

WASHINGTON STATE NATIONAL PARK ROAD TRIP

Seattle to Olympic, Mount Rainier & North Cascades -- and Back Again

The complete planning system for a Washington State national park loop: exact drive times, current 2026 conditions and construction closures, full mini-guides to Seattle and all three parks, six itinerary options, a master reservation timeline, per-town lodging strategy, and the backup plans that save a trip when weather doesn't cooperate.

SEATTLE * OLYMPIC * MOUNT RAINIER * NORTH CASCADES

Adventure Family Vlog
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Firsthand family travel expertise for the Pacific Northwest & America's National Parks

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About This Free Preview

A sample of The Ultimate Washington State National Park Road Trip Guide 2026

This free preview pulls seven sections straight from the full, 116-chapter premium guide -- the same research, the same 2026 accuracy, the same practical detail. The full guide covers Seattle and all three parks in depth, real drive times, multiple itinerary options, and everything you need to plan this trip with confidence; this preview gives you a genuine taste of what's inside before you buy.

Trip at a Glance

The Route	Seattle -> Olympic National Park -> Mount Rainier National Park -> North Cascades National Park -> Seattle
Flagship Itinerary Length	11-12 days -- our recommended pace for a first Washington national parks trip
Minimum Realistic Length	7 days, highly selective, condensing every park to its highlights
Ideal Extended Length	14-16 days, with real time for Olympic's spread-out zones, a North Cascades backcountry day, and room for an optional detour
Total Core Driving Distance	Roughly 700-800 miles for the full loop, not counting in-park driving
Total Entrance Fees (individual)	\$60/vehicle -- \$30 Olympic, \$30 Mount Rainier, \$0 North Cascades
Best Single Purchase	America the Beautiful Annual Pass, \$80 for US citizens/residents (Non-Resident version \$250) -- covers all three parks plus every other federal recreation site for a year
Biggest 2026 Changes	Mount Rainier's timed-entry system cancelled; Ohanapecosh closed for the season; Grove of the Patriarchs still closed
Best Season	Mid-July through September for the full loop, when North Cascades Highway and both parks' seasonal roads are open
Home Base Airport	Seattle-Tacoma International (SEA) -- the trip starts and ends here

2026 Current Conditions & Before You Go

Read this chapter before you book anything

Washington's mountain parks are more seasonally and construction-sensitive than almost anywhere else in the National Park System. Confirm every item below before you lock in dates.

2026 Olympic Travel Alert -- Hoh River Bridge / Highway 101

The 95-year-old Highway 101 bridge over the Hoh River, south of Forks, is undergoing emergency repairs in fall 2026. As of our most recent research, the published schedule is: **overnight closures (roughly 10:30 p.m.-5:30 a.m.) September 14-22; full closures September 24-29, October 1-6, and October 8-13.** There is no local detour across the Hoh River -- when the bridge is closed, routing around the east side of the Olympic Peninsula instead can add several hours to a trip, and the usual clockwise or counterclockwise loop around Highway 101 becomes impractical during the extended closures. If your trip falls between mid-September and mid-October 2026, you may need to completely restructure the Olympic portion of your itinerary -- decide in advance whether you'll spend your Olympic days entirely north of the bridge (Port Angeles, Lake Crescent, Sol Duc, Forks, Hoh, La Push) or entirely south of it (Kalaloch, Quinault), rather than planning to cross it. Separately, Mora Road beyond Mora Campground is also closed for road repairs from roughly July 8 through October 15, 2026, which means **Rialto Beach is not accessible** during that window -- check current status before planning a Rialto day. Verify the latest NPS/WSDOT schedule at nps.gov/olym and wsdot.wa.gov before departure, since construction timing can change.

Master Route Table

The single most useful page in this guide -- bookmark it or take a screenshot before you leave home.

