

WANDERLUST

As pretty as it gets around town when the leaves start to turn, for many of us the signs of our impending cold and rainy season are the hints it's time to start planning to hit the road. Here in Oregon you don't actually have to go far in your wanderings to see some beautiful places (and escape the rain, whether that be in the high desert or inside a museum). And thanks to Amtrak, Greyhound, Porter Stage lines, BoltBus, good old carpooling and more, there are mass transit options from Burns to Bandon — if you aren't traveling by bike or motorcycle, that is.

A DARK AND STORMY BEACH

Bandon in winter is a blustery good time

BY AMY SCHNEIDER



PHOTO BY RICHARD SCHNEIDER

With what felt like 100 mph winds slamming into us, my parents and I stood on a rocky outcropping overlooking the thundering waves and sandy beach of Bandon, Oregon. We'd visited Bandon many times over the years, usually in summer, when glorious sunsets silhouette iconic Face Rock and fat harbor seals bask on rocks.

Though the experience left us with hopelessly tangled hair, we discovered that the colder months in Bandon are

no less delightful than what summer has to offer.

Winter on the Oregon coast is a raging and roaring affair, with dizzying gusts and flurries of rain. Growing up on trips to Bandon, one of Southern Oregon's loveliest coastal towns, I cultivated my affinity for harsh ocean storms paired with a safe retreat. That can mean a yurt or hotel room, depending on your level of intrepidity.

My preference is Sunset Oceanfront Lodging, also one of my grandmother's favorites. She reserved rooms months in advance for our family's yearly retreats to the

coast, when my cousins and I would frolic on the beach, get covered in sand and then race back inside to get hosed off before playing card games.

The "original oceanfront" suite includes six ground floor rooms with a beach-access stairway and an unbeatable view of the ocean (until rising sea levels make it a little too close, that is). The newer suites are a bit more luxurious, with private balconies, and the hotel offers reduced rates during the winter months when tourist season slows down.

Of course, that doesn't mean Bandon becomes a ghost town during winter. "Even back in the earlier days, people that lived inland enjoyed coming to the coast and watching the storms," says Grover Hatcher, co-owner of the incredibly charming WinterRiver Books in downtown Bandon. I called him to chat about the thrills of sipping a hot drink and watching epic waves crash outside the window.

"One thing I'd say about a winter on the coast is that it's changeable," Hatcher says. "No winter is the same." He says that in general, strong winds and stormy seas prevail, punctuated by periods of sunny skies.

WinterRiver Books is a staple of "old town" Bandon, featuring Oregon authors and all the whimsy a small, independent bookstore can offer. My personal Bandon routine is picking up a new fantasy novel at WinterRiver and then heading over to Bandon Baking Co. & Deli, where hot coffee, tea and amazing cinnamon rolls make a perfect match for good reading and rainstorms.

Old town Bandon, a touristy haven, is replete with quirky curio stores that are never short on incense sticks, Oregon coast paraphernalia or detailed statuettes of unicorns and dragons. I recommend running from store to store between downpours (don't skip the legendary Face Rock Creamery), then booking it to nearby Wheelhouse Restaurant for some fantastic wild rice and Dungeness crab concoctions.

And for those with more adventurous spirits than me, yurt camping at nearby Bullards Beach is open year-round. Either way, if you like a good storm, Bandon in winter is hard to beat. ■

To get from Eugene to Bandon, take I-5 south to Exit 162 and merge onto OR-38/OR-99 toward Elkton. From Elkton, continue on OR-38, then turn left onto US-101 south. The trip takes about two and a half hours one way. You can also check out porterstageline.com for a bus schedule. For more info on Bandon, see bandon.com.

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