

# Life in the Valley



## Climb this lighthouse for stunning ocean views

The tour of the 59-foot Cape Blanco Lighthouse allows visitors to climb to the top and look out from where the light still shines. ZACH URNESS/STATESMAN JOURNAL

### Cape Blanco State Park offers iconic Oregon experience

Zach Urness Salem Statesman Journal  
USA TODAY NETWORK

Nothing quite compares with climbing to the top of an Oregon Coast lighthouse.

The circular staircase, stunning glasswork of the lens and sweeping ocean views make it an iconic Oregon experience.

Eleven of these sentinels still dot the coast, but you're only allowed to climb inside a few. Among those, my personal favorite is Cape Blanco, guardian of the westernmost point in Oregon.

There are a few reasons it sits atop my list.

First, the views are outrageously good. Set atop high grassy cliffs, the 59-foot lighthouse offers panoramic views across Oregon's rugged southern coast.

Second, and most important for any family trip, children are allowed to climb to Blanco's top. At some lighthouses, there's an age or height limit, and woe to the person who tells my 3-year-old she can't climb to the top. It will get ugly.

The only downside is the four-hour drive from the Willamette Valley. But, that's not really a downside when you consider everything that Cape Blanco State Park brings to the table.

The park offers a classic campground with showers and bathrooms, along with 52 sites, four reservable cabins and a nice horse camp for equestrians.

Hikers and horse riders are treated to miles of sweeping trails with ocean and forested views.

But, of course, the lighthouse is the main attraction.

#### Trip up the lighthouse

There's a certain logic in putting a lighthouse on Oregon's westernmost point, and in 1870, it was installed.

Today, some of the old touches remain, but many of the parts are new.

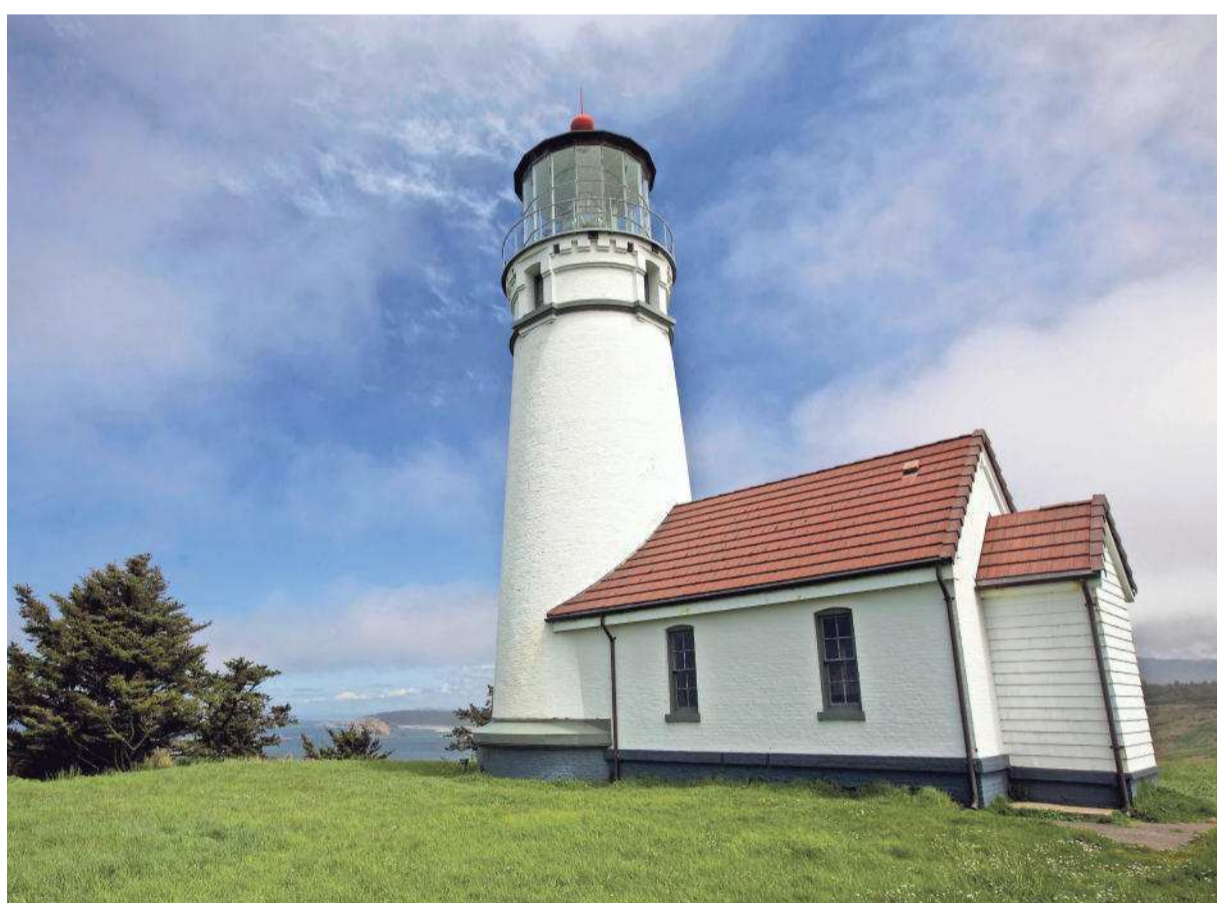
The only way to visit the top is on a tour that costs \$2 per person. It's free for those 15 and under.

