

# A gorge-ous getaway

Story and photos by Tracy Beard

## Skamania Lodge area makes fun early spring outing

The Columbia River Gorge is a wonderland for both locals and visitors to the Pacific Northwest. Plan a quick getaway and indulge in a night or two at the Skamania Lodge while exploring the area. Visit the Columbia Gorge Interpretive Center Museum, discover the area's scenic outdoors, or stay inside and enjoy one of the lodge's relaxing activities. This stunning section of Washington offers a plethora of activities.

Winter and early spring travel deserve special consideration. Picnicking and tailgating are favorite summer pastimes, but the cooler months can be just as fun. Before leaving home, prepare a hot lunch to enjoy along the way. To ensure a steamy meal, place the food inside your RoadPro 12-Volt Slow Cooker and plug it into your car's lighter to keep it toasty while en route. See sidebar, next page.

Stop for a picnic at St. Cloud Day Use Area, approximately 30 miles east of Vancouver, Washington, on WA-14 at milepost (MP) 29.9. Turn right, drive over the railroad tracks, and tote your hot lunch out to one of the picnic tables in the park. This Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area makes for a convenient and attractive stop. The trees are stripped of their colorful leaves at this time of year, revealing to adventurous visitors glorious views of the river. Be mindful of the \$5 per day usage fee.

### Skamania Lodge

Continue heading east on WA-14 for another 13 miles, turn off on Skamania Lodge Road just before Stevenson, Washington. The lodge lies nestled amongst 175 acres of lush forest overlooking the Columbia River Gorge. This rustic-luxe resort makes the perfect base camp for investigating the area. Guests can choose from a variety of well-appointed rooms at the lodge ranging from the luxury treehouses and Windows on the Gorge suites to simpler cozy rooms with traditional hotel amenities.

### Outdoor Activities Abound

Take a scenic drive and view spectacular waterfalls or venture out on one of several nearby hikes. WA-14 affords easy access to trails at Beacon Rock, Hamilton Mountain, and Falls Creek Falls. Follow one of the multiple Lewis and Clark trailhead signs spotted alongside the highway.

Several treks are also available on the property at Skamania Lodge. The newly renovated Gorge Loop Fitness Trail is perfect for those seeking a moderate to difficult hike. Although the trail is only .9 miles long, it includes five stations and 17 workout activities.

Other trails circle the golf course, lead down to the nearby town of Stevenson, or take you down and around Ash Lake.

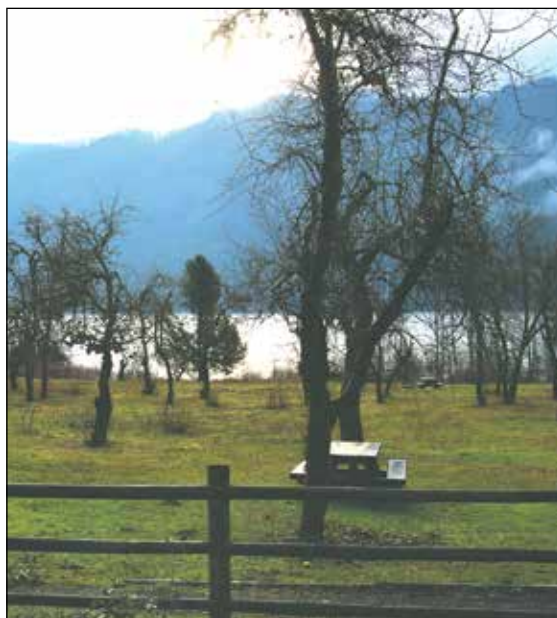
Once the weather warms up a bit, outdoor adventurers can tackle Skamania Lodge Adventures: the aerial park, the zip tour and axe throwing. The 18-hole golf course is open mid-January to mid-November, weather permitting.

### Year-Round Indoor Activities

On the third Saturday of each month, the Skamania Lodge hosts Vine Gogh at the Gorge Painting Classes. The classes include music and step-by-step painting lessons. Libations are available for purchase.

Art lovers and historians will appreciate the "Art of Discovery" walk. The late John Grey, a prominent developer, the County of Skamania, and the US Forest Service in conjunction with several grants funded the building of the Skamania Lodge. The intent was to give visitors a place to stay while discovering the area. Throughout the lodge and convention center, visitors can peruse the hallways and examine John Grey's art collection along with other works. These pieces include Native American and Northwestern sketches, paintings and sculptures.

*cont next page*



Photos, clockwise from left: St. Cloud picnic area; Skamania Lodge's lobby/viewing area; one of the outdoor hot tubs. Opposite page: Artwork on display at Skamania Lodge.

Ads removed for archival purposes



from page 14

The Waterleaf spa is a splendid place to unwind. Book a treatment, swim in the pool, sweat in the sauna or relax in one of the indoor or outdoor hot tubs. Join in a complimentary yoga class from 8–9am every Sunday.

