

Native American Tours

Steptoe Butte, Nez Perce Country and Unforgettable Hells Canyon (Day Trip)

Nomadic tribes of Spokane, Coeur d'Alene, Palouse and Nez Perce Indians roamed the vast Inland Northwest for centuries, but by the mid-1800s, white settlers had begun building forts and farms in the region. Learn how hostilities led to many battles, including the dramatic two-day clash in 1858 when Colonel Edward Steptoe and his 150 U.S. troops attempted to survive an onslaught by an estimated 600 to 1,000 Indians near present-day Rosalia. Sorely outnumbered and outgunned, Steptoe and his men managed to escape in the dead of night. Steptoe Butte is named for the colonel, and views from the top stretch 200 miles over the rolling Palouse.

Continuing south along the Snake and Columbia rivers, you'll hear tales of the Nez Perce Indians, who under Chief Joseph were credited with a largely cooperative attitude toward the soldiers and settlers. Follow the footsteps of Lewis and Clark's Corps of Discovery and stop at Nez Perce National Historical Park Visitor Center (<http://www.nps.gov/nepe/index.htm>) where audio programs and hundreds of artifacts reflect the stories and culture of this tribe.

Come face-to-face with over 650,000 acres of stark beauty at Clarkston, at the edge of Hells Canyon National Recreation Area (<http://www.fs.fed.us/hellscanyon/>). The vast terrain of steep desert bluffs, rugged peaks and alpine lakes shelters Hells Canyon, the deepest gorge in North America. Ride a Beamer's Hells Canyon jet boat down the Snake River into the heart of the canyon. Keep your eyes peeled for deer, mountain goats, bighorn sheep, bobcats and cougars. Stop at pictograph and petroglyph sights and learn about the Native American tribes that lived here thousands of years ago. Enjoy a box dinner at the end of the tour or dine in the city when you return to Spokane.

Historic Forts, Missions and Fossil Digging (Day Trip)

Native tribes fished along rapids of the Spokane River for thousands of years. In 1880, the United States Army established Fort Spokane (www.nps.gov/laro/historyculture/fort-spokane.net) in an area above the confluence of the Spokane and Columbia rivers, which later became Lake Roosevelt with the construction of the Grand Coulee Dam. The fort's guardhouse was converted to an Indian boarding school in 1898 and today houses the Fort Spokane Visitor Center and Museum. See photographs, military uniforms, weapons and photos and read first-hand accounts of life at the boarding school.

Drive north through the Colville Indian Reservation and the Colville National Forest to Republic (www.republicwa.com), a former mining and logging town with century-old buildings, numerous murals and a most unique geological and historical site, the Stonerose Interpretive Center (www.stonerosefossil.org). A treasure chest of fossils

can be found in this site dating back to the Eocene Epoch nearly 50 million years ago. Visitors and amateur archeologist are invited them to grab a hammer and cold chisel and hunt for rocks with impressions of plants, insects and fish. You can keep up to three of your finds.

Visit another remnant of Western expansion and Indian history at St. Paul's Mission (<http://www.nps.gov/laro/historyculture/mission-point.htm1837>) near the town of Kettle Falls. Built in 1845 by Catholic missionaries, the mission stood as a lonely sentinel on a hill overlooking the waterfall and the old Hudson's Bay Trading post at Fort Colville. The mission fell into ruins in the early 1900s but was authentically restored in 1939. Return to Spokane after a tour of the mission. Seasonal.

Options

The Inland Northwest's Native American culture comes alive each year at the colorful Julyamsh Coeur d'Alene Tribal Encampment and Pow Wow (www.julyamsh.com), the largest outdoor powwow in the Pacific Northwest. Watch hundreds of men, women and children dressed in their finest regalia as they compete in dance, drumming and horsemanship. Try some Native fry bread and shop and chat with the vendors.

One of the finest collections of Plateau American Indian artifacts and photographs is housed at the Smithsonian Affiliated Northwest Museum of Arts and Culture (<http://www.northwestmuseum.org/>), located in Spokane's historic Browne's addition residential neighborhood. Thousands of photos of Plateau Indian culture as well as art work by contemporary Indian artists provide a stunning overview of the region's Native American inhabitants.

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