

GET AWAY TO OREGON'S HIDDEN SEASIDE TOWN P. 28

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A view of Battle Rock and its namesake beach. **RIGHT** Fresh urchin. **BOTTOM RIGHT** A cliffside hot tub with killer views at WildSpring.



Finding Port Orford

Discover the not-so-sleepy charms of one of Oregon's most idyllic seaside towns **BY SUSAN HAUSER | PHOTOGRAPHS BY JOHN CLARK**



THE JOKE ABOUT Port Orford is that when speeding motorists are caught blowing through town on U.S. 101, their excuse is, "I didn't know I was in a town!"

This tiny burg, with a population just north of 1,200, is easy to miss. But travelers who do pull off the highway are rewarded with surprising finds: great food, great art, and miles of coastal trails, all in a gorgeous natural setting.

"I call it 'the invisible village,'" artist and Triangle Square Gallery owner Joyce Kinney tells me. "But the minute you actually drive off the highway and see it, you say, 'I had no idea!'"

I'll vouch for that, on both counts. I nearly miss my turnoff for WildSpring

Guest Habitat because I'm distracted by the spectacular seascapes to the west when I'm supposed to be turning south-east. And when I finally settle into my cabin, my location—in the woods three minutes from a bluff overlooking the ocean—poses a serious challenge to my goal of exploring the town. That's the other side of "discovering" Port Orford—around here, it can be just as appealing to stay where you are.

But instead of relaxing on my porch or, better yet, in the hotel's seaside hot tub, I head to Paula's Bistro, right on the main drag. Turns out the waiter who serves me is Paula Baudry's husband, Christophe, a former chef at Maxim's in Paris, who taught

his wife French cooking techniques (and is the pastry chef here). My fresh albacore tuna with Dijon mustard sauce is divine.

Another surprise: Paula's an artist. Her paintings line the walls, so the bistro doubles as an informal art gallery. That makes it one of eight in town, I learn. Eight? That's approximately one gallery for every 150 residents.

The following day I find, among the gallery owners, several well-established artists, such as marble sculptor Eric Johnson, with his Johnson Gallery; woodworker Rick Cook of Cook Gallery; and renowned glass artist Chris Hawthorne, whose Hawthorne Studio is set to expand into a new gallery (Hawthorne) and a restaurant

Northwest Escape



Surfers take a break at Battle Rock Beach.

(Redfish). As for Kinney, she's a fiber artist who represents a flock of other local artists.

While scores of creative types—artists, actors, and now organic farmers and chefs—have laid down roots here, all residents respect the fishermen who built this town. Port Orford is still a working fishing village, as I see when I visit the port later that day. At the dock, commer-



Getting there

Port Orford is 275 miles from Portland and 70 miles from California. INFO portorfordoregon.com

cial fishermen unload their catch before their boats are hoisted by crane from the sea. It's one of only a few elevated, open-water docks left in the world.

On my final day here, I see the town's sea-related history come to life at Cape Blanco Lighthouse, completed in 1870 on Oregon's westernmost point. Then I drive to the Port Orford Lifeboat Station Museum, a 1934 structure built to house U.S. Coast Guardsmen.

And to think I almost missed all that. It's really true: Port Orford is invisible. That is, until you put it on your radar—then you'll never pass it by again.

48 hours in Port Orford

FRIDAY Check into **WildSpring Guest Habitat** (from \$226, including breakfast; on Cemetery Loop off U.S. 101; wildspring.com). Dine at **Paula's Bistro** (\$\$\$; closed Sun; 236 Sixth St./U.S. 101; 541/332-9378).

SATURDAY Watch for whales as you eat breakfast on WildSpring's deck. Then walk on the beach at **Battle Rock City Park** (portorfordoregon.com/battlerock.html) before hitting the town's galleries. Pick up a local brochure of them from **Triangle Square Gallery** (343 Sixth St./U.S. 101; 541/253-6198). From the elevated dock at **Port of Port Orford** (300 Dock Rd.; 541/332-7121), watch fishermen bring in their catch. Finally, try the namesake dish at the **Crazy Norwegian's Fish and Chips** (\$; 259 Sixth St./U.S. 101; 541/332-8601).

SUNDAY Try the made-from-scratch fruit scones at **Hard Rain Café** (\$; 1634 Oregon St.; 541/332-6030). Nine miles northwest of town, at **Cape Blanco State Park** (91814 Cape Blanco Rd.; oregonstateparks.org), visit the **Cape Blanco Lighthouse** (\$2, families \$5). Or explore the **Port Orford Lifeboat Station Museum** in Port Orford Heads State Park (free; 92331 Coast Guard Rd.; portorfordlifeboatstation.org).