



DAN SHERWOOD/Stockphoto.com

DISCOVER

# Oswald West

Whether you're picnicking, hiking, boogie boarding, surfing, or looking for that stunning beach photo, this is the place to be.

STORY BY PAM HOGWEIDE

I'VE SUNNED ON THE WHITE SANDS OFF the southern coast of Thailand; I've played on warm Hawaiian beaches and the Southern California shoreline. Yet my favorite beaches remain on the wild, rugged coast of Oregon with Short Sand at Oswald West State Park my stand-out favorite.

Pristine old-growth forest lines the path from the oversized parking lot on Highway 101 to the beach, a mere quarter mile away. This is more of a walk than a hike. I savor the scenery, towering firs, and moss-covered nurse logs that welcome me each step of the way. Short Sand Creek flows through the trees like a ribbon of promise. And it's a promise that delivers. The first time I rounded the curve of the trail and saw the ocean through the trees, it was such a stunning sight that I stopped dead in my tracks. The fabulous view begins right where the bridge crosses the creek. Verdant green forest contrasts with the blue of the ocean and the surf crashes onto the shore. To me, this is one of the most inspiring places on the Oregon Coast.

Oswald West State Park is named after a governor from the early 1900s who saw to it that state law would protect Oregon beaches for public use and

avoid being dominated by those with commercial interest. Stretching from Arch Cape south for 4 miles toward Manzanita, the state park covers about 2,500 acres of tame and untamed beauty.

“It was originally a designated rest stop,” says Jim Newell, an Oregon State Parks ranger and overseer of Oswald West. That explains the ample parking and better-than-usual restroom facilities accessed directly from the highway. “That’s also why there are no day-use fees. It’s still maintained as a highway rest area.”

Newell has been a ranger for many years, and despite his familiarity with the area, he still appreciates the beauty and history of the park. “You walk through a rain forest and basically see everything that Lewis and Clark saw,” he says. “Yet you’re only an hour away from Portland and 15 minutes from the highway.”

Oswald West is also one of the most accessible parks. The compact gravel path has been widened to accommodate handicapped visitors. “There’s one guy who comes regularly on his motorized chair,” says Newell. There’s a somewhat steep incline not far from the parking lot, but it’s worth the effort.

Originally known simply as Short Sand, Oswald West has become quite popular with about 750,000

visitors annually. It’s also become one of the most popular surfing spots on the entire Oregon Coast. Even non-surfers come to watch the surfing and boogie board action in the waves.

Don’t like getting sand in your shoes? No problem. The gravel-packed path ends at a small bluff with benches and picnic tables overlooking the beach and cove. From this vantage point, visitors can easily drink in the gorgeous view.

Short Sand beach is flanked by two coastal headlands that create a small cove and add considerably to the scenery. To the south juts Neahkahnie Mountain, a peak that looms 1,600 feet above the beach. Neahkahnie is cloaked with legends about shipwrecks and buried treasure, which may be why the small bay is called Smugglers Cove.

On the north end of the beach stands Cape Falcon, so named for its distinctive appearance. “When you’re out at sea, the ridge has a distinct look of a falcon’s talon,” explains Ranger Newell.

Cape Falcon hosts one of the prettiest trails in the area, which begins just past the picnic area. The 2-1/2-mile trail (one way) gains 750 feet in elevation through majestic old-growth forest. Sitka spruce, Douglas fir, and redcedar tower over the trail like giant sentries. I feel transported even further from my busy modern life whenever I walk it.

The hike is a gradual incline. Those who take time to explore this part of Oswald West are rewarded with breathtaking views as the trees thin along the way. Bring your camera. It’s hard to take a bad photo of Smugglers Cove from this vantage point. The blue sea shimmers like sparkling diamonds when sunlight catches the whitecaps. There are several viewpoints along the way.

The reward for reaching the tip of Cape Falcon is the panoramic view of the ocean and the coastline. Steep forested shoreline hugs the wild sea—a mesmerizing sight.

I brought a group of friends to Oswald West on my last visit. Some of them had never been here before. As we hiked the trail to Short Sand Beach and the ocean came into view through the trees, they slowed to a stop. “It’s so beautiful!” they exclaimed. Yes it is, I said to myself. Thank you Governor West. □

## FYI

There is no regular campground at Oswald West, and the walk-in campground with its 30 sites available on a first-come, first-served basis has been closed indefinitely due to danger of falling trees. Many trees, weakened by storms, need to be removed before it can be reopened. (800-551-6949; [oregonstateparks.org](http://oregonstateparks.org))



PAM HOGWEIDE