Tours are offered from April to Oct. 31, Wednesday to Monday, from 10 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Last tour ticket sold at 3:15 p.m. Gates close at 3:30 p.m.

Tickets are purchased at a nice little gift shop. Then you walk across a grassy promenade to the base of the lighthouse, where the tour begins. Volunteer guides will tell you about about James Langlois and James Hughes, lighthouse keepers who manned this station for more than 40 years.

Then comes the spiraling climb upward.

Kids have to be able to make the



Climb to the top of the Cape Blanco Lighthouse on the Oregon Coast. ZACH URNESS/STATESMAN JOURNAL



Lucy Urness, 3, climbs up a narrow staircase into the lens room at Cape Blanco Lighthouse. DAVID DAVIS / STATESMAN JOURNAL

climb on their own — no carrying them. My 3-year-old Lucy couldn't have been more excited, but was a little surprised by the narrow, steep nature of the staircase. Lighthouse stairs don't look much like normal stairs, and it took her a while to get her bearings.

But once she did, it was a lot of fun. We reached the "watch level," and had fun looking out of the peepholes in the brick, before being summoned upward to the "Lens Room."

This was the diceiest part of the climb for Lucy. The final ascent includes climbing up a steep ladder into the narrow room right next to the giant lighted glass that once provided safety for ships at sea.

You don't appreciate the complexity of the glasswork required to shine that beacon outward until you see it up close. Layers of finely cut glass are required.

A volunteer explained the intri-



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cacies of the lens, but to be honest, I was more focused on holding Lucy so she didn't break it, setting off a historical crisis. You can reach out your hand and grasp the delicate lens, and it became immediately obvious why some lighthouses don't want 3-year-olds next to something so irreplaceably delicate.

The view, of course, was grand. High on the cliffs of Cape Blanco, and now 59 feet in the sky, we could see miles down the coast in both directions, and probably 40 miles out to sea.

We took our time on the way down, savoring every step of the spiraling staircase and the little windows in the brink. Lucy was thrilled with the experience, but also happy to set her feet upon the earth again.

Cape Blanco's lighthouse offers a unique, unforgettable experience, especially for a 3-year-old.

#### Cape Blanco Lighthouse

**In a nutshell:** Climb to the top of a 59-foot lighthouse on the westernmost point of Oregon

**Nearest town:** Port Orford

**How to do it:** Visit April to Oct. 31, Wednesday to Monday, from 10 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Last tour ticket sold at 3:15 p.m. Gates close at 3:30 p.m.

**Cost:** \$2 for adults, free for those under 15

**More information:** 541-332-6774

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