

THE ULTIMATE PACIFIC WEST ROAD TRIP

Los Angeles to Seattle -- 11 National Parks, One Unforgettable Journey

The complete planning system for the ultimate West Coast national park journey: realistic drive-time estimates across all 11 parks, current 2026 conditions and seasonal closures, full mini-guides to every park plus Los Angeles and Seattle, multiple itinerary options from 24 to 28 days, a master reservation timeline, and the routing decisions that make or break a trip this ambitious.

11 NATIONAL PARKS * 3 STATES * ONE EPIC ROUTE

Adventure Family Vlog
AdventureFamilyVlog.com

Firsthand family travel expertise for the American West & the National Parks

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About This Free Preview

A sample of The Ultimate Pacific West Road Trip Guide 2026

This preview pulls sections straight from the full guide -- the same research, the same 2026 accuracy, the same practical detail. The full guide covers all 11 national parks from Joshua Tree to Olympic, with real drive times, ten transfer-day execution plans, 24-day and 28-day itineraries, lodging and dining picks for every gateway, and nine finished route maps. Look for the bracketed tags (such as [PLAN B]) that flag the same kind of information at a glance throughout the full guide.

Trip at a Glance

The whole trip in one table.

The Route	Los Angeles -> Joshua Tree -> Sequoia -> Kings Canyon -> Pinnacles -> Yosemite -> Lassen Volcanic -> Redwood -> Crater Lake -> Mount Rainier -> North Cascades -> Olympic -> Seattle
Structure	One-way -- starts LAX, ends SEA, no backtracking to the starting city
Recommended Length	24 days -- our primary recommendation for a first attempt at this trip
Comfortable Alternate	28 days, with real buffer for the two hardest transfer days and fuller time in North Cascades and Olympic
States Crossed	California, Oregon, Washington
Total Core Driving Distance	Roughly 2,400-2,600 miles for the full one-way route, not counting in-park driving
Total Entrance Fees (individual)	\$250/vehicle across all fee-charging parks -- Redwood and North Cascades charge none
Best Single Purchase	America the Beautiful Annual Pass, \$80 for US citizens/residents (\$250 non-resident version) -- covers every fee-charging park on this route for a year
Central Seasonal Tension	Joshua Tree wants cool weather; the mountain parks want summer road access -- see the Best Season chapter
Start Airport	Los Angeles International (LAX)
End Airport	Seattle-Tacoma International (SEA)

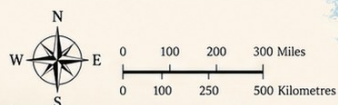
Map 1 — Full Los Angeles to Seattle Route

11 National Parks • One Northbound Journey

From desert landscapes to giant sequoias, volcanic peaks and rugged coastlines, this bucket-list route connects 11 incredible national parks on an unforgettable journey from Los Angeles to Seattle.

LEGEND

-  Route (northbound)
-  Numbered stop (with national park)
-  Major highway
-  National park
-  State boundary
-  Lake / water body



ROUTE STOPS

- 1 Los Angeles
- 2 Joshua Tree National Park
- 3 Sequoia National Park
- 4 Kings Canyon National Park
- 5 Pinnacles National Park
East & West entrances are not connected inside the park.
- 6 Yosemite National Park
- 7 Lassen Volcanic National Park
- 8 Redwood National and State Parks
- 9 Crater Lake National Park
- 10 Mount Rainier National Park
- 11 North Cascades National Park
- 12 Olympic National Park
- 13 Seattle

Road Trip Leg 5: Lassen Volcanic to Redwood

Every transfer between parks gets its own execution plan -- not just distance and time, but the route, fuel strategy, and what's worth (or not worth) a detour.

Distance/Time (no stops)	~230-233 mi, ~4h40m-5h driving
Realistic time with stops	5-5.5 hrs
Preferred route	CA-44 W to Redding, then CA-299 W to the coast, joining US-101 N to Redwood -- CA-44 alone does not reach US-101; CA-299 is the required connector
Fuel strategy	Fill up in Redding again if you didn't top off fully on Leg 4 -- the stretch toward the coast on CA-299 has real gaps
Optional Scenic Detour	Avenue of the Giants is south of the direct Lassen-to-Redwood route. It is a spectacular redwood drive and can be worthwhile if you have substantial extra time, but it requires driving south from the Arcata/Eureka area before retracing your route north toward Redwood National and State Parks -- do not treat it as a quick parallel alternate on this itinerary
Not worth detouring for	Eureka's full downtown if you're behind schedule -- a quick fuel/food stop is enough

INTERNATIONAL VISITOR NOTE -- 2026

If anyone in your group is not a US citizen or permanent resident, two of the eleven parks on this route -- Yosemite and Sequoia & Kings Canyon -- charge an additional \$100 per person nonresident fee (age 16+), on top of the standard entrance fee, effective January 1, 2026. Here's how the pass options actually work: **the standard \$80 America the Beautiful Annual Pass** (available only to US citizens/residents, who must show proof of citizenship or residency to purchase it) covers standard entrance fees at every fee-charging park on this route, but does not exist as an option for non-residents. **The \$250 Non-Resident America the Beautiful Annual Pass**, new for 2026, is the only annual option available to non-residents -- it covers standard entrance at every fee-charging federal site nationwide AND waives the \$100/person nonresident surcharge at Yosemite and Sequoia/Kings Canyon for the pass holder plus three additional nonresident travelers. For a family of four who are all non-residents visiting just these two stops on this route, the \$250 pass pays for itself almost immediately versus paying the surcharge separately at each entrance. The other 9 parks on this route do not charge the nonresident surcharge regardless of which pass you carry.

