Headline: Visit to Oregon is a wonderful journey

Deckhead: Mountains, vistas, coastline create ideal destination

Oregon is nowhere to found on the list of the Seven Wonders of the World, but it should be. The state, sitting on the northwest coastline of the U.S., is blessed land of wondrous natural locations.

Oregon flouts unimaginably glorious settings. From Mt. Hood to the Columbia River to the Pacific Coast Scenic Byway, it leaves no stone unturned.

Mt. Hood is visible from miles away. Eleven glaciers crown its perpetually crowned peak. That is one for every thousand feet it rises above sea level. Placid alpine lakes – with names like Trillium and Mirror – dot the mountain’s flanks. Each boasts a unique view. Lavender and wildflowers fill the forests and valleys in the spring; apple and pears arrive by summer – labeling the epic drive between the mountain and the town of Hood River the Fruit Loop.

Timeless fishing villages, stunning natural landmarks and migrating whales grab your attention while traveling on the Pacific Coast Byway. The 361-mile route traces the state’s coastline along Highway 101, meandering past headlands, seaside cliffs, dense swaths of rainforest and wind-sculpted dunes.

The byway hugs the coastline outside of Cannon Beach and climbs nearly 700 feet above the Pacific, offering spectacular ocean views. Haystack Rock is a 235-foot monolith. It towers like a night’s watchman over the beach and is one of the state’s most photographed natural wonders.

Located in central Oregon, Smith Rock is the birthplace of American sport climbing. Towers of volcanic ash rise from the high desert’s dust and sage similar to the spires of a cathedral. Hikers should explore the obsidian lava flows at Newberry Crater National Volcanic Monument, the place where astronauts trained to walk on the moon.

The great Missoula Floods carved the Columbia River Gorge – a place inundated with breathtaking vistas and waterfalls. Snowmelt streams plunge more than 600 feet down a sheer cliff face at Multnomah Falls in two-tiered cascades. The Vista House at Crown Point opened in 1918. Experience stunning views of the gorge from what might be the most awesome rest stop in the world.

The Oregon Trail carved the Wallowa Valley and it hasn’t changed since the first pioneers crossed by wagon. Ride the gondola from Wallowa Lake Village. Climb 3,700 feet to the peak of Mt. Howard. The high desert of Indian Country rolls in front of you beneath the alpine summit.

Crater Lake, meanwhile, is the deepest lake in the U.S. and one of the deepest on the planet. A picturesque island sits in the middle as a reminder of the region’s violent volcanic past. Visitors drive around Rim Drive on the southern side of the caldera.

Millions of years of history are revealed in layers of earth – one color at a time – at Painted Hills. The name originates from the delicately colored stratifications in the soil. The Painted Hills are best seen in the late afternoon. The sunset transforms them into subtle shades of red, violent basalt and vermilion.

Oregon digs deep and rises high among the most natural locations in the world. Visiting it will have you wondering why it took you so long to make the trip.

Cutline: RISING STAR – The beauty of Mt. Hood reflects off a nearby lake in Oregon. Image: Gerald. Adobe Stock.