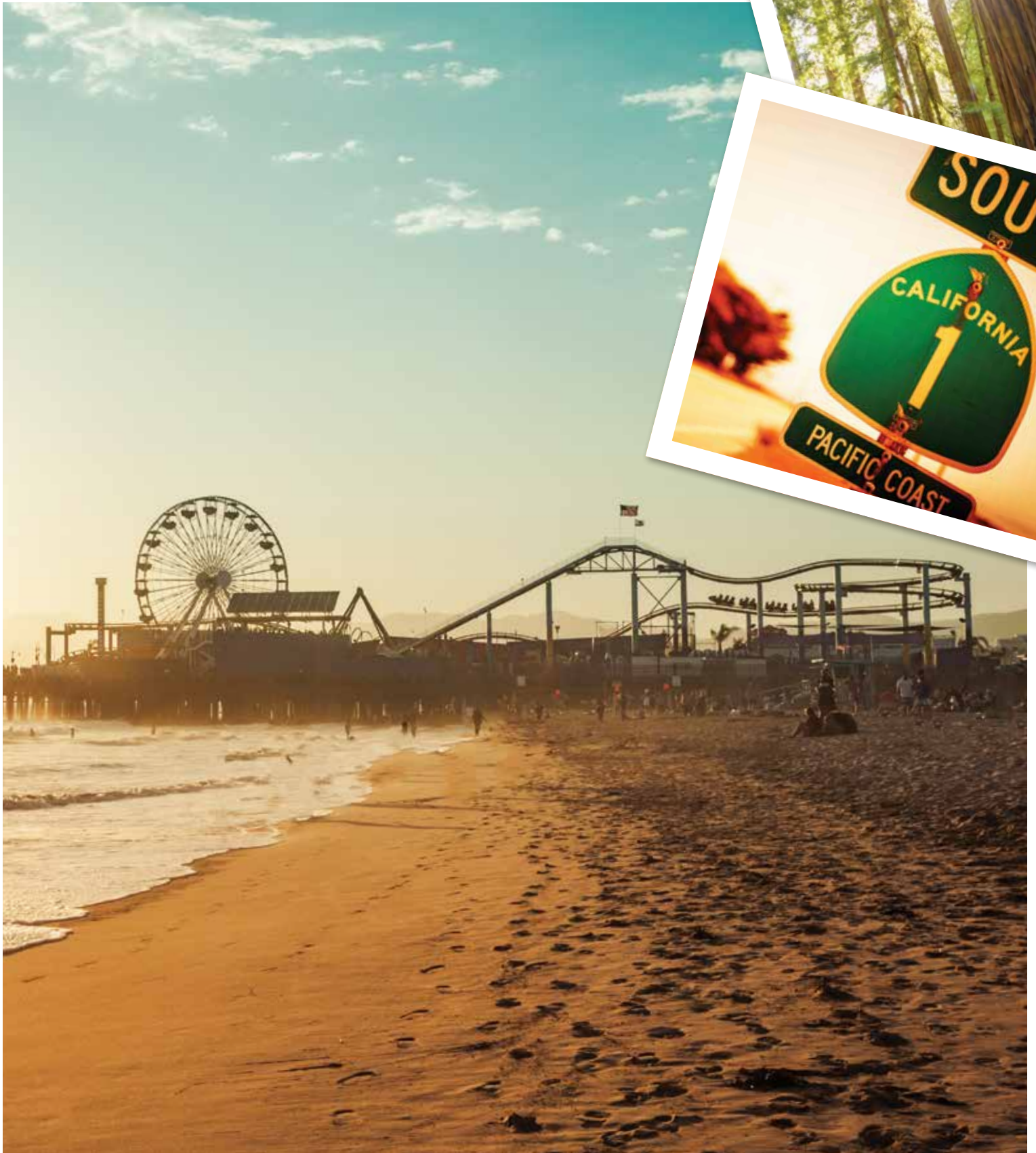


ride on

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE PACIFIC COAST ROAD TRIP

WRITTEN BY HEIDI SIEFKAS





There are a few epic road trips in the United States. Route 66 might be the most famous, but arguably the most beautiful is the one that parallels the Pacific Ocean coastline. The Pacific Coast Scenic Byway/Pacific Coast Highway spans from Olympia, Washington to just South of San Diego, California. It is an approximately 1,650-mile journey following Highway 1 or Highway 101, which hugs the impressive coastlines of Washington, Oregon, and California.