2026 CLOSURE ALERT -- CLEETWOOD COVE

Cleetwood Cove Trail -- the only legal access to the lake shore -- is closed for the entire 2026 season (and through 2027-2028) for a major rehabilitation project, per official NPS announcements. The Cleetwood Cove parking area is also closed. **No boat tours operate in 2026** -- there is no swimming, no Wizard Island landing, and no lakeshore access this year. Cleetwood Cove is the major season-long closure. Most other Crater Lake experiences remain available, but East Rim Drive construction and other facility/trail conditions may change during 2026 -- check the official NPS Current Conditions page shortly before your visit. The Cleetwood Cove trail and boat tours are expected to reopen in 2029.

Two Different Reservation Rules -- Don't Mix Them Up

Fern Canyon/Gold Bluffs Beach: a free day-use reservation is required May 15-September 15 only (not required the rest of the year). This is a California State Parks day-use area (Prairie Creek Redwoods State Park), not an NPS fee -- Redwood National Park itself has no entrance fee at all. A \$12 cash/check day-use fee is collected at the kiosk, **but this fee is waived for holders of any federal America the Beautiful pass, a California State Parks Annual/Poppy Pass, or a current Gold Bluffs Beach/Elk Prairie Campground reservation.** Note that even with the fee waived, the free online reservation may still be required during the May 15-September 15 window -- the reservation and the fee are two separate things. The access road is 8 miles, narrow, unpaved, with stream crossings -- not suited to large RVs or trailers. **Tall Trees Grove:** a free reservation is required year-round, every day, regardless of season -- a different rule than Fern Canyon, and easy to get wrong if you assume they work the same way.

Redwood at a Glance: Premium Planning Panel

Every park gets a compact panel like this one.

Category	Recommendation
If You Only Have One Day	Lady Bird Johnson Grove (no reservation needed) plus Fern Canyon or Tall Trees Grove if you have a reservation
Best Easy Experience	Lady Bird Johnson Grove (1.5 mi loop, no reservation)
Best Family Option	Lady Bird Johnson Grove -- flattest, most predictable option
Best Big Hike	Tall Trees Grove (4.5 mi RT, moderate, reservation required year-round)
Best Viewpoint	Fern Canyon's 50-foot fern-draped walls
Parking Reality	Fern Canyon's small lot fills fast in summer; the access road itself limits vehicle size
Cell Service	Very limited throughout the park
Photography Tip	Fern Canyon in overcast light avoids harsh contrast between canyon walls and sky
Plan B	No Fern Canyon reservation -> Lady Bird Johnson Grove needs none
Seasonal Gotcha	Fern Canyon's reservation is required May 15-Sept 15 only; Tall Trees Grove requires one year-round -- don't mix up the two rules

Day 22: North Cascades -- Choose One Option

This is a genuine either/or choice -- don't try to combine both in one day. Cascade Pass needs a full day on its own, and combining it with the highway highlights below has repeatedly proven unrealistic.

Option A: Highway Highlights Day

Details below.

Morning	Diablo Lake Overlook, Gorge Creek Falls
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Midday	Thunder Knob Trail (a shorter, moderate hike near Colonial Creek)
Afternoon	Washington Pass Overlook
Where to sleep	Same base
Driving today	SR-20 corridor driving only

Option B: Cascade Pass Day

Details below.

Early morning	Depart very early -- Cascade River Road itself takes real time (partly gravel, narrows considerably)
Morning-Afternoon	Cascade Pass Trail (7.4 mi RT) -- treat this as the day's entire main activity
Where to sleep	Same base
Driving today	Cascade River Road round trip plus the trailhead approach -- verify current road and trailhead access status before committing to this option

[PLAN B] **Plan B:** if Cascade River Road is limited or closed, default to Option A -- Diablo Lake Overlook and Washington Pass Overlook together still deliver the park's best roadside scenery.

This Free Preview Ends Here

Get the Complete Guide

The full Ultimate Pacific West Road Trip Guide 2026 includes mini-guides to all 11 national parks (Joshua Tree, Sequoia, Kings Canyon, Pinnacles, Yosemite, Lassen, Redwood, Crater Lake, Mount Rainier, North Cascades, Olympic) with a Premium Planning Panel and signature-hike detail for each, execution plans for all ten transfer days, the complete 24-day and 28-day itineraries with Plan B alternatives, a master reservation table and timeline, lodging and dining picks for every gateway, a budget with itemized arithmetic, a cross-park safety chapter, printable checklists, and nine finished route maps -- all built around current 2026 conditions. Get the complete guide at AdventureFamilyVlog.com.