

# The Grand West Coast

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Imagine reaching out to touch a tree more than 2,000 years old. Or clutching the side of your dune buggy as you crest the top of a sand dune hundreds of feet high. Maybe you prefer to sample wild salmon, buffalo burgers, or award-winning Cabernet Sauvignons and Chardonnays. Or perhaps wander the places which have inspired poets and novelists. The fifty travelers who left ABAC by coach on June 26<sup>th</sup> experienced all of this and more on the PSBO Grand West Coast trip. For the next week, our group traveled by plane, coach, ferry, dune buggy, and jet boat as we explored the beauty, the grandeur, and the history of the Pacific Northwest.

On the first day of our trip, as we rode up I75 to Atlanta, anticipation was high. While many of us were strangers, others had traveled with ABAC before and entertained us with tales of past adventures. Our group included singles, couples, and family groups, and encompassed the young, the middle aged and retired folks.

As we pulled up to Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport, some of the advantages of group travel became apparent. Our suitcases were whisked away and we were shepherded through crowds to the Air-Tran counter. As we waited to check our bags, a guide entertained us with Atlanta and airport history. Then it was on through security and onto the plane.

The advantage to flying west is that in gaining three hours, we arrived in San Francisco with half the day left. Our bags were loaded onto another coach and off we headed south on Route 1 while a local guide gave us background and history as we drove along the Pacific coast past miles of the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary, which is home to 26 species of marine mammals, 94 species of seabirds, 345 species of fish, 4 species of turtles, and more than one thousand reported shipwrecks.

It wasn't long before we turned onto beautiful 17-Mile Drive at Pebble Beach, a winding drive that circles past the many golf courses that make up Pebble Beach. We soon spotted the Lone Cypress, the symbol of Pebble Beach, clinging to a rocky point which jutted into the ocean.

As our driver pulled up to let us out to wander a bit, we were grateful we had been warned to bring coats. The wind whipped ashore as waves crashed on the rocky shoreline, and gulls wheeled overhead as seals called from nearby rocks or braved the rough tides. Our guide told us tales of places like Point Joe, the site of many shipwrecks, and China Rock, where Chinese fishermen lived in lean-tos more than a century ago.

At those moments it wasn't hard to picture the fisheries, sardine canneries, and much harder way of life that John Steinbeck depicts in his short novel *Cannery Row*, set not far up the coast and in the not too distant past.

Back in the warmth of the bus and continuing along 17-Mile-Drive, we drove past beautiful mansions, many of which had been home to Hollywood's early stars. And near the end of our circular route, we came to the Lodge at Pebble Beach, home to the 18<sup>th</sup> green, where the large white media tents were still standing from the U.S. Open, which had been played less than a week earlier.

From Pebble Beach it was on to Carmel, a picturesque town which once claimed Clint Eastwood as mayor, for shopping and dinner before we returned to San Francisco, where we spent our first night in California at the Doubletree Hotel.

The first full day of our trip started with a bus tour of San Francisco. One of our first stops was the gate to Chinatown, once the largest Chinatown outside of Asia and the oldest in this country. It is a city within the city, rich in history and culture, offering exotic scents, sounds, and tastes. We strolled along Grant Avenue, stopping in little shops and listening as our guide pointed out landmarks and told stories of Chinatown's colorful past.

Then it was back on the bus to continue our San Francisco tour. We soon had extra reason to be grateful for our local guide. Our east coast group was surprised to learn that we had arrived in the city just in time for the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition of San Francisco's Gay Pride parade, an event which closed several streets to traffic. Our guide directed our driver by alternate routes so smoothly that if it hadn't been for occasional pedestrians in surprisingly extravagant costumes, we might not have been aware of this huge event.

One landmark that we drove past but probably would have missed on our original route was City Lights Bookstore, founded by poet Lawrence Ferlinghetti in 1953 and widely associated with the beat poets a generation before hippies roamed the area. In 1956 police raided City Lights, arresting the manager on obscenity charges for the publication and sale of Allen Ginsberg's *Howl and Other Poems*. In what became a celebrated test of First Amendment rights, both the bookstore manager and Ferlinghetti were acquitted. Although we hadn't expected to see City Lights, on this trip such lucky surprises almost seemed the norm.

