

Coast Weekend Road Trip *Gearhart*

Gearhart’s quiet streets, simple charm, nature creates an oasis

BY KATHERINE LACAZE

Throughout the 20th century, families from metropolitan areas regularly spent summers in Gearhart, soaking in the town’s peaceful atmosphere of pristine beaches, quiet streets and small-town charm.

The same simplicity and untamed beauty of nature that appealed to travelers of the past continues to draw tourists to the quaint, primarily residential community today.

Located just north of Seaside — so closely they are occasionally mistaken for being part of the same city — Gearhart has no stoplights and a modest amount of commercial activity, mostly contained to downtown along Pacific Way.

What you get instead of urban amenities and attractions is easy access to the Pacific Ocean and its untarnished beaches and dunes, as well as the joy of being nestled beside the Clatsop Plains in a small community rich with history.

Where to explore

The best part of taking a road trip and stopping in Gearhart is the natural beauty of the area. For such a small city,



there is much to explore in Gearhart and just beyond city limits.

There are a couple different ways to access the shoreline. If you drive down Wellington Avenue, you will find a small parking area and a sign that points south to Little Beach and west to primitive trails that wind past a few homes and over the coastal dunes, offering spectacular views of the Necanicum Estuary and Pacific Ocean along the way. The trail and Gearhart Beach can also be accessed on the western end of Pacific Way.

Another option is to head north a couple miles into what is technically unincorporated Clatsop County territory and take Highlands Lane to the Del Rey Beach State Recreation Site. From the small, secluded parking area, you can walk down narrow paths through the rustling dune grass toward the beach to fly a kite, build a sandcastle or wade into the

ocean. At this location, you can also take your vehicle out onto Del Rey Beach and drive a few miles either north or south. Just keep an eye on the tides and the consistency of the sand where you’re driving, as it’s common for cars to get stuck on the beach.

In addition to its natural attractions, Gearhart also possesses a cultural gem that is worth exploring: The Trail’s End Art Association’s gallery, located on A Street. The art cooperative has canceled its regular summer workshops because of COVID-19, but the gallery — featuring the work of North Coast artists — is once again open to the public from noon to 4 p.m. Fridays through Sundays throughout the summer.

Where to eat

While Gearhart does not possess the most extensive or diverse dining scene, there are a few inviting places within city limits to grab coffee, a bite to eat or a sweet treat. The Sweet Shop Gearhart, located in a historic building downtown, serves a couple dozen flavors of ice cream, coffee and espresso drinks and homemade pastries. For a more substantial meal, you can try their daily soup and quiche special, sandwiches, grilled paninis or a savory charcuterie plate.

Another hotspot in Gearhart for both

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CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Gearhart Bowl, combined with a Fultano’s Pizza restaurant, is one of the few entertainment attractions in Gearhart. The historic Gearhart Ocean Inn rents out cottages located a block from downtown. The Gearhart Golf Links, established informally in the late 19th century, is touted as the oldest golf course west of the Mississippi. The Del Rey Beach State Recreation Site, off Highlands Lane, is the perfect spot for flying a kite, having a picnic or building a sandcastle.

Photos by Katherine Lacaze



Morgan Grindy

Pacific Way Bakery, now Mac’s Micro-Market, in Gearhart.

Morning activity: Breakfast, then a walk at Del Rey

BY MORGAN GRINDY

A quiet morning in Gearhart would be nothing without a fresh breakfast pastry. Head to Mac’s Micro-Market, formerly known as Pacific Way Bakery, to pick up a to-go breakfast. Located in the heart of downtown Gearhart, the bakery is walking distance from the town’s best spots. Across the street, you’ll find By The Way gift shop; next door is Trail’s End Art Association.



Morgan Grindy

Plants at Del Rey Beach.

The market sells fresh coffee along with an assortment of pastries. Try the Good Morning muffin, the raspberry cranberry coconut pecan muffin or a cherry almond scone. Their pastry case also has various kinds of croissants, scones, and morning breads. The market is open 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. Monday through Friday.

Call ahead of time to pick up your breakfast on the way to a morning stroll on Gearhart’s Del Rey Beach. Walk down Pacific Way to find a short beach

trail that will take you onto the beach and begin your walk north. Once you make it past 10th Street, you’ve made it to Del Rey Beach State Recreation Site.

For windier, colder mornings you may want to experience the beach in a more weather-protected fashion. Del Rey is known for being a car-accessible beach. Drive north on U.S. Highway 101 until you reach Highlands Lane, which has a sign pointing to Del Rey. Turn left and drive straight onto Beach Road. Beach Road eases cars onto the beach where the sand is easier to drive on. Cruise down the coastline from the comfort of your car but be careful of other vehicles on the sand.

This part of the beach is also a great spot for a walk. Rather than driving onto the beach, continue on Beach Road to the parking lot. Explore the greenery and wildlife that’s on the edge of Del Rey or look over the long beach from the grassy hills that stand between the parking lot and the sand. However you decide to explore the beach, you’re in for a peaceful morning.



Mogan Grindy

Trails End Art Association in Gearhart.

Afternoon activity: See artwork at a local gallery

BY MORGAN GRINDY

In a town as small as Gearhart, there can be a limited number of things to do. Luckily, Gearhart has plenty of art galleries sprinkled around town that feature local artists. Many of the galleries are part of Gearhart’s monthly First Saturday Art Walk.

Begin the afternoon by admiring pastel artist Susan Thomas’ vibrant seabirds, coastal landscapes and sunflowers at A Great Gallery on Pacific Way. Thomas’ work is heavily inspired by Gearhart and local beaches. Her work also includes lighthouses, Gearhart’s buildings, shells and tufted puffins, which live at Haystack Rock.

The Natural Nook Flower Shop includes the work of local consignment artists in their assortment of floral arrangements and garden items. The shop is also featured in the art walk and features terracotta garden globes, an abundance of colorful flower pots and a wide variety of decorative art.

The gallery with the largest variety of work is Trails End Art Association on A Street. Trail’s End is a cooperative of local artists of every skill level. Many mediums are featured, from oil on canvas to jewelry. July’s featured artist is Carol Braden, who specializes in life-size guitars made from recycled metal and found objects. Braden has been featured over 100 galleries nationwide and is well-known among famous musicians like Dolly Parton, Blake Shelton and Zac Brown Band.

Be sure to check out Mary Schlunegger, who is one of 28 artists featured by the gallery. She focuses on birds, using mixed media and acrylic on silver leaf. Another artist, Micheal Muldoon, features Astoria scenes in his oil paintings, such as the Liberty Theatre and ships on the Columbia. Enjoy the interpretations and details of the coast that you may have missed, through Gearhart’s local art scene.