### Columbia Gorge Interpretive Center Museum

Less than a mile from the lodge is the Columbia Gorge Interpretive Center Museum, owned and operated by the Skamania County Historical Society. “The museum is a unique and eclectic collection showcasing ‘how the gorge grew up’,” says Kara Owen, Skamania Lodge’s sales and marketing director.

The museum opened in May 1995, and the building is interpretive of an old sawmill. The spacious layout leads visitors through an easy-to-follow pathway to numerous intriguing divisions of the museum. The various exhibits

showcase early transportation, fishing, history, shopping and religion. Director Robert Peterson is an engaging and informative tour guide.

Stories of early transportation are brought to life with antique cars and trucks, old photos, and a model of one of the most luxurious sternwheelers, The Bailey Gatzert, that traveled up and down the Columbia River. The Bailey Gatzert’s whistle, stern wheel and a name board are all on display at the museum. Early passengers could travel from Portland to The Dalles, Oregon, for \$1.

The museum has a very eclectic array of exhibits including an enormous fishing wheel with an adjoining “home” where the operators lived. Different rooms throughout the building offer videos of the Mount St. Helens’s explosion, geology in and around the Columbia River and other historical events. The museum boasts a lovely display of old quilts and the Don Brown Rosary Collection, the world’s most extensive collection with just under 4,000 unique pieces. Don received most of the collection as gifts, but one rosary was solicited and was used by President John F. Kennedy during WWII.

Any time of year is a wonderful time to visit the gorge and Skamania Lodge; but if you want to beat the crowds of summer, pack a hot lunch and head out before the end of spring. I love my Road Pro slow cooker. When my kids played sports, I packed in numerous hot meals during those cold rainy Pacific Northwest nights. It is a favorite travel companion, and I hope it becomes one of yours. In the sidebar you will find a delicious, healthful travel meal.

...

## PROVISIONS

### ALONG THE TRAIL

#### Tracy’s Traveling Beef with Broccoli

- ½ C. soy sauce
  - 3 Tbl sherry
  - 2 Tbl brown sugar
  - 1 Tbl minced ginger
  - 2 cloves minced garlic
  - 1 lb stew meat (1-inch pieces)
  - ¼ C. beef broth
  - ¼ C. oyster sauce
  - Salt and pepper
  - Cornstarch slurry (2 Tbl. water mixed with 2 Tbl. cornstarch)
  - 1 lb. steamed broccoli
  - 2 C. cooked white rice
- Set your regular home crockpot to 4 hours, add all and cook for 3 hours. Add cornstarch slurry and stir.



Steam broccoli in lightly salted water on stovetop or microwave until crisp-tender. Steam or cook white rice until al dente. Store ingredients separately in your refrigerator.

When you are ready to go, add the beef mixture, broccoli and rice to your RoadPro RPSL-350 12 V 1.5 Quart Slow Cooker (available for \$35-40 at local retailers or online).

Mix the ingredients, dispersing the liquid throughout the dish. Place cooker on the floor of the passenger side of the car and secure so that it does not move or spill. I like to set mine on a towel. Plug the crockpot into your car lighter. After 30–60 minutes, your traveling beef and broccoli dish should be heated through and ready for you to enjoy while you explore the great outdoors.



Tracy Beard writes about luxury and adventure travel, fine dining and traditional and trendy libations for regional, national and international magazines and is a regular “Out & About” contributor to Columbia River Reader.

### VISITOR CENTERS

**FREE Maps • Brochures  
Directions • Information**

- **Kelso-Longview Chamber of Commerce Kelso Visitor Center** I-5 Exit 39  
105 Minor Road, Kelso • 360-577-8058
- **Woodland Tourist Center** I-5 Exit 21  
Park & Ride lot, 900 Goerig St., 360-225-9552
- **Wahkiakum Chamber** 102 Main St, Cathlamet • 360-795-9996
- **Castle Rock Visitor Center** Exit 49, west side of I-5, 890 Huntington Ave. N. Open M-F 11–3.
- **Naselle, WA Appelo Archives Center**  
1056 SR 4, Naselle, WA. 360-484-7103.
- **Pacific County Museum & Visitor Center**  
Hwy 101, South Bend, WA 360-875-5224
- **Long Beach Peninsula Visitors Bureau**  
3914 Pacific Way (corner Hwy 101/Hwy 103)  
Long Beach, WA. 360-642-2400 • 800-451-2542
- **South Columbia County Chamber** Columbia Blvd/Hwy 30, St. Helens, OR • 503-397-0685
- **Seaside, OR** 989 Broadway, 503-738-3097; 888-306-2326
- **Astoria-Warrenton Chamber/Ore Welcome Ctr**  
111 W. Marine Dr., Astoria 503-325-6311 or 800-875-6807

Map suggests only approximate positions and relative distances. Consult a real map for more precise details. We are not cartographers.