



Gold Country

Nevada Fall in Yosemite National Park
(Getty Images)



Tap into California's golden state of mind on this glittering road trip.



“Gold!” was the feverish cry that spread around the world in 1848, sending pioneers pouring into California to seek their fortune and sparking similar gold rushes across the West. Though the California Gold Rush only lasted for seven years, the effects were long lasting.

On this road trip, you'll discover fascinating history from this era of California and the even more intriguing ways in which the towns that sprang up with the Gold Rush have morphed into some of the state's most charming places to visit today. Along the way you'll soak in all the natural beauty of the Central Valley and the Sierra Nevada that greeted hopeful miners nearly 180 years ago.

Start in the state's capitol of Sacramento, where you can go underground to see the original bones of the historic town underneath today's vibrant city and ride a railroad through the farmlands that produce incredible ingredients used by up-and-coming local chefs. Make a side trip up north to see the tallest trees in the world in Redwood National and State Parks before heading south through Elk Grove and Stockton, stopping along the way for incredible eats. Keep driving to the heart of Gold Rush country where you'll find one of the largest gold nuggets ever mined in North America, and charming historic towns like Murphys and Angels Camp.

Discover the Sierra Nevada's best gems as you raft its iconic rivers and explore Yosemite, learning to capture the park's incredible beauty with our photography guide. As you wind your way back to Sacramento, ride a historic steam train and pass through reinvigorated towns from the 1840s like Mariposa and Coulterville.

From waterfall mist to the splash of an oar in a rapid to the sun streaming through a grove of giant sequoias, most of the things that glitter on this road trip aren't gold, but this route will leave you feeling just as rich.

PHOTOS: Calaveras Big Trees State Park (Menga Belgal/Courtesy Calaveras Visitors Bureau), River rafting (Courtesy OARS)



See the Redwoods

Want to walk amongst the tallest trees on Earth? Take a detour north to Redwood National and State Parks, a unique collection of public lands that's part of the only region in the world where coastal redwoods grow. Here's how to spend a weekend.

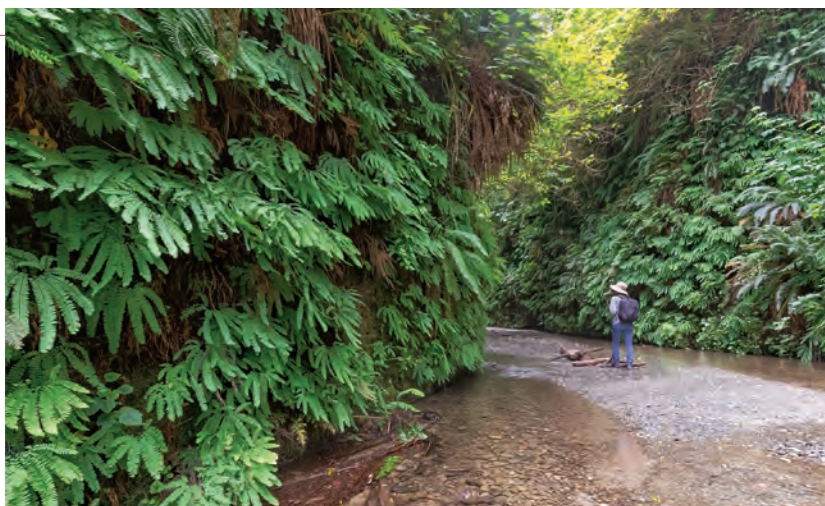
By Mikaela Ruland

DAY ONE

8:30 a.m.

Hike to Fern Canyon ▶

You won't find redwoods in Fern Canyon, but you will feel like you've been transported to *Jurassic Park* as you stroll through walls of incredible ferns. Find the trailhead at Gold Bluffs Beach. Note that you'll need to make a free summer parking reservation online at nps.gov/redw. Wear sturdy, waterproof shoes or sandals with good grip as you're going to get your feet wet, even in the summer months when footbridges are installed. You might have to climb over log jams along the way and the creekbed can be slippery and uneven. It's a quarter of a mile to see the ferns, but you can also do a 1-mile loop.



◀ 12:00 p.m.

Spot Whales and Picnic at Klamath River Overlook

It's well worth the steep, quarter-mile trek to the lower overlook for sweeping views of the Klamath River meeting the ocean. Keep your eyes out for migrating gray whales, which can usually be spotted in December and May and humpback whales which are often seen August through October. Killer whales and harbor porpoises are also occasionally found off the shores of the park. Pack a picnic lunch to keep you busy while on the lookout.

