

Dan Youra, Travel Guide



Second of 5-part series comparing tourism on Olympic Peninsula to Costa Rica

Native peoples were 100% of the population of the western hemisphere 500 years ago. In 1492 the neighborhood started to change for the dark skinned locals. Foreigners arrived. A new minority. Those weren't tourists just looking for a fun weekend. White man planned to stay.

Within 300 years the percentages were radically flipped. White people became the majority. Within another 200 years natives were marginalized to a few small tribes surviving in remote areas under austere conditions. As the clock struck 2000, native peoples found themselves strangers in a strange land.

In traveling the Americas from Alaska to Argentina I search out the roads less traveled that lead to the villages where the native peoples dwell. Some are well known, Titicaca, Cuzco, Palenque. Some are unknown, villages with no names.

Washington's Olympic Peninsula, where I have lived for 30 years, is the ancestral home to native peoples, Makah, Quinault, Hoh, S'Klallam, Quileute, Squaxin. Their reservations are mostly backed up against the sea at the end of narrow roads in quiet isolation far from the madding crowds.

In Costa Rica I visited the BriBri and Cabecar native people on the Talamanca and Cocles Indigenous Reservations in the mountainous jungles along the Caribbean coast. They live far off the beaten track mostly in thatched roof houses with no windows or doors. Muddy, rutted roads are used more by people on foot and on horses than by the few trucks and even fewer cars.

In comparing the lives of native peoples on Washington's Olympic Peninsula to those of in Costa Rica the similarities are more evident than the differences.

A visit to their villages feels like a step back in time, a return to a simpler age. People walk. Neighbors gather on porches and front lawns to talk. A community hall draws people together to celebrate. Crafts and customs still have meaning.

The grandeur of nature frames native villages into a picture of contrasts. BriBri villages in Costa Rica are cradled in the arms of towering mountains. Paths are dripping with fruit and vegetables that hang over walkways, enclosing yards in a supermarket of bananas, beans, corn, pineapple and many edibles unfamiliar to white visitors.

Washington's first peoples continue ancestral traditions of living off the abundance of the sea and the sea life that clings to the shorelines surrounding the Olympic Peninsula. Far, far out a single rutty road, Makah people at the most northwestern tip of the lower 48 states gather seafood, fish for salmon and have even attempted to resurrect the tribe's whaling tradition.

Hoh, Quinault and Quileute people, also at the end of long slinky roads and beneath towering trees, depend on river runs of salmon to satisfy their hunger and replenish their spirits. The Hoh, Quinault and Quileute share their names with the rivers that wash their lives.



Rivers are roads in rain forests. Deep in the jungles of the Talamanca Reserve a large canoe, *La Estrella*, is the only choice for BriBri and Cabecar people to cross the rain swollen Sixaola River. Dug out canoes float bananas to market on meandering highways.

What about tourism? Do natives want tourists? Yes. Tourists fill casinos, visit museums, buy canned salmon and drop dollars at tribal resorts. North American natives have more experience selling to white people.

Unlike their north American counterparts, the indigenous people of Costa Rica do not build casinos and smoke shops at the entrance to their lands. Nor do they share in the wealth bet away by visiting gamblers and pocketed by crafty tribes.

But even the BriBri promote an iguana farm as a tourist attraction. The day I was there an afternoon rain made the trail to the farm too slippery to climb. The people were proud though to show off some animals, plants and new computers at their local school. They were still waiting for an internet hook up. They need a little more experience at turning a buck.

The first peoples of the Caribbean and the peninsula want to be friendly, want to share, want to learn and want to benefit from their white visitors. I felt welcomed by the rain forest peoples, both those who live in the tropical rain forests of Costa Rica, and those who live in the temperate rain forests on Washington's Olympic Peninsula.

Explore Costa Rica from your base camp at a Minotel Lodge, a number of which dot the country. Closest to the BriBri is Las Palmas on a Caribbean beach south of Limon.

Explore the Olympic Peninsula and meet its first peoples out of your base camp in Port Angeles, Forks or Quinault. In La Push the Quileute tribe promotes a resort on its beach in splashing distance of the Pacific surf.

Remember, when you visit the lands and waters of America's native peoples, to show respect. They were here first!

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