

Escape to Yosemite

A park for all seasons — especially summer

BY ANDREW BENDER

John Muir, the naturalist nicknamed "Father of our National Parks" called Yosemite "by far the grandest of all the special temples of Nature I was ever permitted to enter." Over a century after his death, you can still see why.

The jewel of the Sierra Nevada, glacier-carved Yosemite boasts some of the most iconic natural wonders on the continent: granite cliffs, rushing waterfalls, millennia-old Sequoia redwoods, towering ponderosa pines and more than 750 miles of hiking, climbing and driving routes to explore. Just saying the names of these icons — Yosemite Falls, El Capitan, Half-Dome, Bridal Veil Falls, Grizzly Giant — conjures up beauty.

No wonder this landscape has inspired all who have encountered it, from the earliest Ahwahneechee people to the tourists of today.

There's no bad season to visit Yosemite; fall colors, winter snows and spring greenery each have their own magic, and it's a natural for summer. Just plan ahead in summer to avoid post-Covid, school vacation crowds.



Explorer Cabin
Image courtesy of Tenaya Lodge

STAY You don't need to overnight at Yosemite's historic accommodations (you'd be lucky to snag a room) for a quality stay. A few miles outside the park, the resort-style **Tenaya Lodge** is nestled in the woods, in the town of Fish Camp. Tenaya's new **Explorer Cabins** are rustic yet mod-

ern, two-bedroom tiny homes, fit for a family or small group of friends, with full access to Tenaya's pools, spa, activities, dining at Jackalope's restaurant with its wide-ranging menu, and s'mores around fire pits.



Image courtesy of Visit Yosemite Madera County

SEE Among **Yosemite's** infinite opportunities for exploration, **Tunnel View** is the one must-see, a panorama encompassing the triumvirate of El Capitan, Half-Dome and Bridal Veil Falls. Then continue into Yosemite Valley to gaze at these marvels and more from below.

To avoid overcrowding, the National Park Service requires reservations to enter the park during summer peak hours. No reservation? **Yosemite 360 Tours** offers small bus tours staffed by knowledgeable local guides, some born and raised in the park and all enthusiastic to share meaningful insights and life experience.

My travel buddy and I found the tour a perfect orientation for later exploration — we chose a glorious **hike through Mariposa Grove**, the park's largest concentration of giant Sequoias. In the early morning we had it mostly to ourselves and the luxury of quiet to hear wildlife.

OUTSIDE YOSEMITE Tenaya Lodge is close to **hiking and mountain-biking trails** along a pretty creek and to a waterfall. Nearby, kids will love the century-old, narrow-gauge steam trains of the **Yosemite Sugar Pine Mountain Railroad**, as it traces a historic logging route

*Tunnel View Lookout
Image courtesy of Andrew Bender*



through the mountains — and adults will appreciate the railroad's evening programs featuring jazz, dinner or a show.

About 10 miles away, the town of **Bass Lake** is a quaint getaway. Take in the piney scenery from the lakeside bar and grill, Ducey's.

After all that, the town of **Oakhurst** (population 3,450) may seem like the big city. Draws include fine microbrews and gastropub fare at South Gate Brewing Company, the cozy throwback Reimer's candy store, the region's most upscale dining at Elderberry House and even Yosemite Axe Throwing (its owner is nationally ranked in the sport).

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

While you could fly from LAX to Fresno Airport and drive the remaining 90 minutes to Yosemite, considering the time you'll spend in transit it probably takes just as long to drive the approximately 275 miles from LA's Westside.

Once there, remember that the elevation is around 5,000 feet, so allow yourself time to acclimate before strenuous activity. And please heed cautions about respecting wildlife — for the animals' good and your own.



Image courtesy of Andrew Bender

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