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Display until February 28, 2021

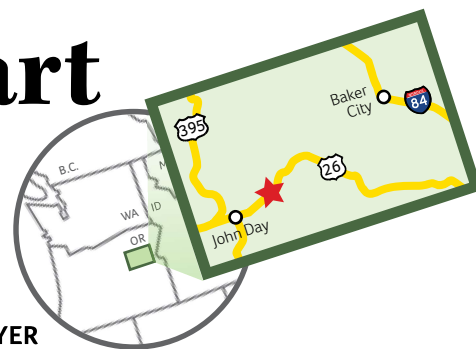


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27 Strawberry Heart

Prairie City, Oregon



BY ADAM SAWYER

Plan Your Trip

Find more information about visiting Prairie City and the Strawberry Mountain Wilderness at either traveloregon.com/places-to-go/cities/prairie-city, gcoregonlive.com/cities/prairie-city or cityofprairiecity.com.

Three things that don't exist: rational discourse on social media, vegan cheese that isn't weird, and a list of people that have visited Prairie City and didn't fall in love with it.

Admittedly, those are just opinions, but I think the Prairie City thing might hold water. Located east of John Day on a very road trip-worthy stretch of Highway 26, it's a place that is big on friendly faces, historic places and a breathtaking backdrop comprised of the Strawberry Mountains. To my mind, Prairie City is the heart of Eastern Oregon, both in location and spirit. Here are some reasons why.

The Strawberry Mountain Wilderness

Within the Malheur National Forest, the Strawberry Mountain Wilderness is home to five of the seven major life zones in North America. It is rugged, remote, and strikingly beautiful. It is also easily accessed from Prairie City. For a representative sampling, just take the classic day hike to Strawberry Lake and Strawberry Falls.

In addition to the 50-foot cascade, this outing also visits a very swimmable lake and affords the opportunity for further backcountry explorations. Along the way, you'll be treated to views of exposed craggy ridgelines, wildflowers and summer huckleberries by the thousands.

Historic Hotel Prairie

In the heart of downtown, the Hotel Prairie was built in 1910 on the corner of Front and Main. In the 100-plus years since, the building has seen its share of upswings, downturns and incarnations. In 2005, a small group of friends and relatives purchased the property and returned the hotel to proper prominence. It is the perfect melding of historic charm and thoughtful restoration and renovation.

The cozy hotel provides the creature comforts and amenities you need and then focuses the remainder of its attention on the history of the area and the building, of which there's a ton. There's an inviting wine/beer bar adjacent to the lobby, which is stocked with area guidebooks of all sorts. The rooms are perfectly appointed and, in some cases, provide majestic views of the mountains.

Oxbow Restaurant and Saloon

For a hamlet of its size, downtown is stocked with a surprisingly large number of great places to eat, drink and



Strawberry Falls

© Adam Sawyer



© Adam Sawyer

shop. A can't-miss is the Oxbow Restaurant and Saloon for the ambiance, the historic bar, the decor, the service and the food. Any one of those would be reason enough to spend quality time there. Luckily, they provide all five at no extra cost. Enjoy a drink or three at one of Oregon's oldest bars while simultaneously trying to convince yourself that the big game trophies hanging on the opposite wall aren't eyeballing you. When you're ready to eat, you can pick from an eclectic list of homespun classics and specials that never disappoint. The pizzas are a standout, as are the homemade desserts.

Downtown Prairie City

As alluded to, there's more. Highway 26, your route into town, becomes the main drag, Front Street. Walk down the block for a beer at the Prairie Pub. Get properly outfitted at BAR-W-B Western Wear. Hunt for treasure at Prairie City Antiques. Get gifts as well as caffeinated at the Roan Outwest Coffee Shop. And the Dewitt Museum and Sumpter Valley Railway Depot is home to an exquisite collection of local history exhibits.

Prairie City is a special town in a truly remarkable part of the Northwest. I have yet to meet another soul who didn't thoroughly enjoy their time spent there. Then, again, I suppose I do know some people who enjoy vegan cheese. 🌱



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