Travel: Finding ecological diversity east of Salem, Oregon

by Tracy Ellen Beard | Sep 10, 2017

SALEM, September 10, 2017 – Oregon offers a diverse landscape of mountains, forests, beaches, and farms; it's an ideal playground for those who relish life outdoors. And for Oregonians, their forests and rivers are a secret they want to keep.

What makes Oregon a four-season outdoor destination is its ecological diversity. Visitors meander through the old-growth forests where moss dangles from the trees like the long, disheveled hair of a woman after a restless night's sleep.

Hike beneath the canopy, wandering through the sun and shade, and listen for the roar of thunder as you prepare for the gentle kiss of mist floating from cascading waterfalls.



Moss on the trees at Silver Falls\Image by Tracy Beard for @CommDigiNews eNRG Kayaking

See the forests from the river after making arrangements to lazily float down the Santiam River or, for the adventurous, over 12 years of age, ride its rapids.

eNRG Kayaking in Mill City, Oregon, offers exciting fun on the North Santiam River. They provide everything necessary for a day on the water. Slip into a snug wetsuit, don a lifejacket, and get ready for fun. Each trip covers seven miles of the river on either a scenic float trip on still water or the Class III intermediate-level white water rapids.

Keep an eye out for gorgeous scenery and wildlife hidden among the trees or scurrying along the river as you paddle.



Rafting on the Santium River\Image by Tracy Beard for @CommDigiNews

Rest in Comfort

The Lodge at Detroit Lake offers eight rooms, each with a functional kitchenette, jetted tub, and cozy fireplace. The welcoming lodge rests in the heart of the Willamette National Forest, surrounded by pine trees.

The resort affords easy access to local hikes, Detroit Lake, Hoodoo Ski Resort, and Breitenbush Hot Springs.



Detroit Lakes Lodge\Image by Tracy Beard for @CommDigiNews

Activities near Detroit Lake

For an easy local hike, try out the South Breitenbush Gorge Trail. The 6.2-mile path with 740 feet of elevation gain is not very difficult. Begin at the Old Breitenbush Guard Station near the Breitenbush Hot Springs Retreat and Conference Center, then walk 100 feet down the road.

Look for a gate marking the Retreat Center, then head left and follow the sign. The route offers a variety of footpaths, boardwalks, and bridges to explore. It winds through the old-growth forest and climbs over babbling brooks.

The best time of year to hike this trail is from mid-spring to late fall.



Sign for South Breitenbush Gorge Trail\Image by Tracy Beard for @CommDigiNews



Boardwalk on South Breitenbush Gorge Trail\Image by Tracy Beard for @CommDigiNews



Foot Bridge on South Breitenbush Gorge Trail\Image by Tracy Beard for @CommDigiNews

Detroit Lake, located 46 miles southeast of Salem, is perfect for swimming, boating, fishing, and camping. Bring a bike or rent one at DL Bike Shop and venture out on the local logging roads surrounding the lake, or ride around Detroit and check out local shops and eateries.

Silver Falls State Park

Stop at Silver Falls State Park. Embark on the 8.7-mile Trail of Ten Falls, which highlights breathtaking views of all ten waterfalls in the park. If that kind of mileage seems daunting, take a trek on one of the shorter trails and discover equally eye-catching views of the waterfalls within the park.



Silver Falls\Image by Tracy Beard for @CommDigiNews

The state park opened in 1933, and the Civilian Conservation Corps completed a majority of the construction. (Franklin D. Roosevelt devised the CCC as a federal program to help put young men to work after the Great Depression.)

The very popular Silver Falls State Park covers 9,000 acres. Over the course of a year, more than 1.3 million visitors frequent the park during the day, and almost 80,000 stay overnight in tents, cabins, yurts, or the RV campground.

This temperate rainforest, located at lower elevations in Oregon's Cascade Mountains, is a great place to visit year-round. Each season offers a spectacular display of colors, and the mild climate ensures that the park rarely closes due to snow or ice.



Eagle Creek Before the Fire\Image by Tracy Beard for @CommDigiNews

Trexler Farms

In Stayton, Oregon, Trexler Farms is owned by Kirk and Sharlene Trexler, who purchased the farm in 1997. Each weekday, Sharlene and her staff prepare lunch for many locals. They cater special events, and their cuisine is impressive.

The chicken with champagne sauce, salmon with herbs, broccoli salad, tasty vegetables, and roasted sweet potatoes are scrumptious, but leave room for one of her delicious desserts: coconut cake, chocolate ice cream pie, or a 7th Heaven bar.



Tasty Vegetables at Trexler Farms\Image by Tracy Beard for @CommDigiNews

The Trexlers and their staff are not only great restaurateurs but are also unknown heroes.

Fires, like the ones currently blazing, are common in forested areas. When the Niagara fire broke out near Big Cliff Dam in Marion County in July 2015, firefighting crews deluged the area to contain the fire that stormed through the local forest.

The staff at Trexler Farms stepped up to feed the hungry firefighters. What began as one order for 65 lunches suddenly grew into more than 450 meals a day on peak days and more than 2,200 throughout the 10-day fire.



Dining at Trexler Farms\Image by Tracy Beard for @CommDigiNews

Saving the Forest

Unfortunately, Oregon's playground is on fire. From the beautiful Columbia River Gorge to Southern Oregon, sections of forest are ablaze. In September 2017, ash fell from the sky like snow. Smoke filled the air from the Columbia River Gorge all the way south of the Oregon/California border along the Interstate 5 corridor.

The most recent fire on the popular Eagle Creek Trail out of Cascade Locks only added to the smoke-infested air from the already-burning central Oregon fires. Firefighters battle the blaze, but in the end, how much of the beloved playground will be lost, and how will people handle this tragedy?

Combating natural or manmade disasters requires the help of entire communities and often the government.

Trained individuals battle on the front lines, but everyone in the local and surrounding communities must support those fighting against the calamity. These tragedies are difficult, but they will not last forever.

Once the emergency is over, workers will rally to restore the ravaged areas. Join in with the communities and help rejuvenate this gorgeous state so everyone can enjoy its magnificence.



Hike at Silver Falls\Image by Tracy Beard for @CommDigiNews

The area surrounding the outskirts of Salem is particularly beautiful and less traversed. Once these current fires end, head east of Salem and enjoy the splendor of Oregon. While you're there, look for Oregon's unsung heroes, like the Trexlers, who make the world a better place.