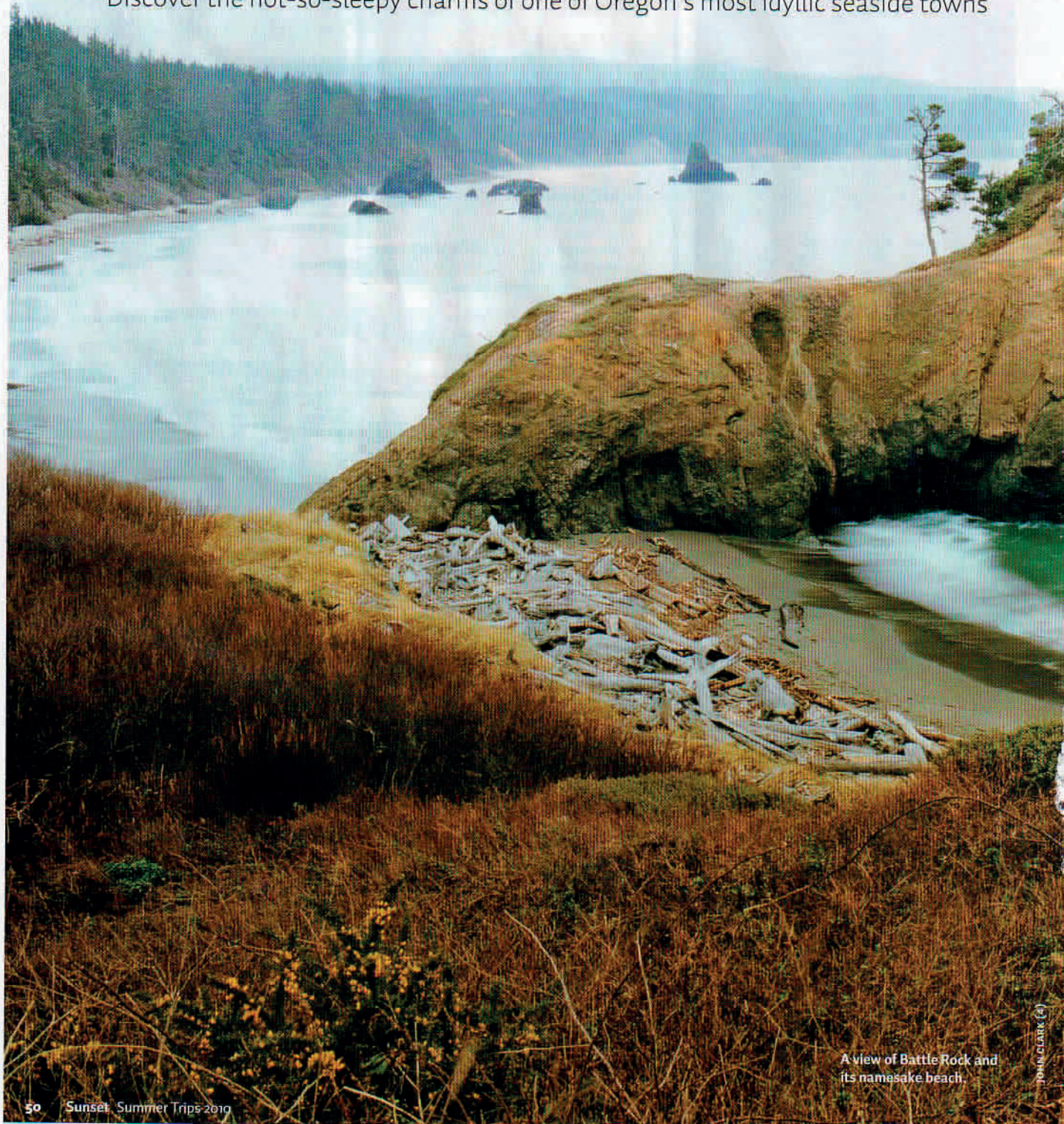


Finding Port Orford

Discover the not-so-sleepy charms of one of Oregon's most idyllic seaside towns



A view of Battle Rock and its namesake beach.

JOHN CLARK (2)

THE JOKE ABOUT Port Orford is that when speeding motorists are caught blowing through on U.S. 101, their excuse is, "I didn't know I was in town!"

This tiny burg, with a population just north of 1,200, is easy to miss. "I call it the invisible village," says artist Joyce Kinney, owner of TriAngle Square Gallery.

But travelers who do pull off the highway are rewarded: great food, great art, and miles of coastal trails.

I'll vouch for that. I nearly miss my turnoff for WildSpring Guest Habitat because I'm distracted by the spectacular seascapes to the west when I'm supposed to be turning southeast. When I finally settle into my cabin, in the woods three minutes from a bluff overlooking the ocean, the location poses a serious challenge to my goal of exploring town. That's the other side of "discovering" Port Orford—around here, it's just as appealing to stay where you are.

The next day I devote to the town's eight galleries and find among the owners well-established artists like marble sculptor Eric Johnson of Johnson Gallery; woodworker Rick Cook of Cook Gallery; and glass artist Chris Hawthorne, who has Hawthorne Gallery and a new restaurant, Redfish, set to open this summer. As for Kinney, she's a fiber artist who represents a flock of other local artists.

And while scores of creative types—artists, actors, and organic farmers and chefs—have laid down roots here, Port Orford is still a working fishing village. I witness this at the dock as commercial fishermen unload their catch before their boats are hoisted by crane from the sea.

On my final day here, I tour the town's history at Cape Blanco Lighthouse, finished in 1870 on Oregon's westernmost point. Then I drive to the Port Orford Lifeboat Station Museum, a 1934 structure built to house U.S. Coast Guardsmen.

And to think I almost missed all that. It's really true: Port Orford is invisible—until you put it on your radar.



TOP A seaside hot tub with killer views at WildSpring.
LEFT A cabin at WildSpring.
ABOVE Fresh urchin.



INFO

Port Orford is 275 miles from Portland and 70 miles from California. portorfordoregon.com

WHERE TO STAY

WildSpring Guest Habitat Watch for whales from the deck. From \$276, including breakfast; wildspring.com or 866/333-9453.

WHERE TO GO

Battle Rock City Park Stroll the beach. portorfordoregon.com/battlerock.html

TriAngle Square Gallery Grab a local galleries brochure. 343 Sixth St./U.S. 101; 541/253-6198.

Port of Port Orford From the elevated dock, watch fishermen bring in their catch. 300 Dock Rd.; 541/332-7121.

Cape Blanco Lighthouse In Cape Blanco State Park, 9

miles northwest of town.

Closed Mon; \$2 admission; 91814 Cape Blanco Rd., Sixes, OR; oregonstateparks.org

Port Orford Lifeboat Station Museum In Port Orford Heads State Park. Closed Tue–Wed; free; 92331 Coast Guard Hill Rd.; portorfordlifeboatstation.org

WHERE TO EAT

Paula's Bistro Don't miss the fresh albacore tuna with Dijon mustard sauce. The bistro doubles as an informal art gallery. \$\$; closed Sun–Mon; 296 Sixth St./U.S. 101; 541/332-9378.

Crazy Norwegian's Fish and Chips \$; 259 Sixth St./U.S. 101; 541/332-8601.

Hard Rain Café Try the made-from-scratch fruit scones. \$; closed Wed; 1634 Oregon St.; 541/332-6030. —SUSAN HAUSER