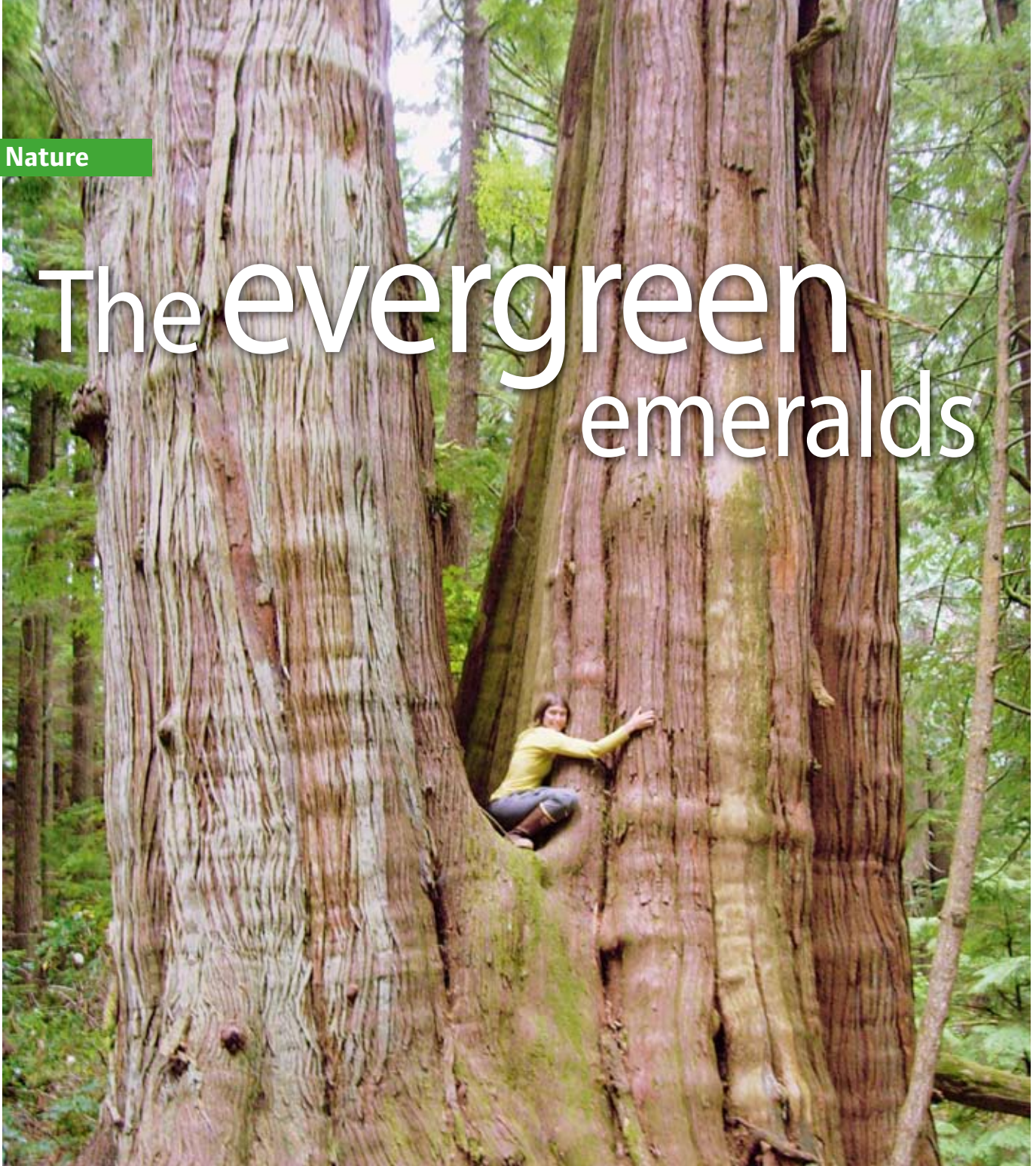


The evergreen emeralds



▲ Evergreens grow to magnificent height in the lifetime.

Shooting like stars into the empyrean, the evergreens of America's rainforests have an arresting charm which captivates even the most seasoned nature traveller.

Text & photographs **YD Bar-Ness**

The cool and mossy smell of the rainforests of the northern hemisphere in America and Canada is exquisite. It transports one into a dreamland of shadowed paths and dark evergreens. Home to rainforests that are incontestably wild, the Pacific Northwest United States (and the Pacific Coastal Canada, too) are an epitome of ecology. The trees in these places are the same as those that stand tall upon the mountain slopes in the American Northern Hemisphere.

These trees achieve spectacular and vibrant growth, lending life to the land they adorn. One can see them on the slopes of volcanoes, in the valleys and on the beaches. Near the cities of Seattle, Washington, and Portland in Oregon, small groves of these trees amid dancing waterfalls await to surprise the visitor. Although in distant geological past these evergreen forests had covered much of the world, they can now be seen retreating into colder places of the world. In spite of not yielding fruits or



▲ The Brothers (or The Olympic Mountains), hidden in the mist, stand tall in the distance.

flowers, these evergreens are indispensable. They render habitat possible by providing timber, and also sustain the environment by acting as lungs of the earth.