● 2:00 p.m.

Float the Klamath River in a Dugout Canoe

Redwood is the ancestral homelands of the Yurok people whose reservation borders the park today. Learn more about their culture and traditional art of making dugout canoes from redwood trees on a two-hour tour down the Klamath River. You'll ride in one of three of these canoes in existence and your tour fee helps maintain this storied tradition. Book at visityurokcountry.com/adventure.



◀ 8 p.m.

Pitch Your Tent

There are no hotels or lodges inside the park, but there are four developed campgrounds. Jedediah Smith and Mill Creek are in the north of the park and Elk Prairie and Gold Bluffs are in the south. RVs and trailers aren't recommended. These campgrounds are popular and advanced reservations, which can be made at ReserveCalifornia.com, are recommended.

DAY TWO

7 a.m. Get a Permit for the Tall Trees Trail ▶

One of the most sought after hikes in the park is Tall Trees Trail. This strenuous, 9-mile roundtrip hike brings visitors to a well-protected grove with excellent growing conditions that has allowed the redwoods here to exceed 350 feet. Because of the grove's popularity, a free permit is required to hike to it. Only 50 are issued per day and can be reserved at [nps.gov/redw](https://www.nps.gov/redw) 24 hours in advance.



4 p.m. Check Out Tidepools at Enderts Beach ▶

The rugged trail off Enderts Beach Road is approximately 1-mile roundtrip and follows a band of cliffs down to a small beach with the pools on the north end. Be sure to check tide charts ahead of time to learn when the tide will be out and the pools accessible. You'll want to wear sturdy shoes with a good grip to protect your feet on the sharp rocks while you look for crabs, anemone, seastars and snails.

PHOTOS: Hiking to Fern Canyon, Klamath River Overlook, Camping at Redwood National Park (Theo Crazzolara), Hiking Tall Trees Trail (Getty Images), Avenue of the Giants (Dan Senft Photography), Enderts Beach (Courtesy of Redwood National & State Parks)

◀ 1 p.m. Take a Scenic Drive

Newton B. Drury Scenic Parkway is one of the only places in the world where you can drive through a grove of old growth coastal redwoods. Take exit 765 or 753 off Highway 101 to access this gorgeous road. There are numerous pull-outs, but don't miss Big Trees where you can take a quick, two-minute walk to a beautiful grove of redwoods, one of which is estimated to be more than 1,500 years old.



Farm to Fork

By Mikaela Ruland

Sacramento may be a bustling metropolis, but its location nestled in the heart of California's farmland has helped make it America's farm-to-fork capital. Sacramento is the fourth-largest sushi rice producer in the world and even exports to Japan.

It wasn't always a city so focused on incredible food, though. In the mid-1800s, the Gold Rush fueled it. Head to the Old Sacramento Waterfront, a state historic park which has preserved the city's past. You'll find shops, restaurants, candy stores and even a comedy club housed in original and restored buildings. But to really experience this city's past, take an Old Sacramento Underground Tour with the Sacramento History

Museum. In the 1860s the entire city was raised almost a story after repeated flooding, but parts of the original city still remain underground.

Next, it's time to learn what farm-to-fork really means. You'll find an unmatched enthusiasm for local ingredients everywhere you go pioneered by the owners of Sacramento's Michelin-star- establishment, The Kitchen Restaurant. At the waterfront, Rio City Cafe with its beautiful patio and The Firehouse Restaurant with its fine dining menu both emphasize the use of food farmed nearby.

Don't get so caught up in the food that you forget Sacramento's incredible libation scene, though. Mornings are best spent

at Old Soul Co., to experience the coffee that catalyzed Sacramento's roasting movement. When you're ready for an adult beverage, head 15 minutes out of town to the award-winning Bogle Vineyards, which flies under most people's radar. More of a beer drinker? Sacramento has 70-plus craft breweries.

After tasting your way through the city, it's time to get a look at where all those incredible ingredients come from. The Sacramento River Fox Train will take you on a 2.5-hour journey along the river through the area's gorgeous farmland. With themed rides for the family and speciality rides for adults like beer or wine trains, you'll find something for every taste all year long.

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River Reprieve

By Mikaela Ruland

Located in the heart of California's wine country and surrounded by incredible wetlands, Elk Grove is a perfect place to stop on the way to Yosemite.

