

How to hike in the rain in Astoria

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According to the weather and climate data website Weather Atlas, it rains nearly 200 days a year in Astoria.

Meanwhile, there are more than a dozen trails in Astoria and Warrenton, with a combined 135 miles to explore. With proper preparation and gear, hiking in the rain can be an enjoyable winter activity and prevent a nasty case of cabin fever.

Choose the right path

On rainy days, it's best to avoid steep drop-offs and trails that require maneuvering over rocks or tree branches that may be slippery. Watch out for hidden dangers on wooden staircases and bridges; the surfaces can be hazardous when soaked with moisture and covered with a layer of slime.

Hiking in the cover of an old-growth forest will provide a little shelter from the rain and may even keep the trail drier in some areas. Portions of the North Head Lighthouse trail in Cape Disappointment State Park and Fort Stevens State Park are paved and forested, creating an ideal route.

If you fail to plan, you plan to fail. For the most part, it's wise to stick to shorter hikes during rainy weather, as you can always

head back if the weather takes a turn for the worse. Tell a friend about your plans so they'll know to keep tabs on your return.

You should continuously monitor the weather conditions before and during the hike, no matter the distance. If lightning is on the radar, stay home.

It's critical to keep track of when the sun is predicted to set, as it gets dark very quickly during the winter months. For this reason, even if it's just a short hike, you should bring an emergency flashlight just in case something happens on the trail and you're out longer than expected.

Keep in mind, even urban paths like the 12.8 mile Astoria Riverwalk may require an emergency flashlight. Although the trail goes through downtown, many portions of the course are not lit and become very dark after sundown.

Dress for the weather

It doesn't hurt to have multiple layers of protection for your gear and cell phone, even if you use waterproof products. Keep a cell phone, GPS or weather radio inside a plastic ziplock bag. Pack an extra trash bag to keep things dry if other options have failed.

Avoid cotton at all costs, as the fibers will hold the moisture close to your skin. Wool and synthetic layers will help keep you

warm and dry under a raincoat.

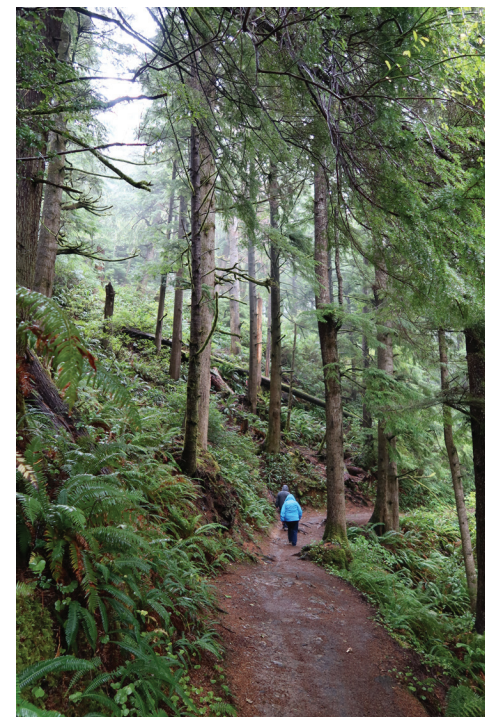
Proper footwear is essential, including the type of socks you wear; wool socks will keep your feet dry. Waterproof hiking boots are best, as there's likely to be plenty of puddles out on the trail.

Beware of lightning

If you're out on the trail and the weather takes a turn for the worse, there are essential rules to remember.

Lightning strikes structures or objects closest to the storm, so seek lower ground if you're on a mountain top or ridge. You can figure out your proximity to the storm by counting the seconds between a flash of lightning and the sound of thunder. If the sound of thunder comes less than 30 seconds after lightning, you need to find shelter immediately. If a shelter is not available, try to make your body as small as possible, crouch onto the balls of your feet with your feet touching, tuck your head and cover your ears with your hands.

The rainy months in Astoria don't have to be clouded with cabin fever. With proper gear and preparation, hiking can be one of the best winter activities on the North Coast.



The trail to Short Sand Beach in Oswald West State Park is blanketed by trees and is a short half-mile walk through the woods.



A group of hikers watch surfers in the rain at Short Sand Beach in Oswald West State Park.

Photos by Nikki Davidson/The Astorian



Rain stimulates mushroom growth, so hikers can expect to see some interesting fungi formations on a wet weather hike.



Rainy weather hikers should prepare to dodge mud puddles and wear water resistant boots, pants and coats.