Timbre of aviation

The timber industry played a major role in the development of the modern American economy. Before that it had ably sustained the cultures and economy of the Native Americans too. One can see a link between these forests and the evolution of aviation. Boeing was founded near the city of Seattle with access to the coastal rainforests of the Olympic Peninsula. In Seattle, one can still find the remnants of some of the world's largest trees like the Sitka spruce. Light and strong, Sitka spruce wood was used in building the aircrafts of the early 20th century.

On volcanic slopes

Mt. Rainier, placed more than four thousand meters above the estuarine city of Seattle, has glaciated slopes and a fiery history. These features allow for extremely fertile forestland. A national park, Mt. Rainier is a mountaineer's challenge and a key part of the Seattle's skyline. In its southeast corner, the Ohanapecosh camp-site hosts tent and car campers beneath the towering firs. Just up the road, Cathedral Grove, with its massive cedar and fir trees, can be found on a sandy river island within the fast flowing mountain river.

Valley of moss

To the west of Seattle lies the craggy and stormy Olympic Peninsula. As the Pacific Ocean slams against it with fury, it

produces an extremely mossy forest in the valleys to the west. In the Hoh rainforest, deep within the Olympic National Park, the maple and spruces droop with the weight of the mosses and lichens as the forest's floor turns into a green carpet. The lush moss holds the moisture in the air like a sponge. As a result, even in mid-summer, the rainforest is transformed into a cool evergreen atmosphere.

The trek up the Hoh River is justifiably famous. The massive river rambles down from remote and glaciated mountains. One of the country's premiere trails tracks it upstream before climbing steeply to the snout of the Blue Glacier. From the most fertile low valley forest to the austere rock faces of the high mountains, this trail is a great way to witness the range of forests in the Pacific Northwest.

Stumps of Schmitz

Even in the fast-growing metropolis of Seattle, one finds some of the country's healthiest urban forests. One great place to discover it is Schmitz Preserve Park, a forested valley hidden behind west Seattle's scenic Alki Beach. Somehow, this valley escaped the full attention of the woodcutters and was donated to the city by the German immigrant Ferdinand Schmitz. Giant stumps can be found throughout the Preserve. They act as a strong reminder of what the city area was like. Starting at the top of the park, one could explore the trails through the woods, and exit near the beach.

An Olympian candy

The famous Pacific Coastal Highway 101 clings to the shoreline of



▲ Above: The icy flanks of Seattle have a cool evergreen atmosphere. Below: A cascading waterfall is an ideal photographic opportunity.

the Olympic Coast near Rialto Beach. These beaches are not sunny. The water there is not warm. The waves smash onto the rocky cliffs in a never-ending sequence. There are no beach bars, sunbathers or walking promenades. Approachable on dirt trails, these beaches are backed by sheer bluffs and thick rainforests and are ideal for an adventure in the wilderness.

Quite rare, wild beaches like the Olympic let one have solitude uncommon to tropical tourist beaches. As one walks along the beach, one passes by countless giant logs, lying bleached in the sun, scattered like toys along the sand.

In a strong contrast to sheltered valley forests like the Hoh, the storm-smashed cedar, spruce and pine of these beaches assume strange, grotesque shapes. Camping here can lead to exploring tide-pools, sea-caves, and jagged rock-stacks of unparalleled beauty.

Folds of falling water

Near Portland, Oregon's largest city, the massive Columbia River passes through the Cascade Mountains as it slowly makes its way to the Pacific Ocean. On the southern banks of the river, beautiful waterfalls spill off a volcanic plateau to splash down and join the river.

Along the Eagle Creek Gorge, you can see a stunning sequence of waterfalls as you climb up onto the plateau. Clinging onto the steep edge of the canyon, among feathery fir trees clamouring for light, one encounters many waterfalls. While some of these are high and misty, others trickle down rock faces. On sunny days rainbows can also be seen. The Pacific Northwest US is also famous for its ski-suiting snowy peaks. You could enjoy coffee in Seattle's cafes and bike around Portland's famous bike trail network.

Valuable tips

Look up, as most of a forest's activity takes place in the canopy. Look down, as buried in the leaves and dirt are treasures of biodiversity. Listen carefully, as insects, the wind, breaking branches, flowing water and falling rocks whip-up mesmerising sounds. Look back as you walk to earn a sense of how it looks in the other direction. If you have to retrace your steps, this exercise will help you stay oriented. Try and be safe. Make sure you stick to the established trail. If you happen to go to a remote area, tell someone where you are going. Equip yourself with the clothing, tools and skills necessary to visit these wild places. Be extremely careful with the weather, as it can turn stormy.

Fact file

Getting there

Jet Airways has daily, direct flights to New York and Newark from Chennai, Delhi and Mumbai. Onward connectivity is available via Jet Airways' codeshare partner United Airlines.

Accommodation

There are several resorts, boutique hotels and B&Bs to suit every budget.

For more information

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