

FamilyGetaways

Fun Trips, Helpful Tips, Family-to-Family Advice, and Memorable Adventures

Huge columns of rock, called sea stacks, loom just off shore at Olympic National Park's Second Beach



Best National Parks for Families

Olympic National Park

Rain forest, mountains, and coastline make this enormous park a must-see for nature-loving families • By Joanna Nesbit

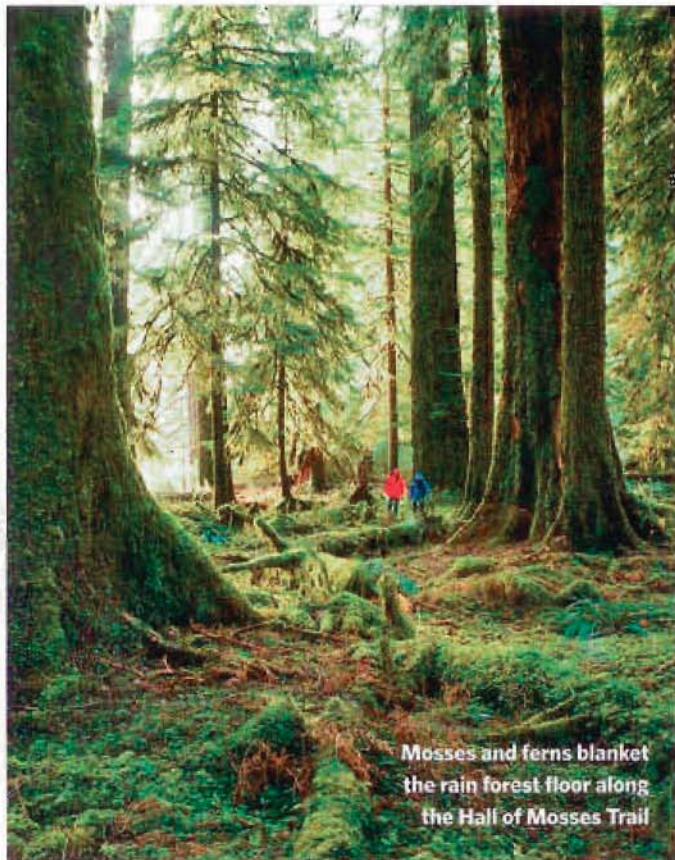


Olympic National Park, located on Washington's Olympic Peninsula, is an outdoor paradise. Best known for its rare temperate rain forest, the park actually contains three distinct ecosystems: old-growth forest, rugged coastal beaches, and snow-capped mountains. Plus there are rivers, lakes, waterfalls, and hot springs, all fed by the region's impressive yearly rainfall. Even the rainy days have a lush beauty all their

own — just pack those waterproof boots and coats!

Olympic is popular, receiving three million visits a year, but at nearly one million acres, there's plenty of terrain to go around and numerous day trips to choose from. Although the center of the park is accessible mainly by hiking trail, U.S. Highway 101 loops around Olympic, passing breathtaking sites at the park boundaries. Here are just some of the many offerings.

Family Getaways



Mosses and ferns blanket the rain forest floor along the Half of Mosses Trail

The Star Attraction

The Hoh Rain Forest

No visit to Olympic would be complete without a hike in the Hoh Rain Forest, one of the largest old-growth stands in the Northern Hemisphere. Located in the Hoh River Valley, between the coast and the mountains, it averages 140 to 170 inches of rain a year — that's 12 to 14 feet!

Hall of Mosses and Spruce Nature Trails For an easy rain forest experience, walk the .8-mile interpretive Hall of Mosses Trail to see giant Sitka spruce, club moss, sword ferns, and giant lichen. The 1.2-mile Spruce Nature Trail includes views of the Hoh River (Hoh Rain Forest Visitor Center; 360-374-6925).

Hoh River Rafting Guided half-day trips bring paddlers to the wilderness along the Hoh River, far from the well-trod trails (February through October; \$44 per person, ages 5 and up; 360-374-9288; rainforestpaddlers.com).

