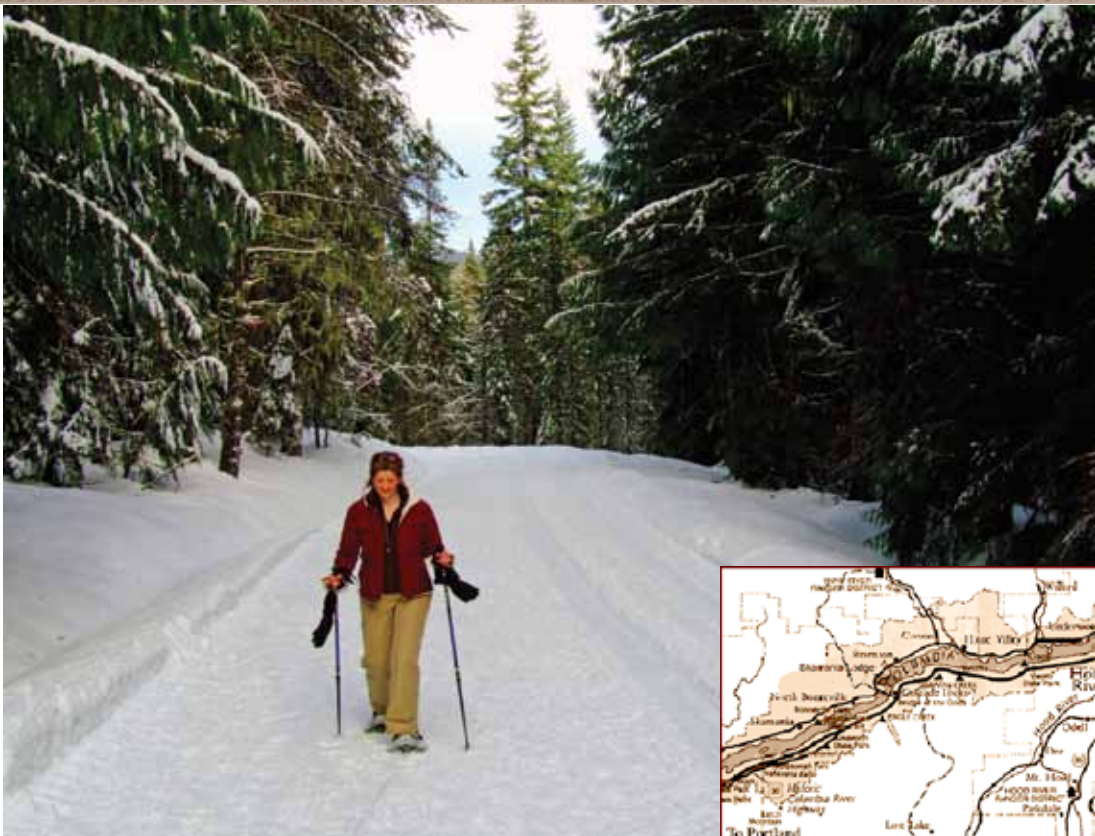


On Trail



Are you looking for snowy escapades or would you prefer a snow-free hike? Either way the Columbia River Gorge has you covered.

Here, a snowshoer enjoys the easy terrain at Trillium Lake. Photo by Eli Boschetto.

Map courtesy of Explore the Gorge.



Stay Close, Play More

Soft beds and day trips in the Columbia Gorge

If the mere mention of taking a “staycation” this winter sends you straight to your laptop in search of the cheapest flight anywhere out of town, hang on. I think you’re going to like the Gorge.

My family takes our vacations in small, weekend-sized chunks close to our home base of Seattle. With our energy-filled toddler in tow, we combine outdoor activities like day hiking with exploring small towns or visiting local wineries. Local travel saves us money, we get to know our beautiful region inside and

outside, and we still get our much-needed time off together.

Near the top of our list for winter weekend getaways is the mighty Columbia River Gorge—the only sea-level passage through the Cascades and a bona fide four-season destination for hearty hikers. Trails for all abilities lead to dramatic waterfalls that are always beautiful and occasionally frozen. As you move up from the river on both the Washington and Oregon sides, you will find plenty of opportunities for snowshoe hikes and cross-country skiing. In between your daytime outdoor pursuits, rest your head on a soft bed in one of the gorge’s small-town hotels or bed-and-breakfasts.

Lauren Braden

Lauren is WTA’s Director of Communications. She also runs Northwest Tripfinder. Get inspiration and advice for Pacific Northwest travelers at nwtripfinder.com.

