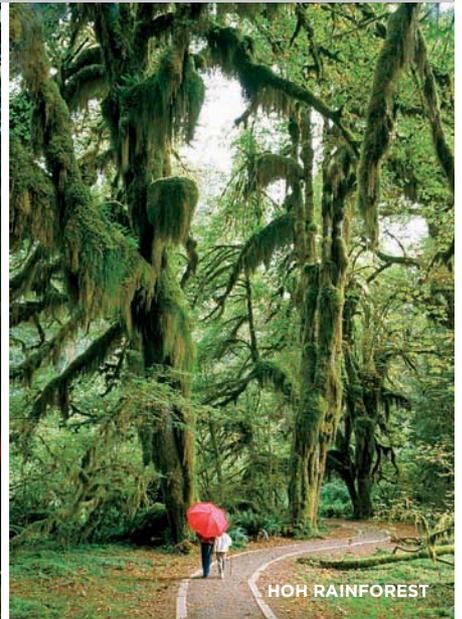




RUBY BEACH



HOH RAINFOREST

OLYMPIC TORCH RUN

TREAT THIS ROUTE as a marathon, not a sprint. On the Olympic Peninsula (OP), where the rain forest meets the sea under towering mountains, it's impossible to tour without frequent stops to marvel at the natural attractions. Most are accessible year-round, and in many cases they are more spectacular in winter, when waves pound the coast, waterfalls roar, and the forest swells in a thousand shades of green.

While no road crosses its interior, the OP boasts many wonders just a short stroll from the car. From I-5 outside of Olympia, head north on U.S. 101 on the west side of Hood Canal, the Puget Sound channel famous for its shellfish. Tour the Hama Hama Oyster Company in Lilliwaup or follow Forest Service roads to short interpretive trails that describe how the U.S. Forest Service and Civilian Conservation Corps built the peninsula's infrastructure. Then veer up to Port Townsend to sample its Victorian architecture and historic forts, and stop in Sequim to visit Dungeness Spit, a national wildlife refuge that juts five miles into the Strait of Juan de Fuca.

Continue west to Port Angeles, gateway to Olympic National Park's Hurricane Ridge and Lake Crescent, as well as Victoria, British Columbia (via ferry). Stay on U.S. 101 to Forks, currently abuzz as the setting of the teen vampire series *Twilight*, or swing out on Highway 112 to Neah Bay and Cape Flattery, the northwesternmost point in the Lower 48. The Makah Tribe has built a three-quarter-mile trail and boardwalk that makes it easier than ever to get to the tip.

From Forks, drive south on U.S. 101 to access lush rain forests and rugged Pacific Coast. Some beaches require serious hiking, but the sea stacks and tide pools at Ruby Beach, located soon after U.S. 101 reaches the western coast, are near the parking lot. Likewise, the half-mile Lake Quinault Rain Forest Nature Trail, just off U.S. 101, is as awe-inspiring as the better-known Hoh Rain Forest's Hall of Mosses, a scenic 18-mile drive each way.

Some 40 miles south in Hoquiam, the loop leads back east toward Olympia. But first, take a quick detour west on Highway 109 to Grays Harbor National Wildlife Refuge, whose mudflats provide a haven for shorebirds. —MIKE GREENSTEIN

DRIVE TIME:
10 HOURS
DISTANCE:
424 MILES



MUST DO

> EAT

THE LODGE Set to open in 2010, this restaurant promises to bring the magic of the *Twilight* series of books and movies to Forks, a key setting in the series. Dedicated consumers of the pop-culture phenomenon will appreciate the many *Twilight*-themed dishes on the Lodge's menu. www.dazzledbytwilight.com

> SEE

WORLD'S LARGEST TREES Quinault Valley has six conifers recognized by the National Forestry Association as the largest living specimens of their species. Two (western red cedar and sitka spruce) are easy walks from the parking lot. Get maps online, at the Quinault Internet Café, or at the ranger station next to Lake Quinault Lodge. www.quinalultrainforest.com

> PLAY

OLYMPIC DISCOVERY TRAIL Eventually, this nonmotorized corridor will stretch 125 miles from Port Townsend to the Pacific, but currently the 27 miles from Hollywood Beach in Port Angeles to one mile east of Sequim Bay are completed for biking, hiking, and horseback riding, mostly along former rail lines. www.olympicdiscoverytrail.com