OPENING SPREAD: The iconic Bixby Creek Bridge just south of Carmel in Monterey County, California. **THESE PAGES FROM LEFT:** Santa Monica Pier with fun entertainment for those young in age and young at heart. The route has plenty to offer, whether traveling north or south. The Redwoods, Mother Nature's awe-inspiring masterpieces. Wildlife is abundant, including sea lions in big cities like San Francisco to harbor seals in smaller towns like Morro Bay.

North to South or South to North.

Many travelers debate whether to drive from north to south or vice versa. Most would say driving from north to south gives you better views as your lane is closer to the ocean. Regardless of which way you experience the drive, budget enough time—this route is not a race. The full drive at a leisurely pace takes ten days to two weeks. But if you can't afford that much time, consider breaking it up into mini road trips. What do you want to see most? Perhaps start in Crescent City, California and go on to San Diego for a California adventure, or from Seattle to San Francisco to see more of the Pacific Northwest and Northern California.

Olympic National Park.

This nearly million-acre park is in the heart of Washington's Olympic Peninsula. Truly unique in terrain, Olympic National Park combines its rocky coast with snowcapped mountains and dense forests. There are countless highlights, but high on most visitors' lists are Lake Crescent and Hurricane Ridge, both off Highway 101.

Oregon Coast.

Crossing the mouth of the Columbia River marks the beginning of the Oregon Coast. Be prepared for a myriad of stops. Around each bend there is another beautiful rock formation, beach, or vista. Some of that beauty is thanks to the elements. This exposed coast is known for strong winds and rain, so be prepared. Plan to refuel your vehicle and grab a bite in Cannon Beach; the area is known for clam chowder. Farther south, you'll find pleasant walks and vistas at Cape Perpetua. Adventure lovers can take a dune buggy tour through the Oregon Dunes National Recreation Area. At the bottom of the state, you might encounter year-round warmer temps due to a unique weather effect known as the Banana Belt of Oregon (the Brookings Effect, to locals).


Northern California Redwoods.

Once crossing into California, you are in the heart of big redwoods. Although there are many parks to pick from, Humboldt Redwoods State Park is home to the well-known Avenue of the Giants. This thirty-one-mile drive runs parallel to Highway 101 and winds through some of the largest redwoods in the world. Stop at the Humboldt Redwoods State Park Visitor Center outside of Weott to stretch your legs and enjoy a picnic.

San Francisco to Morro Bay.

This stretch is all about juxtaposition; you get a taste of the city with the Golden Gate Bridge and Fisherman's Wharf, as well as the remote ruggedness of the road with abundant wildlife along Big Sur's majestic coastline. Monterey's most popular sites are the 17-Mile Drive (Pebble Beach) and the Monterey Bay Aquarium. If you prefer to see wildlife in its natural environment, San Simeon is the place to spot hundreds (if not thousands) of elephant seals sunning themselves on the beach. The best months to see the seals are January, April, and October. Continue on to quaint Morro Bay—a perfect place to take a stroll and witness the harbor seal and sea bird entertainment.

Santa Monica to San Diego.

Whether this is your starting segment or your finale, there are spectacular activities and foodie finds to enjoy in these metro areas. The Santa Monica Pier is a favorite stop for ocean views, a ride on the Pacific Wheel, and a bite to eat. Whether you fancy seafood or a good old-fashioned hot dog, food carts or upscale dining, there are oodles of choices at the pier. In Los Angeles, the Hollywood sign and the Hollywood Walk of Fame offer great photo ops. Once you reach San Diego, you may want to get off the road for a bit. Locals and visitors alike enjoy a ferry ride to Coronado Island or a day at the San Diego Zoo, located in Balboa Park. 

travel tips.

What to Bring:

Download any maps before you leave, as internet and cell service can be limited. (Alternatively, bring paper maps.) Pack plenty of cell phone chargers. Walkie-talkies, if caravanning with others.

When to Go:

Avoid holiday weekends, if possible. Spring and fall offer reduced crowds with shoulder-season weather.

How Much Time to Allow:

Leisurely pace, enjoying the sights: ten to fourteen days
Moderately fast, skipping some stops: seven days
Speedy, skipping a lot of stops: five days