

OCEAN PARK

THE HEART OF THE PENINSULA

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or a trip that bypasses crowded highways and returns your soul to a safer, more leisurely time, follow U.S. Highway 101 toward Washington state's southern-most peninsula. Once there, head north on State Route 103 toward Ocean Park — a visitor-friendly area located at the “heart” of Washington's most famous beach.

If you are looking for a weekend or longer close to nature, activities that the entire family will never forget, festivals or events nearly every weekend of the year, beautiful scenery, historic landmarks, walking trails and seafood that can't get any fresher, then treat yourself to the Ocean Park area.

Please visit the Ocean Park Area Chamber of Commerce website “Directory” page and look under “All Members” for web page listings for each of many friendly local businesses. The address is <http://opwa.com>.

On the way north on State Route 103, you'll pass by many areas worth exploring: Loomis Lake State Park; Loomis Lake fishing area; and the Klipsan Beach approach with its historic Coast Guard Life Saving Station, are some examples.

A red flashing light marks the center of Ocean Park. Everything here is located “from the light.” In fact, they have only recently started using house numbers.

Don't worry about getting lost. There are plenty of places to get information. The Ocean Park Area Chamber of Commerce Office is two blocks east from “the light” on Bay Avenue and every business will gladly provide directions to points of interest.

Scout out the many businesses that dot the road from Long Beach to Ocean Park and on to Oysterville. The variety is surprising. Ocean Park is home to two of the largest grocery stores on the Peninsula, a hardware store and a pharmacy. There are galleries, gift shops, a bookstore, restaurants and lodging choices that include motels, cabins, historic bed and breakfasts, vacation rental homes, RV spaces and camping.

You will find an opportunity to relax in Ocean Park. Have an espresso or lunch at the beach approach. Relax with a glass of wine and a sunset. Enjoy walking around town visiting artists, jewelers and crafters in their studios and shops. There are gift stores and a used bookstore carrying current and nostalgic items to browse. Tame your hunger at ice cream parlors, restaurants and watering holes. Jack's Country Store is one of the prime places to get lost in. Tom or any employee of Jack's store will help you find your way. One of the many reasons to linger in these businesses is that some of the better storytellers can be found in them.

The main attraction, and the reason most people come here, is the shore. The ocean is just a short walk west of “the light.” Here you are in the center of a grand beach that stretches more than 10 miles in each direction. Walk along the broad expanse of sand and stop to create a driftwood sculpture or build a sandcastle. Fly a kite or fish for surfperch. Watch a flock of sea birds in synchronous flight or spy a hawk in search of prey.

The beach is designated a state highway and automobiles can be driven on it. If you have a disabled friend or an aging relative, this is one of the few opportunities where they can be transported to the ocean's edge for a real seashore experience.



Ocean Park's Old-Fashioned Fourth of July Parade is a fun exercise in patriotism and small-town neighborliness. — OBSERVER FILE PHOTO

Couples and families enjoy the various events that Peninsula communities host. The Garlic Festival, held the third weekend in June, rejoices in the cloves that form the foundation for oodles of good food and good fun. The Old Fashioned Fourth of July Parade provides a rollicking family event that harkens back to family picnics and memorable experiences.

OCEAN PARK'S OLD-FASHIONED FOURTH OF JULY PARADE IS KNOWN FOR ITS ABUNDANT HOMETOWN PATRIOTISM

The weekend after Labor Day hums and roars with activity. The whole Peninsula is filled with custom cars participating in the Rod Run to the End of the World. The event begins with early registration on Friday afternoon, a slow drag on Friday night and climaxes with the car show on Saturday. Nearly 1,000 classic cars are on display. Throngs of visitors pore over the fit and finish of every one. There is, of course, ample time to exchange stories about your favorite car from an earlier time.

The Peninsula is rich in history. The Chinook people, who

were skillful traders and excellent seamen, first occupied the whole Peninsula area. After European seafarers discovered the area, a fur trade arose. Later, pioneers arrived at the mouth of the Columbia River and by the 1830s an oyster trade began in the Willapa Bay. Settlers soon followed.

By 1850 there were permanent settlements around the bay. Oysterville soon dominated the area. The raucous nature of the town and its vicinity convinced some that more uplifting environs would be desirable.

Ocean Park was conceived as a summer camp for religious meetings. Currently open to the public, Ocean Park Resort started as a Methodist Church campground in 1906 and celebrated a century of operation three years ago. By the 1890s the land of Ocean Park was platted and sold.

The Camping Association eventually moved to an 80-acre plat, 25 blocks north of “the light.” It is now known as the Ocean Park Retreat Center and United Methodist Camp.

There are many older residences that date back to the late 1800s in Ocean Park. Much of the lumber, in fact entire buildings, was barged over from South Bend and the smaller villages on the east side of the bay and Long Island. Others were built from shipwrecks and their cargoes that washed up on the beach. A brochure for a walking tour of these homes is available on the Internet (www.opwa.com) and at the Ocean Park Area Chamber of Commerce office.