

Sapphire Water by Day, Hop Yards by Night — A 3-Day Crater Lake & Bend Road Trip

I-Journey Travel Guide

Three days through Central Oregon's volcanic high desert — a cinder-cone summit and craft-brewery crawl in Bend, a morning scramble up Smith Rock's red-rock spires, the impossibly blue caldera of Crater Lake from the rim road's overlooks, and a walk through a mile-long lava tube on the way back — with real lodges, real breweries, and 2026 prices for every stop.

DURATION 3 Days

BEST TIME TO GO July – September

Crater Lake's 33-mile Rim Drive is buried under an average of 44 feet of snow a year and typically doesn't fully open until summer, so July through September is the reliable window for the full loop and the warmest, driest weather in Bend. Note: the Cleetwood Cove Trail and all boat tours to Wizard Island are closed for trail and marina rehabilitation through the summers of 2026, 2027 and 2028 — Rim Drive, its overlooks and the park's other trails remain open.

FROM
\$600 USD / person
for 2 people, incl. rental car, 2 nights' lodging, park entrance and activity fees

Day 1 Land in Bend & the High Desert at Sunset

A rental car pickup at the small Redmond airport and an afternoon getting oriented in Bend, closing with a cinder-cone sunset and a craft-brewery dinner.

Rental Car Pickup — Redmond Municipal Airport (RDM)

~15 minutes to downtown Bend • from \$45–70 USD / day

A small regional airport 15 minutes north of Bend with National, Alamo, Avis, Budget and Enterprise counters on-site — the natural gateway for a Crater Lake–Bend loop, since it lands travelers close to Bend and Smith Rock immediately.

Pilot Butte State Scenic Viewpoint

~45 minutes, self-guided • free

An extinct cinder-cone volcano rising directly out of Bend's east side, with a paved road (or a short trail) to a 360-degree summit view of the city and the snow-capped Cascades — a good first stop to get oriented, and a favorite spot for sunset.

Deschutes Brewery Bend Tasting Room & Beer Garden

~1.5 hours · flights from ~\$10 USD, pints ~\$7 USD

Bend's original craft brewery, opened in 1988, with a downtown tasting room and beer garden pouring year-round staples alongside small-batch and barrel-aged releases — the anchor stop on the city's well-known Bend Ale Trail.

Deschutes Brewery · <https://deschutesbrewery.com/pages/bend-tasting-room-beer-garden>

Dinner — Zydeco Kitchen & Cocktails

~1.5 hours · \$25–\$45 USD / person

A downtown Bend spot leaning New American with Cajun-inflected touches — a well-reviewed, reliable first-night dinner a short walk from most downtown hotels.

Overnight — The Oxford Hotel Bend

From \$250–\$350 USD / night, for 2 people

An AAA Four-Diamond eco-boutique hotel in downtown Bend with an on-site restaurant, walkable to the Deschutes River and the brewery district.

The Oxford Hotel Bend · <https://www.oxfordcollection.com/hotels/hotel-bend>

Day 2

Smith Rock in the Morning, Crater Lake by Sunset

An early climb among Smith Rock's red-rock spires before the two-hour drive south to Crater Lake's rim, timed for golden-hour light over the caldera.

Smith Rock State Park — Misery Ridge Trail

~2–2.5 hours, self-guided hike · \$10 USD day-use parking fee

A dramatic canyon of red and gold volcanic spires along the Crooked River, world-famous for rock climbing and just as good for hiking — the 3.7-mile Misery Ridge loop climbs steeply to a rim-top view before dropping back along the river, best started early to beat both heat and crowds.

Smith Rock State Park · <https://www.smithrock.com/>

Drive — Bend to Crater Lake National Park

~2 hours via Hwy 97 & Hwy 138 · self-guided

A straightforward drive south through pine forest and high desert to the park's north entrance — fill the tank in Bend, since services thin out closer to the park.

Rim Drive & Overlooks

~2–3 hours, self-guided · \$30 USD / vehicle park entrance

The 33-mile road ringing the deepest lake in the United States, with pullouts at Watchman Overlook, Sinnott Memorial Overlook and Sun Notch framing the impossibly blue caldera and Wizard Island's cinder cone — note that Cleetwood Cove Trail and lake-level boat tours are closed through 2028 for rehabilitation, so the rim overlooks are the way to see the water on this trip.

Crater Lake National Park (NPS) · <https://www.nps.gov/crla/planyourvisit/fees.htm>

Dinner — Beckie's Cafe, Union Creek

~1 hour · \$15–\$30 USD / person

A beloved roadside diner on Highway 62 operating since 1926, famous across Oregon for its homemade pie — a classic stop on the way in or out of the park.

Beckie's Cafe · <https://www.unioncreekoregon.com/dining/beckies-cafe/>

Overnight — Diamond Lake Resort

From \$150–\$280 USD / night, for 2 people

A lakeside resort about 20 minutes north of Crater Lake's north entrance, with motel rooms, studios and cabins on the shore of Diamond Lake beneath Mount Bailey and Mount Thielsen.

Diamond Lake Resort · <https://diamondlake.net/>

Day 3

A Lava Tube, the High Desert Museum & the Flight Home

A last look at the caldera before heading north, with a stop inside a mile-long lava tube and an afternoon at Bend's High Desert Museum on the way back to the airport.

Sun Notch or Garfield Peak Trail

~1–2 hours, self-guided hike · included with park entrance

A short morning hike before leaving the park — Sun Notch is an easy half-mile walk to a dramatic lake view, while Garfield Peak is a steeper 3.4-mile round trip climbing above Crater Lake Lodge for one of the best overlooks in the park.

Lava River Cave, Newberry National Volcanic Monument

~1.5 hours, self-guided · free entry, \$2 USD timed-reservation booking fee

Oregon's longest continuous lava tube, a mile-long, high-ceilinged tunnel formed by a Newberry Volcano eruption — bring or rent a flashlight, wear layers (it's a steady 40°F / 4°C year-round), and book the timed-entry parking slot ahead on Recreation.gov.

Deschutes National Forest — Lava River Cave · <https://www.fs.usda.gov/r06/deschutes/recreation/lava-river-cave-timed-reservation-tickets-system>

High Desert Museum, Bend

~2 hours, self-guided · ~\$20–25 USD / person

An indoor-outdoor museum just south of Bend covering the region's natural and Native American history, with live otters, porcupines and birds of prey alongside walk-through pioneer and ranching exhibits — a relaxed last stop before the airport.

High Desert Museum · <https://highdesertmuseum.org/tickets/>

Departure — Redmond Municipal Airport (RDM)

~25 minutes from Bend · return rental car at the terminal

Closes the loop on three days that ran from a cinder-cone sunset to a sapphire caldera to a mile inside a lava tube — return the rental car and check in for the flight home.