

24-Carat Resort at Top of the Rock by Dan Youra, NW Travel Writer

LaPush is a peaceful, fishing village at the mouth of a river on the shore of the Pacific Ocean at the end of a road 14 miles off highway 101 on Washington State's Olympic Peninsula.

When you are in LaPush you are on the "Rez", which is short for "reservation" for any of you city slickers, who haven't been away from the bright lights for awhile. The Quileute Indian Reservation is one square mile at the mouth of the Quillayute River. (Yes, the two "Q" words are spelled differently).

The Quileute people are a proud tribe of seafaring fisherman with many generations of harvesting whales, seals, salmon and crab from their ocean front deli.

The name "LaPush" comes from the days of French fur trappers, when it rolled off the lips of Chinook language speakers as a native variation on the French "la bouche" (mouth), referring to its location at the mouth of the river.



A-Ka-Lat or "Top of the Rock" at LaPush



Cabins at Quileute Oceanside Resort

The attractions that draw present day visitors to this remote rez are the beautiful beaches and the abundant nature shows, from entertaining birds to inspiring sunsets. Lodging itself is an attraction. Quileute Oceanside Resort is a necklace of 24-carat cabins strung along the shore of First Beach at the entrance to town. A stone's throw from the ocean surf, the resort's cabins range from simple sleepers to jacuzzi studded works of art with gas fireplaces and hand crafted furniture.

Rain or shine, nature orchestrates a daily extravaganza to entertain visitors. At sunrise and sunset golden rays dance on the offshore islands. You do not have to be in LaPush long before you are hummed into a trance by the ceaseless sound of the surrounding surf.

The surf calls you to join nature's procession of shorebirds, gulls and pelicans flying in formation toward the buttressed, cathedral like rocks at the south point of First Beach. Slide along the beach on surf flattened skipping stones to the north for a close up encounter with sacred islands, the largest of which is James Island, known as A-Ka-Lat (Top of the Rock), in the native language. It is a sacred place where chiefs in former days were buried in canoes, which were suspended from the island's tree tops.

Up and down the beach behemoth trees are scattered like Paul Bunyon's pick up sticks. The ancient trees line the sand gallery like giant sculptures waiting for the next storm to relaunch them to their next show at another Olympic gallery up or down the Pacific coast.



Birds put on a non stop show. Squadrons of stealth pelicans glide single file, inches above the crashing surf, heading to rendezvous with other squadrons at the marina to battle over leftovers from fishing and crabbing boats unloading their catches at the cannery. Seagulls in disarray fuss and scream, protesting an eagle soaring through *their* air space. A couple of crows dive bomb a hawk perched too close to *their* mooching grounds near the cabins. Anyone can enjoy these avionic antics. Serious bird watchers on the other hand can add new notches to their binoculars, spotting rare and transient snowbirds chalking up frequent flier miles between the arctic and the tropics.

Enjoy nature's show, because you won't be able to watch your favorite soaps or sports on television. The resort's cabins do not have televisions or telephones. Cell phone service has no bars.

One sport you can watch at LaPush is surfing. Yes, surfing. At just the right times and tides surfers slip on their wet suits, launch their boards and paddle out to catch the waves for a ride into shore.

In Olympic National Park south of LaPush are Second Beach and Third Beach, acclaimed among the top scenic beaches in north America. North of LaPush are 26 miles of hikeable shoreline along Olympic Coast National Marine Sanctuary linking to Makah Indian Reservation. Beaches in both directions are towered over by majestic sea stacks, splashed by tide pools and graced by eagles, pelicans, gulls and assorted flocks of other fine feathered friends. First Beach is 20 feet from your cabin. Second Beach is a .75 mile hike and Third Beach is a 1.5 mile hike from the trail heads.

If you want to impress the elders of the tribe, you can learn the Quileute language, which is not related to any other language in the world and which, along with only four others, has no nasal sounds, missing "m" and "n". The alphabet has eight "k's" and four "x's", and, when spoken, has more guttural clicking and clucking sounds than a stuttering frog. Interestingly, the word "frog" (há·ga²y in Quileute) is so special that it has its own letter "g" with a sound so rare that it is only used when pronouncing "frog".

Your first lesson will include ʔá·lita (fish), x^wadáh (bug), yá²wa (snake) and ʔa²á·sayat (meat), where the "ʔ" is a stoppage of air called a glottal stop. Maybe the elders will be so impressed that they will invite you to enjoy some smoked sá·tís (salmon).

Don't be surprised (or scared) if on a walk to the Lonesome Creek Store and Campground you are escorted by local dogs that look more like a cross between a brown bear and a shaggy wolf. They're friendly. They just want you to buy them fried chicken and jojos at the store. On a cultural note related to the dogs the Quileutes traditionally raised woolly-haired dogs for their hair, which they spun and wove into prized blankets.

LaPush can be relaxing, invigorating or both. Even if you don't enroll in Quileute Language 101, you will learn something worthwhile about life on the Rez and you are guaranteed to leave in awe of beautiful beaches beneath the Top of the Rock where nature's show runs all four seasons.



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