Safety Tips

The Columbia River Gorge is gorgeous in every season, but it's subject to some wild weather in winter. Although most of the Gorge roads and trails sit at pretty low elevation, erratic weather patterns and intense wind can deliver blustery conditions. Have an emergency kit in your car, carry tire chains and pack extra blankets. Make sure your boots have good traction, dress in layers and bring head-to-toe rain gear. Hiking poles can be helpful on wet, slippery trails. Poison oak is common on the Lyle Cherry Orchard Trail and other trails in this area of the Gorge, and the allergen oil, *urushiol*, is still present on plant stems that have lost their leaves for the winter. Wear long pants and wash up thoroughly with soap and water after your hike.

Winter Waterfalls

When the mighty Columbia River cut a deep canyon through the Cascades, it just wanted to get to the ocean. But hikers have been reaping the benefits for years, as the river's urgency gave us dramatic scenery with a plethora of cascading waterfalls enveloped by mossy canyons. These waterfall hikes below are all accessible off of the Historic Columbia River Highway or its east-west parallel route, Interstate 84. You can stay overnight on either end of this waterfall route.

Where to Play

Latourell Falls Loop. 2.3 miles round trip, 540 feet gain. Oregon State Parks. Two falls, and upper and a lower, compete for star attraction status on this easy state park hike close to Portland. The first of the falls, tumbling off a basalt cliff, is just 300 feet up the paved trail.

Bridal Veil Falls. 1.2 miles round trip, 175 feet gain. Take this quick and easy paved-to-gravel path to a two-tiered cascade that is viewed from a platform.

Multnomah - Wahkeena Falls. 5.4 miles round trip, 1,550 feet gain. The 620-foot Multnomah Falls is the highest of the 77 waterfalls on the Oregon side of the Gorge. In just a quarter mile, you'll be standing on the breathtaking and historic Benson Bridge, which crosses Multnomah Creek between the two tiers of the falls. To get the full view, keep hiking up to the top of the falls, a 600-foot climb from the parking lot. You can turn around here as most tourists do, or keep hiking for the Wahkeena Loop Trail and several more cascades along the way, some big and some small.

Eagle Creek. 12 miles round trip, 1,100 feet gain. It's a stunning and dramatic hike with so many falls along the way that most any



In winter, the fine mist coming off of Multnomah Falls frosts the nearby rocks and trees. Photo by Josh McCullough.

turnaround point will satisfy. This breathtaking route is blasted into the side of a rockface in parts and takes hikers behind the scrim of a plunging waterfall. Hike with sure footing, bring hiking poles and utilize the handrails.

Where to Stay

Hood River BnB. Want a soft bed a few blocks from the shops and brewpubs of downtown Hood River? Enjoy a hot breakfast on the house, a hammock on the deck, and plenty of room to stow your gear. The friendly owner is happy to share her knowledge of local attractions and recreation. Rooms start at \$85. hoodriverbnb.com

Hood River Hotel. Stay in an historic inn right downtown with charming rooms, ensuite baths, some with kitchens. Amenities include a sauna and free wifi. Rooms start at \$99. hoodriverhotel.com

McMenamins Edgefield. Set on a lush 38-acre parcel of farmland on the Columbia River in Troutdale, the Edgefield has its own onsite brewery, winery, distillery and spa. Live music and the onsite glassblower and potter will keep you entertained. An overnight stay here is a lively experience; bring earplugs if you head to bed early. Hostel beds available. Private rooms start at \$50. mcmenamins.com

McMenamin's Edgefield location provides a spirited retreat for winter travelers.





Kim Brown ambling through the Lyle Cherry Orchard. Photo by Susan Elderkin.

Open Vistas

Sunshine draws explorers to the east end of the Gorge. Vistas open up. Oak trees dot the landscape. The sky is big. Many of the hiking opportunities in this region are relatively new, and not all trails are well signed. The best way to ensure you're on the right trail is to have a topo map and good hiking guidebook with you (I recommend Craig Romano's *Day Hiking: Columbia River Gorge*, which includes all of the trails below). Stop at one of the region's local wineries after your hike for a different kind of taste of the landscape.

Where to Play

Lyle Cherry Orchard. 5 miles round trip, 1,100 feet gain. Looking for winter sunshine? Head into the rain shadow. The Friends of the Columbia Gorge own and manage this stunning preserve, where you'll find traces of a century-old cherry orchard. Gnarled garry oak clump into pockets of forest too, providing habitat for diverse birdlife on the other side of winter. This little-known hike is a hidden gem, one of the best finds on the Washington side of the east Columbia River Gorge. Views of the Columbia River toward The Dalles are spectacular. Keep in mind that with those wide-open views can come blustery wind, so dress warmly.

Coyote Wall. 6 miles round trip, 630 feet gain. The stunning wall is a rising columnar basalt ridge, and the main trail will take you through scattered ponderosa pine atop its cliff to enjoy panoramic views of the river. Avoid the user-built spur for both safety and ecological reasons, and keep a close eye on children around the steep cliffs.

Catherine Creek Labyrinth. 4.3 miles round trip, 780 feet gain. If basalt is your thing, the Catherine Creek area rewards with outstanding rock formations. User-built trails can be confusing (and damaging) here, so take care to stick to the main loop trail. For a longer hike, the labyrinth trail can be combined with Coyote Wall.