Start your day at the Cosumnes River Preserve where you can see more than 250 species of birds on the 3-mile roundtrip River Walk Trail. In the winter months, spot majestic Sandhill Cranes. The Cosumnes River provides stunning flat water opportunities to kayak, canoe or SUP. You can rent paddle crafts in nearby Lodi. For even more wetland beauty, explore Stone Lakes Wildlife Refuge with easy, paved walking trails.

After a day spent wildlife watching, there's no better place to relax than at one of Elk Grove's many wineries or breweries. Buy a two-day Trail Pass from CorksAndCaps.org which let's you order four flights from eight different participating spots. Don't miss McConnell Estates Winery, a fifth-generation operation located in an 1800s-era house turned tasting room. For beer, Flatland Brewing is a local favorite.

When it's time for dinner, you'll find cuisine from many parts of the globe represented here. Fujiya serves fresh sushi, tempura and ramen in the heart of Elk Grove. Or, try Todo Un Poco, a locally owned spot with a unique Mexican and Italian menu, often marrying the two. Try the Chicken Mole Tortellini or a Pork Adobo Calzone for a gastronomic experience that's hard to find anywhere else.

Learn more at ExploreElkGrove.com.

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Culture Stop

By Mikaela Ruland

Stockton was named the country's most diverse city by *U.S. News & World Report*, which makes it the perfect place to explore incredible food and stunning art.

Fresh produce and tantalizing spices draw locals, travelers and chefs to the hustle-and-bustle of the Downtown Stockton Certified Farmers' Market every Saturday from 5 a.m. to 11 a.m. (or until things sell out). It's one of the state's oldest and most successful markets. Find it under Highway 4 at Washington and San Joaquin streets. A can't-miss event that celebrates the city's culture and cuisine is the

Stockton Flavor Fest, May 17-19, 2024. It features art, live music and, of course, plenty of delicious food from around the globe.

Be sure to stop at a local favorite, The Fruit Bowl at 8767 East Waterloo Road. Owned by the Lucchetti family since 1945, you can indulge in delicious pies, sandwiches and gelato in addition to its famous stone fruit.

Next, check out Stockton's art scene. A big draw is the giant buddha and 90 other jewel-encrusted statues at the Wat Dhammararam Buddhist Temple, which celebrates the life and story of the

Cambodian buddha. An active Buddhist temple, you may spot monks walking along its paths. The temple area is free and open to visitors during daylight hours. Donations are accepted.

See stunning paintings by artists like Pierre-Auguste Renoir, Albert Bierstadt and J.C. Leyendecker at the Haggin Museum including Bierstadt's panoramic paintings of Yosemite. President Ronald Reagan borrowed *Looking Up the Yosemite Valley* from the Haggin to hang in the Roosevelt Room in the White House during his presidency.

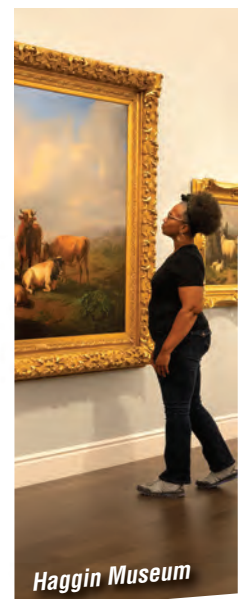
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Wet and Wild

By Tori Peglar

Experience two of Yosemite National Park's rivers for a thrilling whitewater rafting adventure.

Both the Merced and Tuolumne rivers flow out of the park, offering class III and IV rapids. For a day trip, go with OARS down the Merced River, a fun, rollercoaster of rapids with a break for lunch.

For a multi-day trip, raft the Tuolumne, one of the best whitewater rafting experiences in the country, says Steve Markle, director

of marketing. Only two commercial trips are allowed down the nearly continuous stretch of class IV rapids per day, making for a remote and pristine experience. Along the way, you'll stop to hike, explore an abandoned mine and play beach games.

"You are literally laughing like a kid bouncing through the rapids, and there are not many activities that evoke that kind of response," Markle says. "Even if you fall out of the boat, it's a story you'll tell for the rest of your life."

Wondering what gear to bring? OARS suggests warm and waterproof layers for cool mornings on the river, sandals with a secure strap (no flip-flops), quick-dry clothing (that means no cotton), sunglasses with a strap and sun protection, like a hat with a brim and sunscreen.

