. Most of Washington's wine grapes (above) are grown in the dry eastern half of the state, home to hundreds of wineries.

Did You Know? >> Washington state's official marine mammal is the orca; three pods frequent the inland waters of Western Washington in the summer. Whale-watching cruises are available, but the area's beaches and ferries also offer superb viewing spots. The best place to see orcas from the shoreline is at Lime Kiln Point State Park on San Juan Island, between May and September.

19th century lighthouses, bike the new 8.5-mile Discovery Trail from Ilwaco to Long Beach, explore rocky coves and caves, and catch crab off a jetty. Kids love the arcade games in the town of Long Beach, and children and adults alike are dazzled by the kaleidoscope of colors and shapes at the World Kite Museum and Hall of Fame.

Or you can just let the surf soothe you, and then pull up a chair at one of the area's renowned restaurants to indulge in the region's best: freshly harvested fish and shellfish, wild mushrooms and cranberries. To plan your visit, contact the Long Beach Visitors Bureau at 360-642-2400 or www.funbeach.com.

Bike through the San Juan Islands

The San Juan Islands, in the middle of the Salish Sea, are a wave-washed getaway rich in recreational opportunities. Located in the rain shadow of the Olympic Mountains, the more than 400 islands of the archipelago (many of them tiny and privately owned) boast 247 days a year with sunshine. Five of the islands—Guemes, Lopez, Orcas, San Juan and Shaw—are accessible via scenic ferry rides from Anacortes, and Lummi Island is accessible via a county ferry near Bellingham.

The San Juans are a major tourist destination, so it is best to arrive early at the ferry terminal in the summertime. Some visitors avoid car lines by cycling through the islands. Astride a bike, you'll encounter miles of country roads, art-filled towns, charming cafes and friendly locals. The best San Juans vacation combines several of the islands.

Lopez is known for its rolling, pastoral landscapes with quiet lanes that are ideal for biking. Be sure to visit Spencer Spit State Park, with its sand peninsula and lagoon where you're likely to see seals, great blue herons and shorebirds. San Juan Island is an artists' haven, with galleries in Friday Harbor, numerous artists' studios and the IMA Sculpture Park at Roche Harbor. Horseshoe-shaped Orcas Island, the largest of the islands, offers a splendid mix of natural beauty, quaint villages and art; Orcas Island Artworks gallery represents more than 40



Pike Place Market (above) is a favorite Seattle destination for fresh produce. Hikers at Mount Rainier (below) encounter waves of colorful wildflowers sweeping across the subalpine meadows.



island artists. For more information, call 888-468-3701 or visit www.visitsanjuans.com.

Hike through Mount Rainier's Flower Fields

Mount Rainier commands respect. When not cloaked with a cloud cap, the mountain is visible at great distances. Because of its tremendous height—14,410 feet—Mount Rainier has several environmental zones: At its base, rain-forest lowlands are streaked with roaring rivers born of glaciers. At the top, rock ridges and steeply pitched ice slopes lure mountain climbers.

It's the sweet middle, however, that draws day hikers and backpackers to the mountain. Waves of wildflowers—magenta Indian paintbrush, blue lupine, rosy spirea, periwinkle alpine asters and a galaxy of others—spread a riot of colors across the spongy subalpine meadows in mid-summer. With a sapphire sky overhead and the craggy, snow-covered summit looming as a backdrop, the mountain's vivid meadows are as close as you can come to being inside an Impressionist painting.

One of the easiest approaches to the mountain is at Paradise, located at 5,400 feet elevation

And don't miss ...

Tacoma's Museum District. There are three outstanding museums within a block: the Museum of Glass, with its spectacular and colorful Chihuly Bridge of Glass (www.museumofglass.org); the Tacoma Art Museum, known for its focus on Northwest artists (www.tacomartmuseum.org); and the interactive Washington State History Museum (www.wshs.org).

The Methow Valley. This scenic area east of the Cascades offers an extensive trail system used by cyclists in the summer and skiers in the winter; the focal point is Winthrop (www.winthrop-washington.com), a Western-themed town.

ArtFest (www.northwestmuseum.org). Spokane's annual outdoor juried show, held the first weekend in June, is one of the Northwest's premier art festivals.

Bellingham (www.bellingham.org). Attractions in and around this Northern Washington city include arts and theater venues, scenic Chuckanut Drive and year-round recreation at area lakes, Mount Baker and Mount Shuksan.

Leavenworth (www.leavenworth.org). This Bavarian-themed village in a Cascade Mountain valley near Wenatchee is known for its festivals, and is an ideal center for hiking and river rafting.

Olympic National Park (www.nps.gov/olym). This park offers some of the most enchanting landscapes in the state, with rain forests, a string of wilderness beaches and sky-high alpine meadows at Hurricane Ridge.

Tillicum Village (www.tillicumvillage.com). This attraction is on Blake Island, a 45-minute cruise from downtown Seattle. Enjoy an experience that includes a performance of traditional Northwest Coast Indian dancing and a meal of alder-smoked salmon.

and 19 miles east of the Nisqually entrance to the national park. The historic Paradise Inn, with its grand lobby and massive fireplaces, offers simple overnight lodging, and hosts the Paradise Jackson Visitor Center. For more information, call 360-569-2211 or visit www.nps.gov/mora.

Explore Pike Place Market

Locals and visitors alike frequent Seattle's spectacular, historic Pike Place Market, which is set on a waterfront hillside with grand views of Elliott Bay. Now more than a century old, "The Market," as locals affectionately call it, is much more than produce stands, although the rich textures and colors of fresh berries, apples, peaches and seasonal flowers are a huge draw. With more than 200 commercial businesses, around 100 farmers renting tables by the day, nearly 200 craftspeople, the famed fishmongers tossing fish, and numerous cafes and restaurants, the market is a cacophony of sights and sounds every day.

The market sprawls over 9 acres. A stroll through the warren of white-painted arcades yields delightful discoveries, such as a window full of exotic pastries at the Piroshky Piroshky bakery; cheese being made on-site behind glass windows at Beecher's Handmade Cheese (try a sample of the fresh-made cheese curds); and tiny doughnuts trembling along a conveyor belt, glistening with oil from the deep-fat fryer, and then tossed with cinnamon sugar at the Daily Dozen Doughnut Company. Lending liveliness to the scene, dozens of street performers play everything from wistful Irish melodies to tub-thumping, washboard-scraping old-time music. To learn more about the market, call 206-682-7453 or visit www.pikeplacemarket.org. ■

Leslie Forsberg writes from Seattle.

Getting There: Alaska Airlines (800-ALASKAAIR) and Horizon Air (800-547-9308) offer frequent service to communities throughout Washington. To book a complete Alaska Airlines Vacations package, call 800-468-2248 or visit alaskaair.com. For more information about Washington travel, go to www.experiencewa.com.