



Stephanie Inn

Oregon Coast Road Trip

Source: July 2011 Hideaway Report



Highway 101 runs 363 miles through Oregon, from Astoria on the south bank of the Columbia River to the California border, just beyond Brookings, mostly hugging the coast except for occasional swings inland. You could drive it in a day, but that would be missing the point. The route offers glorious views of the Pacific around nearly every bend, dozens of state parks with broad, sandy beaches and rugged headlands, and small towns with a sprinkling of galleries and curiosity shops and waterfront diners that serve wonderful fresh-caught seafood.

The Pacific Ocean that carved the coast controls the climate. It does rain here. From December through February, it rains and rains.

Landmarks such as Cape Foulweather and Dismal Nitch earned their names. Lewis and Clark's Corps of Discovery, in the winter of 1805-06, spent 106 days at Fort Clatsop near what is now Astoria, and Captain Clark recorded that rain fell on all but 12. But come late spring, the rain tapers off, and by summertime, the skies dry up. On glorious, sunny days, you can stroll along broad stretches of warm sand as the tide ebbs and the ground fog lifts, while offshore, powerful breakers crash against enormous sea stacks and engulf lesser rocks in spectacular slow-motion sprays. Or you can perch on a high promontory with 50 miles of white-edged coastline spread below and views 30 miles out to sea.



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Astoria, about a two-hour drive from Portland, was established as a fur-trading outpost by John Jacob Astor's Pacific Fur Co. in 1811, and has recently spruced itself up to celebrate its 200th anniversary. The city of 10,000 overlooks the Columbia River from a steep hillside dotted with colorful Victorian-style houses. At the foot of the hill, the revitalized 1920s-era downtown stretches along weathered piers, once the foundation for vast seafood canning operations. The canneries are long gone; giant Bumble Bee was the last to leave, and its sprawling structures at Pier 39 have been converted to galleries, professional offices, various nautically themed enterprises and a fine brewpub.

The bygone canneries were the inspiration for the stylish **Cannery Pier Hotel**, which sits on pilings over the river where the Union Fishermen's Cooperative Packing Co. once stood. Designed to resemble the original cannery, the hotel's waterfront rooms face the busy shipping channel and the four-mile-long Astoria-Megler Bridge that connects Washington and Oregon. Our fourth-floor corner suite (avoid standard rooms) offered a stunning view of the Columbia and the massive iron bridge. The river was directly below our small balcony. To the east, beyond the bridge, a half-dozen large freighters lay at anchor, awaiting orders or a berth at upriver ports. In the distance across the water, the Cape Disappointment Lighthouse blinked intermittently through a bank of fog that shrouded the Washington shore.

Our suite, though not opulent, certainly provided all the comforts: a king bed, built-in dresser, effective bedside lighting and smallish closet; the tiled bath held a whirlpool tub and separate shower; and a sitting room with a wood floor contained a table for two and a gas fireplace. The suite's chief attraction was the dramatic view from large windows in every room. Despite the proximity to waterway and highway, we heard only seabirds and once or twice the quiet thrum of a passing ship. We awoke in the dim light to see the freighter *Jia Li Hai* heading out to sea. (The front desk offers a printout of the Daily Ship Report.)

The hotel has no restaurant. An ample (if unimaginative) breakfast buffet is served in a comfortable lobby. The amiable staff not only make dining recommendations, but will provide transportation in one of several vintage luxury cars.

Glamorous, the **Cannery Pier Hotel** is not. But we loved its location and liked the way its unpretentious feel and honest design honor Astoria's colorful, hardworking past.

Cannery Pier Hotel 84 One-Bedroom Suite, from \$375. No. 10 Basin Street. Tel. (503) 325-4996.

Stephanie Inn, a longtime Harper favorite 25 miles south on Highway 101 at Cannon Beach, is as different from the Cannery Pier Hotel as trendy Cannon Beach is different from Astoria, and many may find the inn's casually elegant lodgings and gracious service a better fit. Here, you can enjoy spectacular Pacific beach views from your oceanfront room, and in an afternoon, drive 35-40 minutes up the coast to sample Astoria's attractions as well.

On our recent incognito visit, we booked the spacious Oceanfront "Janice Kay" Room on the second floor, overlooking nearly nine miles of broad, sandy beach and the looming shape of Haystack Rock, a quarter-mile offshore. The suite was large enough not to be overwhelmed by a mammoth four-poster bed, an armoire that swallowed up our luggage, a writing desk and chair, two period-style upholstered chairs and a round, glass-topped table. The tiled bath held a two-person Jacuzzi, a separate shower and a single vanity.

Shortly after we'd checked in, a spring squall swept inland from the Pacific. Rain beat against the windows, and the wind rattled two wicker chairs on our small private balcony, where a gull huddled on the railing. As twilight fell, we lowered the lights, turned on the gas fireplace and watched the storm pass.

We had dinner reservations for 6 p.m., but we'd eaten a late lunch at the delightful *Bridgewater Bistro* in Astoria. When we asked at check-in for a later table, we were offered a candlelight dinner in our room — a happy option, since the dining room does not have an ocean view, while our room offered the grand view, privacy and the fireplace.

Shops and galleries line the main street of Cannon Beach. But the not-to-be-missed attraction, besides the wonderful beach itself, is Ecola State Park, a short drive that winds north of town through Sitka spruce and tops out on Tillamook Head with ocean views that Captain Clark called "the grandest and most pleasing prospects which my eyes ever surveyed."

Stephanie Inn 91 Oceanfront Suite, from \$550. 2740 South Pacific. Tel. (503) 436-2221.

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Lake Mary Smith cove, along the route, Depoe Bay, 100 miles south of Cannon Beach, has seen a shift away from traditional fishing and timber economies. Charter boats still sail from its snug harbor, but this once-gritty town now also has its share of galleries, good restaurants and a new whale-watching center.

A mile south of town, the **Whale Cove Inn** looks over a lovely cove that's rimmed by weathered cliffs and a slim crescent of driftwood-strewn sand; breakers cascade over a rock shelf that guards the mouth of the bay.

