

At Charleston, keep driving another 13 miles to **Shore Acres State Park**. Pay the \$5 entry fee, pull in and park in the big paved lot, but DO NOT go into the formal garden — yet. That's your reward for finishing the hike that awaits, about two-and-a-quarter miles of easy coastal trail down to **Cape Arago**, with its loud and smelly sea lions lounging on offshore rocks.

2 pm: Start hiking. You brought your Gore-Tex, right? The four-and-a-half-mile loop trail wanders south along the coast just behind the fenced-off formal garden and heads past the gorgeous Simpson Cove and onwards. You may get rained on, and this time of year can be chilly, so dress warm and dry and keep everyone moving.

Once you've reached Cape Arago, enjoy the windy view, take a few photos, have a snack and, if pressed for time, return the way you came — or, if you're more ambitious, take the scenic loop route back to Shore Acres by heading up the unmarked logging road above the parking lot and working your way along the ridge. This maintained but informal trail can be steep and slippery and a little hard to find in places; as you approach Shore Acres on the return, it takes you past the concrete remains of a World War

II coast-watching installation. If you get back with daylight to spare, head north along the coast — past the remains of the old Simpson tennis courts (who could play tennis in this kind of wind?) — for another, much shorter loop trail of less than a mile and back to the garden.

5 pm: Assuming you've timed this right (I hope you brought flashlights on the hike in case you didn't) you should be back at Shore Acres just as it gets dark — the perfect moment to tour the spectacular formal garden, which is lit up from Thanksgiving until New Year's by tens of thousands of Christmas lights. The garden, laid out in the style of Versailles, is all that remains of the timber-baronial estate of Louis J. Simpson, who enjoyed life in a mansion overlooking the ocean before it burned down in a mysterious fire on July 4, 1921. The grounds fell on hard times until the state, which bought the property in 1942, began restoring the garden in the 1970s.

7 pm: By now you should be plenty hungry for dinner. Head back to Coos Bay to the **Blue Heron Bistro**, which serves classic German cuisine — and yes, they have German beer — at 100 Commercial Avenue in downtown before retiring to your room at The Mill for the night.

DAY 2

Sleep in this morning and then enjoy breakfast at The Mill's **Plank House** restaurant, which offers solid Northwest fare and a view of the Coos River. Next drive to downtown Coos Bay and park in one of the free public lots along the waterfront, where you can see an ocean-going tug on display next to a pleasant boardwalk and paved path about a mile long for strolling between the railroad tracks and the water. Next divert yourself for an hour or so at the **Coos Art Museum**, which is housed in the beautiful old Art Deco post office building at 235 Anderson Avenue. Big by small-town standards, the museum has maritime and Northwestern art. While downtown check out the **Egyptian Theatre**, 229 S. Broadway, a restored Egyptian-revival 1925-vintage vaudeville house that now shows movies and offers occasional concerts on its massive — and original — Wurlitzer theater pipe organ.

For a late lunch/early dinner, head back toward Shore Acres, but this time stop in Charleston, which is perhaps Oregon's most-authentic fishing village. It's wrapped around a U.S. Coast Guard station and heliport but also supports a small commercial fleet, whose skippers and sailors can be found — along with some decent seafood — at a handful of small restaurants and bars within a block of the water. Wander around and enjoy the scenery before picking a place to eat. One of the best choices is **The Portside**, 63383 Kingfisher Road, where you can dine and then hang out with a book and a drink or a cup of tea and watch the fishing boats come and go until it's time to drive back to North Bend for...

7 pm: Showtime at the **Liberty Theatre**, 2100 Sherman Avenue, North Bend. The Little Theatre on the Bay, an amateur theater group that is resident at the Liberty, puts on a delightfully cornball Christmas show each year modeled on the Grand Ole Opry in Nashville and using local talent. This year's version is called *Opry Home for the Holidays* and runs Dec. 1 through 3; tickets and more info at thelibertytheatre.org.

DAY 3

Sleep in again. This is, after all, a holiday. Check out of your room. Then grab breakfast at the **Pancake Mill Restaurant**, 2390 Tremont Street, North Bend, which is right across Highway 101 from The Mill Casino. Enjoy sweet, syrupy carbs and hot coffee galore. Expect a short wait for a table on weekends.

11 am: Finally, get in the car and head back to Eugene the way you came, not forgetting to stop and say hello again to the elk at Dean Creek along the way. You'll be home by 1 pm, fully refreshed.



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