Another favorite spot in San Francisco is the beautiful serpentine Lombard Street, a road so crooked that bus travel is impossible. As we stopped near the top of Russian Hill, those of us who wanted to brave the climb to the top of Lombard disembarked and panted our way up before winding our way down on foot. Those who chose to stay on the bus continued their coach tour of the historic neighborhood before meeting us at the bottom of the hill.

A special treat was the ferry ride from Fisherman's Wharf across San Francisco Bay past Alcatraz Island to Sausalito, a beautiful village across the Bay in Marin County, where we ate lunch and had a little time for shopping. For some of us, lunch seemed somewhat redundant as we had already treated ourselves to fresh loaves of Boudin's sour dough bread and chunks of

Ghirardelli chocolate at Pier 39, but the cold wind and salty spray from the ferry ride reinvigorated our appetites.

No trip to San Francisco would be complete without a ride on one of the famed cable cars, so at the Fisherman's Wharf stop we all clambered aboard. People really do hang off the sides of the car because space inside is at a premium, but doing so is entertaining enough that many of us might choose to ride outside even if there were room inside.

After a full day in San Francisco, we returned to the Doubletree Hotel for a well earned rest before loading back up on our coach and heading north.

Monday morning our group left San Francisco, following U.S. 101 across the Golden Gate Bridge and into Marin County. By way of one of the most beautiful and photographed routes in the country, we soon found ourselves in the famed Napa Valley, home to thousands of acres of vineyards and wineries large and small. A real treasure was the historic Hess Collection Winery, which prides itself on sustainable and organic practices in the cultivation of its vineyards. Here we were given a private tour of the winery and of Donald Hess's contemporary art collection, which is housed there. Following the tour, we were treated to a wine tasting outside under a magnificent wisteria canopy.

For our lunch break that day we stopped at the Sonoma Plaza, a grassy square surrounded with small shops and cafes, many of which are housed in historic adobe buildings. We took advantage of the opportunity to wander this lovely area of Sonoma in picture perfect California weather.

The next leg of our journey was for many of our group the most memorable: we were headed into Redwood country. Our route took us along the Avenue of the Giants, a 31-mile drive through Humboldt Redwoods State Park, with its more than 50,000 acres of redwood groves. These coast redwoods, one of three types remaining in the world, are the tallest trees on earth and the oldest, with some more than 2,000 years old. The immense height of the trees, along with the coastal fog that provides much of their necessary hydration, keeps the forest in a sort of perpetual twilight. The second tallest tree in the world, the Stratosphere Giant, is located in this park. The tallest coast redwood, the tallest living organism on earth, was discovered in 2006 in nearby Redwood National Park and stands slightly over 379 feet. It has been named Hyperion, "he who looks from above," after one of the Titans from Greek mythology.

Along the road through the redwoods, our driver had pulled over several times so that we could photograph and marvel at these giants "just one more time." Late in the evening, during what should have been the last of these stops, a forest ranger pulled up in his truck and offered to reopen a nearby visitor's center, where he answered our questions about the history and ecology of the park. Redwood trees thrive in groves because they have an amazingly shallow root system—six to twelve feet--and no tap root. By interlocking their roots, they form a stronger base. And because of their shallow roots, they are restricted to foggy, rainy climates such as the Northern California coast where they are watered by the atmosphere.

We finally took leave of our host only because we were overdue at our next stop, the Samoa Cookhouse in Eureka. This last surviving lumberjack camp-style cookhouse in the West has been in operation since 1893. The area's plentiful redwoods led to hundreds of mills and logging operations, and each of them had a cookhouse. This particular cookhouse originated as the Hammond Lumber Company cookhouse and is now the Louisiana-Pacific Samoa Cookhouse, serving meals family style at long communal tables. In Eureka, as everywhere we went, we were met with considerable generosity. When we arrived, we were hungry and the food was excellent. A real treat was the Marionberry jam, made from the large Marian blackberries native to the Northwest, but impossible to find in Georgia. Yum!

After a restful night at the Red Lion Inn in Eureka, we continued our drive up the rugged Pacific coast. Not far off the road we were able to see small herds of the majestic Roosevelt elk, the largest North American elk, with males weighing up to 1,000 lbs. While they kept their distance, they didn't seem to fear us, perhaps because they not had to fear hunters since Teddy Roosevelt first took an interest in their protection.

