

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE OLYMPIC BIOSPHERE RESERVE

The Olympic National Park is situated in the Olympic Peninsula which is located in the State of Washington, on the west coast of the United States. Initially, this site was designated as Mount Olympus National Monument in 1909 by the American President Theodore Roosevelt. 29 years later, in 1938 Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Congress gave another name to the "Monument" and declared it a national park. And it was not until **1976** that UNESCO declared the Olympic National Park as an **International Biosphere Reserve**. Lastly, in 1981 it was declared a World Heritage Site.

The park covers an area of 3.734 km<sup>2</sup>, and within the park, there are diverse ecosystems; including temperate rainforests, alpine meadows, rugged coastlines, and glacier-capped mountains.

## ECOLOGICAL CHARACTERISTICS

The Olympic National Park has a rich variety of flora and fauna. Indeed, over 1,450 types of vascular plants grow on the Peninsula. It has some characteristic trees such as Sitka spruce (*Picea sitchensis*), western hemlock (*Tsuga heterophylla*), and western red cedar (*Thuja plicata*). It has also a lot of flower species, for example in the montane forests grow wildflowers such as Bunchberries – *Cornus unalaschensis*, Bead lilies – *Clintonia uniflora*, etc. Additionally, 11 major river systems drain their water streams in the Olympic Mountains, providing adequate habitats for anadromous fish species to live. The wilderness coastline, the largest undeveloped coast in the US and therefore the least exploited by human beings, has a wide variety of native and endemic (species that only exist in a natural way, and that their existence is limited to a geographic area smaller than a continent) animal and plant species, including endangered animals as the northern spotted owl (*Strix occidentalis*) and the marbled murrelet (*Brachyramphus marmoratus*). Apart from that, there is a large coastal subspecies of Roosevelt elk (*Cervus elaphus roosevelti*), the protection of that specie was the main reason for the establishment of the national park in 1938.

## SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS

It is not legal to cut down the trees from this natural reserve. In addition, about 3 million visitors go annually to visit the park, and some touristic trails have been created for visitors to walk around the National Park.

The Olympic Mountains have been for many centuries the traditional homeland of many Native American groups who have benefited from the rich natural resources of the forests and rivers. Indeed, there are 8 Olympic Peninsula tribes that still maintain a relationship with the park based on the traditional land use, origin, beliefs, mythology, and spiritual beliefs and practices. These tribes are called Lower Elwha Klallam, Jamestown S'Klallam, Port Gamble S'Klallam, Skokomish, Quinault, Hoh, Quileute, and Makah. The ancestor of those tribes were the owners of the Olympic Peninsula, and they were the ones that ceded their land and

waters to the federal government through treaties in 1855 and 1856. Nowadays, those tribes live on reservations along the shores of the island.

## TRIP IDEAS of the website of the Olympic National Park

If you only have **several hours to visit** the park, the website advises you to do the following: stop first at the Olympic National Park Visitor Center in Port Angeles. Exhibits, an orientation film and friendly staff will help you make the most of your time at Olympic.

After your visitor center stop, you might consider one of these options:

- A 45-minute drive from Port Angeles to Hurricane Ridge brings you from the lowlands blanketed with old growth forests to treeline, where clumps of subalpine firs give way to open meadows. On a clear day, views of the Olympic Mountains and Strait of Juan de Fuca are spectacular.
- From Port Angeles, drive about 30 minutes west to Lake Crescent where you can stroll along the shores of the 12-mile long, glacially-carved lake.
- From Port Angeles, a 75-minute drive will bring you to Rialto Beach, where you can walk along a beach amidst drift logs and stones, watch waves crash onto offshore islands, and perhaps spot a bald eagle soaring overhead.

On the contrary, if you have **one long day**, you'll have time for a quick visit to each of Olympic's major ecosystems, the mountains, the forest and the coast.

- You can reach nearly a mile in elevation with a trip to Hurricane Ridge, where you'll find a visitor center and nature trails. Beginning early in the morning will increase your chances of seeing wildlife and help avoid the larger number of visitors later in the day.
- From Hurricane Ridge, a three-hour drive to the west will bring you to the Hoh Rain Forest. A visitor center, picnic area and short nature trails can enhance your rain forest visit. Along the drive, you will pass by Lake Crescent. Utilize the pullouts to stop and enjoy the beautiful views!
- After leaving the Hoh, an hour and a half drive toward the northwest will bring you to Rialto Beach on the Pacific Ocean in time for sunset.
- Grocery stores, restaurants and other amenities are available in the towns of Port Angeles, Forks and at other locations along Highway 101 and the park access roads.

And if you have **two or more days**, you can explore more of Olympic's diversity. Perhaps you'd like to spend a few hours or longer hiking one of the park's trails, or visiting a lesser-known area like Deer Park or the Quinault Valley. You'll find more ideas in the Places to Go section of this site.