

Come Play With Nature

The Great Outdoors Grows Even Greater During A Visit To The Long Beach Peninsula

One look at the map explains the natural mystique of the Long Beach Peninsula. Set on Washington's southwestern-most coast, the peninsula wraps an arm around Willapa Bay like a protective parent, shielding the region's habitats and inhabitants from sea winds and storm waves.

The result is a textbook case of nature in harmony. Salmon spawn in its nutrient-rich streams, shellfish thrive in its shallow waters, and Harbor Seals nurture their pups on safe sandbars. Shorebirds migrate here by the thousands each spring, and seabirds find refuge by the bay in the summer and fall. Wetlands, marshes and forests protect precious creatures like Canvasbacks and Cormorants, while Trumpeter Swans wing their way here for their winter vacation and Bald Eagles fish in local waters.

Visitors to the Long Beach Peninsula encounter an equally benevolent retreat. With 28 miles of open beach for their adventuring pleasure, they can lose themselves in a dream world of dune grass and lupine, perhaps glimpsing one of the rare Snowy Plovers which nest here. Then, they can wander pristine trails through forests rich with Western Hemlock and Sitka Spruce, supporting the threatened Marbled Murrelet.

Hiking presents exhilarating options for enjoying this rich environment. Visitors can explore the great outdoors on foot, courtesy of trails through the lush coastal forests of 1,882-acre **Cape Disappointment State Park**, home of lakes, marshes, streams and jaw-dropping views of the Pacific Ocean and Columbia River.

Willapa National Wildlife Refuge, one of North America's most pristine estuaries, calls to nature lovers with its wetlands, grasslands and coniferous forest. Refuge highlights include 5,400-acre **Long Island**, where stands of 900-year-old Western Red Cedar house Bald Eagles and Great Blue Heron; and **Leadbetter Point**, laying claim to some of Washington's most significant salt-marsh habitats.

Hikers can hoof it along the half-mile **Long Beach Boardwalk** with its interpretive displays, picnic areas and mesmerizing seascapes. And they can retrace the steps of Lewis and Clark on the **Discovery Trail**, an eight-mile promenade from Ilwaco to north Long Beach.

Other activities and adventures bring visitors even deeper into the heart of this wondrous setting. **Kayaking** lets them ply the rivers, streams and bays at their own pace, glimpsing seals, sea lions and birds. **Horseback Riding** along the edge of the Pacific Ocean is rivaled only by four-legged back country excursions, led by master horsemen. **Charter Fishing** for salmon, sturgeon and tuna creates splashy memories for a lifetime.

Bird Watching brings travelers close to such winged beauties as the graceful Black Brant and the distinguished Brown Pelican. Shore-based **Whale Watching** yields glimpses of the spray of gray whales in the near shore waters. During nighttime low tides, **Digging for Razor Clams** assembles friends and families for one-of-a-kind seaside safaris.

In the midst of it all is the **Beach** itself, mile upon mile of dune-lined magnificence. Seeming to stretch forever, it creates a captivating canvas for throwing a Frisbee, flying a kite, sharing a picnic or simply slowing down to appreciate the countless natural gifts of the Long Beach Peninsula.

#