As we drove north there occurred one of those serendipitous moments that occasionally catch us by surprise. We had made an unscheduled stop at a rest area in a small roadside park, and as we used our few moments to investigate the wooded area, one member of our party called us to come see his discovery, a small grove of redwoods as massive as those in the Avenue of the Giants. We were awed by the enormity of the trees and discovered that it took nineteen of us joining hands to encircle the largest of them. When asked to recall a special memory from the trip, most of our group mentioned this special moment.

On our way again, the road climbed high above the shore, and we stopped on rocky outcrops to look down at the Pacific. As the cold wind and towering waves pushed relentlessly against us and the against rocks where we stood, Robert Frost's poem "Once by the Pacific" seemed particularly appropriate:

The shattered water made a misty din.  
Great waves looked over others coming in,  
And thought of doing something to the shore  
That water never did to land before.  
.....  
You could not tell, and yet it looked as if  
The shore was lucky in being backed by cliff,  
The cliff in being backed by continent;  
..... (1-4, 7-9)

While we think of Frost as a New England poet, he was born and spent his early years in San Francisco and must have stood in wonder at the power of the Pacific just as we did that day in late June. At one of our stops, engraved stone monuments listing names of those lost at sea added to our sense of awe. The warmth of our coach seemed particularly reassuring as we returned to it.

By early afternoon we had crossed into Oregon and reached our destination, Jot's Resort at Gold Beach along the Rogue River. While Gold Beach got its name from the discovery of gold in the area, today it's better known for its wildlife and salmon fishing. Our adventure for the afternoon was a jet boat ride up the Rogue River, an excursion as exciting as it was beautiful. While jet boats can speed over the water sending up spectacular spray, particularly when the pilot sends them into spins, they are among the most environmentally sensitive boats, having no propellers but instead drawing water in from the front of the boat and shooting it rapidly out the back. With our pilot pointing them out, we saw several large birds of prey, including bald eagles, hawks, and falcons, along with huge nests balanced in the tops of trees. While we didn't spot a bear or one of the rare mountain lions that day, our pilot told us that such sightings were possible.

On our return to Jot's Resort, some of us shopped for canned smoked salmon and other Pacific Northwest delicacies, and then we met for a delicious dinner at the Rod and Reel Dinner House before heading back to our rooms.

More Oregon adventures were on the schedule for Wednesday as we left Gold Beach and continued up the Oregon coast to Coos Bay, where we visited a myrtle wood factory to watch skilled craftsmen turn rough blocks of wood into satin-finished bowls, clocks, chests, and ornaments and utensils of all descriptions. At the end of the tour, we found many of the items for sale, and some in our group came away with bowls to treasure for generations.

The excitement factor was about to crank up a few notches! Coos Bay sits at the edge of the Oregon Dunes National Recreation Area, home to the largest expanse of coastal sand dunes in North America. It was time to take a dune buggy ride on a multi-seat monster that sits high off the ground. The dunes were a revelation as we saw miles of white sand pushed by the constant wind into huge dunes rising hundreds of feet into the air. While we saw the occasional small dune bugging flying over the sand and throwing itself into the air, our ride was somewhat less heart stopping. But as we crested the steeper dunes and seemed to fall straight down the other side, we did our share of squealing.

The Oregon Dunes were formed by thousands of years of wind and tide pushing sand from the ocean bottom onto the shore and sculpting it into dunes that are reformed slowly but constantly by the forces of nature. Although the area has been relatively stable for 6,000 years, we were sorry to hear from our guide that because of the introduction of an invasive beach grass, the dunes will likely have disappeared within the next twenty years.

We left Coos Bay and stopped fifty miles up the coast at the picturesque seaside town of Florence, where we had lunch and checked out the shops. Many in the group recommend the clam chowder at Mo's, but it seemed impossible to find a poor choice for lunch in Florence. After our busy morning, we were ready for a restful ride over the Coastal Mountain Range and through the Willamette Valley to Portland, where we were to spend the next two nights at the Oxford Suites Jantzen Beach, a 3 star hotel that made our stay in Portland a treat in itself.