Depending on water flows, OARS has minimum age requirements for each trip.

Learn more at OARS.com/California or call 800-446-7238.



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Calaveras Gems

Two hours from Yosemite, check out a sprinkling of charming historic towns, an astonishing grove of giant sequoias and the uncrowded California of which you've dreamed.

By Tori Peglar

5 Calaveras Big Trees State Park

This amazing grove of giant sequoias was the first one to be discovered by settlers in 1852 and is California's longest continuously operating tourist attraction. See the spectacular giant sequoias up-close on the 1.4-mile North Grove Trail Loop. It's super popular for good reason as it's an easy trail for kids and adults.

2 Moaning Caverns Adventure Park

Rediscover your inner child at this adventure park in Vallecito which includes cave tours and a 32-foot-high climbing wall for all ages. Home to the state's largest single cave chamber, take the Spiral Cave Tour that brings you into the marble depths of the Calaveras formation. View the main chamber by walking down a narrow wooden staircase 65 feet under the ground. Continue 100 more feet to the bottom.

3 Murphys

Stop by Murphys Historic Hotel, a beautiful building that opened in 1856 and is known for its bar scene. There are more than 24 wine tasting rooms within walking distance of Main Street. Visit Ironstone Vineyards' museum to see an incredible 44-pound chunk of crystalline gold. In summer, there's a concert series at Ironstone Amphitheatre on site.



Calaveras Big Trees State Park
(Preethi Chandrasekhar / Courtesy of Calaveras Visitors Bureau)

4 Angels Camp

Writer Mark Twain shot to fame when he wrote *The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras*. Inspired by his story, residents started the annual Jumping Frog Jubilee in 1928. It's held at the Calaveras County Fairgrounds on the third weekend of May. Delve into gold mining history at Angels Camp Museum and see a large collection of carriages and wagons. Just up the road is one of the best preserved and oldest school houses in the state, Altaville Schoolhouse. Don't miss historic downtown's Stories in Stones, a haven for rockhounds.

5 Mokelumne Hill

Hotel Léger Restaurant & Saloon, established in 1851, gives you a great opportunity to eat in a 130-year-old dining room or have a drink at the bar with locals. You can borrow a ghost hunting kit from the front desk since the hotel is rumored to be haunted by friendly spirits.

Peruse Petroglyph Gallery, which features contemporary art. Walk across the street to get a cup of coffee and snack at Moke Hill Nuts and Candies. For food and wine, head to Renegade Winery on Main Street where grapevines climb a huge pergola on the outdoor patio.

Learn more at GoCalaveras.com.



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Big Trees

If you want to see some of the largest and tallest trees in the world, California is the perfect place to go. Strolling through quiet groves of mighty giant sequoias and coastal redwoods, it's easy to feel small. These are the national parks to visit to see these majestic species. Their sheer size alone makes them hard to capture, so we asked our friends at Tamron for some tips on how to get the best photographs of these parks.

by Mikaela Ruland



Photo by Grant Ordelheide
F/13; ISO 200; 0.4 second

Yosemite National Park's Mariposa Grove of Giant Sequoias

Mariposa Grove, in what is now Yosemite National Park, inspired the United States' first land protection legislation, eight years before Yellowstone became our first national park. Today, this magnificent grove is one of the best places in California to stroll through big trees. On the 2-mile

Grizzly Giant Loop Trail you'll pass the namesake Grizzly Giant, the oldest sequoia in the grove at nearly 3,000 years. It's just one of many spectacular trees to gaze up at. Another highlight is walking through the California Tunnel Tree, which was carved in 1865 to allow stagecoaches to pass through. To hit

the trail, park at the Mariposa Grove Welcome Plaza at the South Entrance and take the seasonal free shuttle to access the grove which leaves every 10-15 minutes. December through March, there is no shuttle service so you'll need to hike an additional two miles each way to access the loop.

Redwood National and State Park's Grove of Titans

On California's remote northern coast, between Trinidad and Crescent City, a unique collection of jointly protected federal and state lands make up Redwood National and State Parks, home to many of the world's remaining coastal redwoods. These trees are the tallest on Earth, reaching up to 380 feet into the sky. Thanks to a variety of factors, the tallest tree changes frequently. The current record holder lives deep in the backcountry and the park asks visitors not to attempt to hike to it in order to protect the area's fragile root systems. See equally impressive and much more accessible giants in Jedediah Smith Redwoods State Park.