Where to Stay

Lyle Hotel. Old and charming, Lyle Hotel has great touches like fluffy robes and down comforters, but they keep room rates reasonable. Bathrooms are shared. Some rooms are on the side of the hotel that is nearest the railroad tracks, which train enthusiasts will love, but be warned (just bring earplugs). Rooms start at \$65. lylehotel.com

Bingen School Inn Columbia Gorge Hostel. Sleep on the cheap in this historic Civilian Conservation Corps construction school house, complete with chalkboards in the rooms. A cool amenity is its classic wooden gymnasium with indoor basketball and a rock climbing wall. Dorm bed \$19, private rooms from \$49. bingenschool.com

Quaint details at the Lyle Hotel



Northwest Explorer articles describe backpacking trips in the Northwest and beyond. Want to write about your trip? Email editor@wta.org



Go Deeper

Want to learn more about the Columbia River Gorge? Here are a few helpful resources—from websites to check out to the ultimate way of getting to know a place, building a trail with WTA!

Visit Waterfalls

Northwest. An online resource for waterfall lovers, this website maintains a database of cascades throughout Washington, Oregon and Idaho. waterfallnorthwest.com

Read *Day Hiking: Columbia River Gorge*.

Craig Romano's well-researched guidebook features 100 hikes on both side of the Gorge. mountaineersbooks.org

Join Friends of the Columbia Gorge. This nonprofit organization that protects the scenic, natural, cultural, and recreational resources of the Columbia River Gorge. gorgefriends.org

Volunteer in the Gorge.

Washington Trails Association hosts work parties on Columbia Gorge hiking trails year-round. Visit wta.org for more information.



Winter Wonderland

For some, a mid-winter getaway is only complete with plenty of beautiful white snow. Just to the south of Hood River in the Columbia Gorge you'll find one of the Pacific Northwest's most iconic winter wonderlands, the slopes and valleys around Mount Hood. Downhill skiing at Timberline Ski Resort draws thousands of powder-seekers and it is possible to ski there nearly year-round. The national forest trails listed below are best explored on snowshoes or cross-country skis. All of these opportunities and lodgings are congregated around the small community of Government Camp on the south flank of Oregon's mighty mountain.

Where to Play

Trillium Lake. 5 miles round trip, minimal elevation gain. You won't see any of the name-sake trillium while snowshoeing here, but you will see plenty of Mount Hood as you stomp through these snowy meadows 40 miles from Portland. The mostly flat, wide trail area makes it an excellent choice for beginners, but all levels will enjoy the views. Mount Hood is the main attraction, but the frozen lake and meadows have considerable charm, too. Weekends can be very busy and parking is limited.

Barlow Pass. 6 miles round trip, 600 feet elevation gain. Snowshoers and cross-country skiers follow the Pacific Crest Trail to Barlow Pass to explore the rugged wilderness of Mount Hood's lowlands.

White River West. 3 miles round trip, 600 feet elevation gain. Hike toward breathtaking views of Mount Hood's imposing summit as you parallel the White River canyon. About a quarter-mile into the hike is "the pit," one of the most popular sledding spots near Mount Hood. Once you pass this steep bowl, you can enjoy the majesty of the mountain before you

Barlow Pass snowshoers. Photo by Darryl Lloyd.

Timberline Lodge, one of the Pacific Northwest's classic winter destinations



in more peace and tranquility. Hike up and along the ridgeline until you reach the overhead powerlines, a good turn-around point.

Where to Stay

Timberline Lodge. Where the lodgepole pines end, the permanent snowfields begin. Timberline Lodge is one of the best examples of depression-era WPA-built mountain architecture in the United States. The setting is dramatic any time of year, but never more so than in winter when thick white snow blankets the lodge and surrounding terrain. History buffs, take note: throughout the lodge you will learn its rich story of creation. Local carpenters crafted everything from the wall panels to bedside tables from hand-hewn Douglas-fir, while blacksmiths welded ironwork to adorn each drawer and door. But it's the world-class recreation, from mountaineering to downhill skiing, which draws most visitors to this mountain getaway. Winter rates are a splurge, but even if you don't stay the night, stop in for a drink at the bar or coffee by the fire. timberlinelodge.com

Laughing Bear Cabin. One of several cabins built by the Steiners, prolific cabinbuilders in the 1920s and 1930s. This one has all the original furniture, bear locks, bent wood and Dutch doors. laughingbearlogcabins.com

Cascade Huts. Snowshoe or cross-country ski from cabin to cabin. These huts offer the opportunity for self-guided, multi-day trips. \$150 a night for a hut that sleeps up to eight. (Barlow Butte hut shown above left.) cascadehuts.com

So, have I convinced you to stay and play close to home this winter?♦