

Cannon Beach cool



A view from [Trip Styler](#)

July 14, 2015

Wine, Surfing, Summer, Spring, Oregon, Fall, Couple, Coffee, Beach

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Discovering trend-setting spots above the shore

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Just a 90-minute drive from [Portland](#), Cannon Beach is popular getaway for Oregonians and Pacific Northwest weekenders who road-trip to the coastal community for a break (pun intended).

As a well-established retreat for families and surfers alike, the sand-dusted streets are filled with Cape Cod-style cafés, driftwood sculptures, surf shops, salt water taffy confectionaries, and souvenir stores selling kites and crêpes. It's pretty much my former 10-year-old self's vacation heaven.

(Seriously, is there anything better than building sand castles while breaking for salt water taffy?)

Now in my 30s, I wonder if my modern self—with an affinity for cool-hunting—would feel the same love for [Oregon's most swell spot](#) as I did when I was little, especially since I no longer build sand sculptures or eat salt water taffy on a regular basis.

Enter a bakery, an interactive eatery, and a distillery, all of which remind me why small towns are America's real trendsetters.



Open in 2014 with the help of a crowd-funded campaign, Sea Level Bakery + Coffee quickly becomes part of my Cannon Beach commute. Yet, if it wasn't for the smell of fresh bread wafting out the door, I might have missed it. The cabin-come-coffee stop blends into the local scene with its windblown cedar shakes, white trim, and picnic table out front.

Daily bread is the bakery's *raison d'être*. Completely taken by visits to his grandmother's house in France and their ritual of going to the *boulangerie* to pick up fresh baguettes, owner Jason brought this idea back as a souvenir, and together with his coffee-loving wife, they started their shop pairing crusty-come-chewy bread with brew from Portland-based Stumptown Coffee Roasters.

After spending an hour at Sea Level noshing and sipping in a state of nowhere-to-be vacation bliss, I walk 50 steps to the beach and attempt to burn off the bread on a two-hour power-stroll. (I think you burn more calories ambulating in the sand, right?) That night I have a reservation at EVOO Cannon Beach, a small market and interactive bistro mixing gourmet goods and intimate cooking shows.



Here, a dynamic husband and wife duo act as co-head chefs at the area's most highly-acclaimed address for epicureans seeking food nirvana. Miles away from your average dinner out, guests sit at place settings cozied up to the kitchen, while the chefs prepare each dish so close you could reach out and touch the hot-smoked wild king salmon or the ricotta cavatelli.

Not content just to show patrons the art of cooking, owners Bob and Lenore dole out Food Network-level know-how gleaned from their experience running some of North America's leading culinary institutions. Think of the experience like a soufflé: Flavor-rich, without any filler ingredients.

*Viewfinder Tip: For hotels in Cannon Beach, opt for a shorefront stay such as **Surfsand Resort**, so you are near the beach.*

The next day, in an effort to continue my mission uncovering the town's distinct digs, I beeline for the Cannon Beach Distillery, tucked behind a leather shop and art galleries. Helmed by a former science major, the tiny tasting room also is where artisan spirits made from raw ingredients are fermented, matured, and bottled. The store is stocked with small-batch booze ranging from rum to agave to whiskey. I become an immediate fangirl of the "Lost Buoy Gin," befitting its surroundings with a salty-sweet smoothness.

Feeling like I should sop up some of my *spirited* intake with some food, I head back to EVOO to grab a beach-chic picnic to-go. The picnic basket has all of the essentials: artisan charcuterie and cheese, EVOO olive oil, plus a house-made loaf of bread.

Toting my picnic to the beach, I place a blanket down and nosh the afternoon away while watching dogs, bikes, kites, beachcombers, surfers, joggers, and coffee-toting walkers play along the 4-mile swath of sand.

As the afternoon draws to a close, I notice a family in the distance building a sand castle while chewing salt water taffy. Thinking back to my first brush with Cannon Beach as a kid, I smile and realize that the small town edging Oregon's Coast is ever-evolving with a dose of cool for every age.

What beach towns do you visit and re-visit?