

Life in the Valley



Coastal yurt getaway

The view inside a deluxe yurt at Umpqua Lighthouse State Park. PHOTOS BY ZACH URNESS/STATESMAN JOURNAL

Deluxe yurts located at Umpqua Lighthouse State Park ideal for winter camping on Oregon Coast

Zach Urness Salem Statesman Journal
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It's hard to say when it happened, but at some point, the standard-sized yurts at Oregon's state parks became just a little too cozy.

Ideal for winter on the Oregon Coast, the heated and framed tents have been a staple of our beach adventures for almost a decade.

But with two young and mobile children now milling around, we decided this December to upgrade from the normal-sized yurt to the "deluxe" options only found at Umpqua Lighthouse State Park, almost a three-hour drive from Salem between Florence and Coos Bay.

Still a great deal at \$82 per night, deluxe yurts offer more space, sleeping options and a private bathroom and shower. And there's still that unique experience of spending the night in what's basically an oversized knit hat.

The six deluxe yurts are often booked on weekends, even during winter, so I'd recommend making plans at least a week or two in advance. You'll have an easier time scoring them midweek.

It takes more than a cool dwelling to make a great family trip, of course. And in that sense, Umpqua Lighthouse worked out well.

Great location

Umpqua Lighthouse is just south of Reedsport in the heart of Oregon Dunes country, barely a stone's throw from Winchester Bay and the Umpqua River.

It makes a good base camp. Two other great state parks, Heceta Head and Sunset Bay, are within a reasonable drive.

But there are plenty of close-by options as well, including right out the front door of the yurt.

Lake Marie

One of the fun things about staying in the deluxe yurts at Umpqua Lighthouse is that you can step out the door and be on a pretty nice hiking trail.

Both mornings of our stay, I hiked the 1-mile loop around Lake Marie, a lovely forested pool with a swimming area for summer that's also quite pleasant in winter. It's also stocked with trout three times per year.

The trail is almost entirely flat, with picnic areas surrounding it, and it is a great one for smaller children. My 1-year-old daughter did the first "serious" hiking of her life on that trail, so I'll always remember it for that.

But it's also cool because of signs that detail the name and interesting facts about the flora. Here's a sign that says, "salal: Indians dried the blueberry-like fruit into 10-pound cakes." Another reads, "western red cedar: Indians stripped and pounded the soft, stringy bark to make clothing."

Oregon Dunes exploring

The Umpqua Dunes are the largest in Oregon, and they are a sight to behold. One of the best ways to really experience them is by renting a dune buggy. There are a number of places both around the state park and in Reedsport where you can rent a buggy or even go on a guided tour.

The closest staging area is Winchester Bay.

Fantastic beach and dunes

Located near the mouth of the Umpqua River, a wonderful beach can be found at "South Umpqua Jetty" day use area, not far from the state park.

The beach is really nice in itself, but a short walk away, there's steep rolling dunes ideal for "sand sledding."

I kept my 3-year-old thrilled for hours by climbing up the dunes and sliding down. It was better than snow. Almost.

To find it, drive down from the state park toward the ocean, past the Umpqua Lighthouse, and turn left onto Salmon Harbor Drive — where you can see the mouth of the Umpqua River — for a short distance. Park in a nondescript parking area that requires a \$5 day-use fee. It's less than 5 minutes from the state park.

Umpqua Lighthouse

The actual lighthouse the state park is named for is just a short drive outside the park. You can drive up and look at it but can only go on a tour by scheduling one at the museum down the road.

For more info, call (541) 271-4631.

Pro tip: You'll get a discount on the cost of the tour if you mention it took 240,000 bricks to construct the lighthouse tower.

Fishing

The fishing in Salmon Harbor can be great, especially for crab and fall Chinook salmon. Prime time is typically July to September.

Go with a local guide based out of Winchester Bay, and fill your freezer.



The deluxe yurts at Umpqua Lighthouse State Park offer a camping-style experience with a bit more comfort.



Six deluxe yurts are available for guests to rent at Umpqua Lighthouse State Park.



The South Umpqua Jetty day-use area includes dunes, a great beach and sand sledding.



The deluxe yurts are usually booked on weekends, so plan in advance.