The Grove of Titans, named for their mighty height, girth and interesting shaped branches, has an elevated boardwalk to protect tree roots. Park on Howland Hill Road (a narrow, unpaved road that shouldn't be attempted in large vehicles) and enjoy the 1.5-mile loop.



Photo by Ken Hubbard
F/8; ISO 200; 1/50 second

Tamron's Tips for Photographing Big Trees

- ▶ Use a wide-angle lens like Tamron's 11-20mm, 17-28mm, or 17-50mm. A wide-angle lens will allow you to include more of the tree in a single shot. This is especially useful when you're trying to capture the height and width of the tree.
- ▶ Try to find interesting perspectives that highlight each tree's unique features so you're not taking the same shot as everyone else.
- ▶ Use a sturdy tripod to keep your camera steady. This will help you avoid blurry shots, particularly in low light conditions that are common in these shady groves.
- ▶ Pay attention to lighting. It can make a huge difference in the final image. Try to capture the tree in soft, diffused light, such as during sunrise or sunset. This will help bring out the trees' colors and textures.
- ▶ Put your camera in manual mode and experiment with different settings. Try adjusting the aperture, shutter speed and ISO to see what works best for the scene.

Learn more at
Tamron-Americas.com.



Photo by Kira Emerson
F/1.8; ISO 25; 1/120 second

Sequoia National Park's Giant Forest

Sequoia National Park, between Fresno and Yosemite, is home to some of the largest trees by trunk volume in the world. Giant sequoias only grow on the western slope of the Sierra Nevada and can live to be 3,400 years old. One of the largest and most impressive groves in the park is Giant Forest, home to the world's largest sequoia. Known as General Sherman, this tree measures 36 feet in diameter at the base and is more than 275 feet tall. Two paved loops, the 0.75-mile Big Trees Trail and the 2-mile Congress Trail, access this impressive tree, along with many other massive specimens. To find the trails, exit the General's Highway at Wolverton Road and park at the Main Parking and Trailhead.

South of General Sherman, be sure to make a detour onto Crescent Meadow Road where a giant sequoia fell in 1937 and a tunnel was cut through to keep the road accessible. Cars smaller than 17 feet wide and 8 feet tall can drive underneath it, or a bypass is available for larger vehicles.

Our old growth forests are at risk. Only an estimated 5% of coastal redwoods remain and fewer than 80,000 giant sequoias are still living today. Logging, wildfire and drought all pose a threat to these incredible trees. While they may seem indestructible, redwoods and sequoias can be quite fragile. It's important to stay on marked paths and boardwalks when photographing as shallow roots can be easily damaged by foot traffic.

Feel the Gold Rush



Kayaking on Lake McSwain (Courtesy Yosemite Mariposa County Tourism Bureau)

From historic Gold Rush downtowns to luxury glamping and outdoor adventures, here are four reasons to visit the towns of Mariposa, Midpines, Fish Camp and Coulterville.

By Mikaela Ruland

■ Explore More

Spending a day exploring the great outdoors outside of Yosemite is a must. While no whitewater rafting trips run through the park, you can conquer some of the best rapids in California outside the boundaries on the same river that runs through the valley: the Merced. Book a half or full day excursion with OARS (pg. 51) or Zephyr Whitewater Rafting to experience a gentle float or an adrenaline-inducing ride down Class IV rapids. If flatwater is more your speed, head to Lake McSwain, 40 minutes from Mariposa where you can rent kayaks and paddle around the snowmelt-fed waters. If you have kids, don't miss a stop at Splash-n-Dash Aqua Park, the largest floating, inflatable water park in the U.S.

If you'd prefer to keep both feet a bit closer to the ground, a full-day horseback ride with Yosemite Trails Horseback Adventures will bring you into Mariposa Grove where you can gaze up at incredible giant sequoias from the back of your horse.

■ Stay Awhile

When you stay just outside the park, you'll get the best of both worlds. You'll be close to Yosemite to spend your days hiking and sightseeing, but also have easy access to dining, shopping and museums. There's several national chain hotels in the region, if that's what you're looking for, but there's also a ton of unique lodging options to check out. If a resort stay with on-site dining, a gorgeous pool and a spa sounds perfect, Tenaya at Yosemite is right next to the park's South Entrance with options ranging from luxury cabins to hotel rooms. At Blackberry Inn Yosemite, you'll find a bed and breakfast experience in a charming setting. If glamping is more your style, choose the sleek AutoCamp Yosemite where you can stay in a renovated Airstream.