*Money* magazine called Portland America's "Best Big City," and it's not hard to see why. Portland is a clean, eco-friendly city with stunning views. It has truly earned its nickname the "Rose City." Portland is home to several exquisite rose gardens, including the spectacular

International Rose Test Garden, home to 7,000 rose bushes; the Peninsula Park Rose Garden, which is nearly as large; and the smaller Ladd's Addition Garden. Our guide informed us that we were not visiting at peak season, nor were we visiting the largest of the gardens, but none of our group was disappointed by the quantity or variety of roses in bloom. From the top of the hill, we had a wonderful view of the garden, but the real beauty was in looking at the individual roses, each unique in color, form, and scent.

We branched out from Portland to the Lewis and Clark highway, which follows the majestic Columbia River, tracing the path taken by Meriwether Lewis and William Clark when they finally reached the river in October of 1805, 18 months after their Corps of Discovery struck out from St. Louis on a grueling trek across uncharted wilderness with the goal of exploring our new country and reporting back to President Thomas Jefferson. The Columbia River is the second largest river in North America, and the banks rise steeply from the water on both the Oregon and Washington sides of the river.

Our destination this afternoon was the Columbia River Gorge, which became another trip favorite. The Columbia River Gorge has the greatest concentration of waterfalls in the Pacific Northwest, many of which already looked familiar from their many appearances in films and on the covers of coffee table books. Among the most spectacular is Multnomah Falls, with its 620 ft. vertical drop. The bracing temperatures and the constant wind through the gorge added to the atmosphere of the majestic scenery.

After a second night of luxury in Portland, we continued north to Mt. Rainier and lunch at Paradise Lodge, at the base of the mountain. It was here that the serious carnivores among us got to sample buffalo burgers, which are naturally lean and totally delicious. And at the lodge we were in for another unexpected treat—snow. In July. But we also we met with sore disappointment. While guidebooks tell us that Mt. Rainier, a dormant volcano and part of the Cascade Mountains, is, at over 14, 000 feet, “one of the most visible natural features in Western Washington,” that it “soars thousands of feet over surrounding peaks,” and that it “is visible from hundreds of miles away,” this day it was shrouded in fog, and we couldn't see it.

As we continued the short distance to Seattle, less than 60 miles to the northwest, we hoped that the fog would lift and give us a view of the most recognizable mountain in North America. But the fog stayed. We had about decided that Mr. Rainier was just a tale for gullible travelers.

Seattle, however, was a delight, with our visit to the fun and funky Pike Place Market, which has grown from its beginnings in 1907 as a small farmer's market. Today it is still a farmer's market, but its nine acres comprise hundreds of year-round businesses, craftspeople, and street performers, as well as an estimated one hundred farmers who bring their produce daily. The market was teeming with shoppers and vendors and was colorful with piles of flowers and fresh vegetables. Fans of Food Network were hoping to catch the guys at Pike Place Fish Market throwing huge fish to each other, and we weren't disappointed.

As the day ended we gathered at the Keg Steak House for a farewell dinner with lots of shared memories and laughter before heading to the Coast Bellevue Hotel for our final night. By that time Mt. Rainier was shrouded in darkness, but we hoped for a great view in the morning.

Saturday morning, cool and overcast, was for packing and getting to the airport. With great anticipation we searched the horizon for Mr. Rainier. But again, nothing. Our trip through the airport and onto the plane was the best kind—uneventful. As we taxied down the runway headed for home, it seemed impossible that we could have experienced so much in so few days. Then our plane rose from the ground and broke through the clouds, and there it was. Mt. Rainier rising thousands of feet above the clouds into the clear blue sky. It was a sight that was more than we could have hoped for and one that we are not likely to forget.

We landed in Atlanta tired and somewhat surprised by temperatures in the high 90's when we had spent the past seven days bundled up against the cold. Some of us arrived home with souvenirs collected at our various stops, but all of us came back with a load of memories. Those of us who had started our trip as strangers left it as friends. And as we stepped off the coach at ABAC, we were people changed by our experiences of a majestically beautiful part of our country, different in so many ways from the familiar comfort of South Georgia. Those of us who had just taken our first trip with ABAC were already planning which of ABAC's trips would be our next, understanding now why so many of our company were regulars. Our photographs are beautiful, but there is nothing like experiencing in person all that our world has to offer.

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