Leg	Miles	Drive Time	Best Departure	Notes
Seattle to Port Angeles	~85 mi	1.5-2 hrs (ferry) / 2.5-3 hrs (drive-around)	7-8 a.m.	Ferry: check WSDOT wait times first. Drive-around: I-5 S to US-101 W.
Port Angeles to Lake Crescent/Sol Duc	~20-30 mi	30-45 min	Flexible	Short, scenic, no rush
Forks to Hoh Rain Forest	~20 mi + spur	45-60 min one-way	Early -- lot fills by mid-morning	No fuel or food at the Hoh itself
Kalaloch/Forks area to Mount Rainier (Ashford)	~200-220 mi	5-5.5 hrs	7-8 a.m.	The longest leg of the entire trip -- treat as a full travel day
Paradise to Sunrise (via Stevens Canyon, seasonal)	~65 mi	2-2.5 hrs one-way	Early morning	See the Realistic Drive-Time Warning earlier in this guide
Mount Rainier (Ashford) to North Cascades (Marblemount)	~180-200 mi	4.5-5 hrs	7-8 a.m.	Via I-5 N and SR-20 E through Sedro-Woolley
North Cascades (Marblemount) to Seattle	~110-120 mi	2.5-3 hrs	Flexible	SR-20 W to I-5 S

Hurricane Ridge

The Easiest Way to See the Olympic Mountains Up Close

Why go: a short drive from Port Angeles delivers sweeping alpine views most parks require a serious hike to reach. Realistic time needed: a half-day, longer if hiking Hurricane Hill. Parking: a large lot that can still fill on summer weekends -- NPS recommends arriving before 7 a.m. during peak summer for the best odds. Facilities: the historic Hurricane Ridge Day Lodge burned down in May 2023 and has not been rebuilt -- there is currently no indoor visitor center, no cafe, and no gift shop. A temporary outdoor visitor contact station and portable restroom trailers are available, but there's no indoor space to warm up or wait out weather, so bring your own water and check the forecast before you go. Family suitability: good -- the paved sections of the Cirque Rim Trail remain accessible, though without the lodge's indoor amenities. Crowd strategy: arrive early; the area gets genuinely busy by midday in July and August, and 2026 construction (utility and water system work) may add weekday closures in early summer -- verify current status before you go. Nearby pairing: Lake Crescent, about 30-40 minutes away, pairs naturally for a full day.

AFV Stay Pick: A-Frame in Packwood

One of our firsthand lodging recommendations, and a genuine standout in the Packwood area: an entire-home A-frame cabin in Packwood's Timberline community, about 7 miles from Mount Rainier and 16 miles from White Pass Ski Area. Two bedrooms, four beds (a private queen bedroom plus a loft with a queen and a twin bunk), one bathroom, a private hot tub, a wooded backyard with a fire pit -- and elk are commonly seen right from the property. It's well suited to a family using Packwood as a base for Paradise, since it puts you close to the mountain without the premium of an in-park stay. Note that cell service at the cabin is limited, though WiFi calling and texting work fine. As with any short-term rental, verify current availability and pricing directly before booking -- we don't guarantee either here.

Day 8: Mount Rainier -- Sunrise

Morning	Depart via Stevens Canyon Road/SR-123/SR-410 -- budget 2-2.5 hours; see the Realistic Drive-Time Warning
Midday	Arrive Sunrise, Sourdough Ridge Trail
Afternoon	Mount Fremont Lookout if energy and time allow, then begin positioning toward North Cascades
Where to sleep	Greenwater or Enumclaw, positioned for tomorrow's drive to North Cascades
Driving today	~65 mi to Sunrise plus continuing toward tonight's lodging

Plan B (low energy): Sourdough Ridge alone, skipping Mount Fremont Lookout -- still delivers Sunrise's signature close-up mountain views.

Plan C (Stevens Canyon Road closed): if the seasonal road isn't open yet or has closed early, the only route to Sunrise is the long way around via SR-706, I-5, and SR-410 -- 3+ hours. Consider skipping Sunrise entirely this trip rather than losing most of a day to driving.

This Free Preview Ends Here

Get the Complete Guide

The full Ultimate Washington State National Park Road Trip Guide 2026 includes all 116 chapters: complete mini-guides to Seattle and all three parks (Olympic's tide-planning chapter and 15 destination write-ups, Mount Rainier's corrected volcanic history and construction alerts, North Cascades' Cascade Pass deep-dive), the full 11-12 day flagship itinerary with Plan A/B/C notes for every single day plus five more itinerary variants, a master reservation timeline, real per-town lodging and dining recommendations, four route-map specifications, cross-park safety and backup-plan tables, and a full quick-reference back section -- all built around current 2026 conditions. Get the complete guide at AdventureFamilyVlog.com.