■ Eat Like a Local

At 1850 Restaurant and Brewery in downtown Mariposa, locally made beers brewed with Sierra Nevada snowmelt pair with a diverse menu on which everyone in your group is sure to find something to love. For live music with a side of incredible local ingredients, head to Grove House. A favorite menu item is the "Chicken Goes Bok Bok" salad with bok choy and a peanut dressing.

Tenaya at Yosemite isn't just a beautiful lodging experience, it's also the place to go for a delicious meal close to the park. There are several restaurant options ranging from bar and grill fare to artisan pizza and Embers, the flagship dining experience, is a great place to make a reservation for a memorable meal. With four and seven course menus and thoughtful wine pairings, it's a favorite date night spot.

■ Discover History

The area's historic districts offer a small town experience that feels like you've stepped back in time. In Coulterville, the 115-person town looks a bit like a Wild West movie set, if you threw in modern cars. You can't miss the town's one-stop-shop, the Coulter Cafe and General Store which operates as both a visitor center and a restaurant serving great lunch options, often accompanied by live music.

Also worth a stop for history buffs are Mariposa's three museums, the California Mining and Mineral Museum, the Mariposa Museum and the Yosemite Climbing Association Museum and Gallery which does a fantastic job cataloging how this national park has shaped the sport of rock climbing including a gorgeous photography gallery with works by Tom Frost and Glen Denny.

Learn more at Yosemite.com.

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All Aboard

Feel like you've entered a time machine on a steam train ride with the Yosemite Mountain Sugar Pine Railroad.

By Mikaela Ruland

Just 10 minutes from Yosemite's South Entrance you can step back in time when you ride a historic narrow gauge steam train. The Yosemite Mountain Sugar Pine Railroad is an experience like no other and is a can't-miss part of your trip if you truly want to understand this region.

On a leisurely, one-hour journey, you'll hop on board an open-air logging car behind one of two Shay steam locomotives. These powerful engines, from 1913 and 1928 respectively, were the same kind that once fueled the lumber and mining industries in this part of the country. There's only one other narrow gauge engine in the world of their kind still in operation. On the two-mile journey down the original route of the Sugar Pine Railroad, you'll pass through the Sierra National Forest. As you head down an impressive 4.5% grade, the railroad's staff will narrate what you're seeing and help you understand the history of logging in the Sierra Nevada.

At the turnaround point, you'll get the opportunity to get off the train and take photos, explore the picturesque creek and watch as the crew adds more water to the engine. Then, get back on board to witness

a true engineering marvel as the train chugs its way back to the station.

Rides run up to four times a day, April through October. It's always a good idea to book in advance as time slots can sellout, especially on busy summer weekends. Plus, you'll get the best price when you book online.

While the ride only takes an hour, be sure to budget more time to enjoy the other on-site attractions. If you're traveling with kids, you'll want to add on gold-panning to your train ride ticket. Learn how miners extracted gold from the area's creeks with an authentic sluice box and you'll even get to take home a vial of the real gold you uncover. There's also a museum housed in an 1880 homestead where you can see artifacts from the area's past, a toy store and a gift shop where you can purchase souvenirs and grab n' go fare, and a hot snack bar.

The railroad also offers several special rides that, if they coincide with your vacation, you would be remiss not to book. A fan favorite is the Moonlight Special. This three-hour evening ride on Wednesdays and Saturdays during the summer lets you get a little silly

as you immerse yourself in a night of music. First, enjoy a delicious barbecue meal, then board the train to a backcountry stage where a local folk band will serenade you around a campfire to classics like "Home on the Range". On the ride back it'll be dark so you can see the stars or perhaps the full moon. Or, choose the Moonlight Melodrama, a similar format with a fun theatrical performance where audience participation is highly encouraged. This ride is offered on the first Sunday in June, July and August.

For a truly unique experience, book the Yosemite Jazz Train. On select afternoons throughout the summer, don your best outfits and get ready for an incredible musical experience with both up-and-coming jazz performers and some of the biggest names in the genre. Enjoy appetizers and a meet and greet with the artists before boarding the train to the Lewis Creek Amphitheater. There, you'll be treated to an open-air performance like no other. Be sure to book all specialty rides at least two weeks in advance.

Book your ride at YMSPRR.com.

Moonlight Melodrama ride (Courtesy of Yosemite Mountain Sugar Pine Railroad)

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