Hoh River Trail This 17.3-mile path winds deeper into the rain forest, but the flatness of the first section makes it a great choice for an easy family day hike.

The Olympic Mountains rise above paddlers on Lake Crescent



Explore the Land

Where There's Water

Families can find ample water play in the park, whether it's rowing on Lake Crescent, exploring the coastal beaches, or feeling the spray from a cascading waterfall.

Beach Adventures Pristine beaches line the park's 73 miles of coast. Sea stacks make for striking scenery, while tide pools and copious driftwood encourage long afternoons of ocean-side play. Second Beach is accessible via a gentle .8-mile forest walk.

Waterfall Wonders Sol Duc Falls thunders all year, and tall Marymere Falls roars most in the spring. Each is about a mile's walk into the forest.

Lake Fun Lake Crescent, 12 miles long and carved by glaciers, offers sandy beaches, boat ramps, trails, and summer swimming. The Log Cabin Resort rents boats and hydro bikes from May to October (360-928-3325; logcabinresort.net).



Local Curiosity

See What We Saw

This museum in Forks, a small timber town near the Hoh Rain Forest, pays homage to what was once a principal industry of the peninsula. Crosscut saws, working model steam engines, and a bunkhouse depicting how loggers used to live commemorate early logging history (open Tuesday through Friday, May through October; \$3 for ages 13 and up; 360-374-9663).

Wildlife Watch

Olympic's Curious Creatures

The park is large and lush, providing premier animal habitat. Look for these distinctive locals.



Roosevelt Elk

The peninsula is home to one of the largest herds of Roosevelt elk in the Pacific Northwest. Watch for them in and around the Hoh Rain Forest.



Olympic Marmot

Found only in the Olympic Mountains, these furry critters can sometimes be seen soaking up summer sun. They hibernate for as long as eight months each year.



Sea Urchins

These prickly animals cling to tide pool rocks with tubelike feet, eating seaweed and dead fish. Tiny stingers protect them from sea otters and other predators.

Checklist of Fun

IF YOU HAVE ...

A few hours ...



then try:

- A ranger presentation at Hoh Rain Forest Visitor Center
- A Hall of Mosses Trail hike
- A drive along Highway 101

A day ...



then try:

- A hike to Sol Duc Falls
- A paddle on Lake Crescent
- Tide-pooling at Second Beach

A weekend ...



then try:

- A drive to Hurricane Ridge Visitor Center
- Rafting on the Hoh River
- A Spruce Nature Trail hike
- A trip to the Forks Timber Museum

When finding a quarter meant being rich.

When three sofa cushions equaled a fort.

When acting like a kid wasn't an act.



Seasonal Events



Spring rains add even more drama to Sol Duc Falls

A Year at Olympic

The rain forest explodes with greenery in the warm months, while fall migrations and snow mark the cooler seasons.

Spring The rain forests are at their most verdant, but trails are quiet, awaiting the visitors of the drier summer months.

Summer This is the least rainy period on the Olympic Peninsula and best for camping. Ranger programs kick into high gear.

Fall Coho salmon return to Salmon Cascade, a waterfall on the Sol Duc River. Listen for bull elk's bugling calls as mating season begins.

Winter Hurricane Ridge, home to a visitor center and trail system high in the Olympic Mountains, is open on weekends, weather permitting, for skiing and snowshoeing (360-565-3131).

Joanna Nesbit lives with her family in Bellingham, Washington.

Where to Stay

National Park Lodging

Hoh Rain Forest Campground This National Park Service campsite provides tent and RV sites (no showers), picnic tables, and summer ranger programs. It's first-come, first-served, so arrive early (\$12 per site; 360-374-6925; nps.gov/olym).

Hotel Accommodations

Kalaloch Lodge, Forks Perched on a bluff above the ocean, this lodge offers rooms and suites, as well as cabins (doubles from \$99, cabins from \$119; 866-525-2562; visitkalaloch.com).

Olympic Suites Inn, Forks This hotel offers one- and two-bedroom suites, some with full kitchens (doubles from \$69; 800-262-3433; olympicsuitesinn.com).

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Call Olympic National Park at 360-565-3130 or visit nps.gov/olym.

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