A high-angle, wide shot of the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco, California, during the "golden hour" of sunset. The bridge's iconic Art Deco towers and suspension cables are silhouetted against a vibrant orange and yellow sky. The water below is a deep, rich blue, and the bridge deck is filled with cars. The overall mood is serene and majestic.

Golden State of Mind

Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco
(Getty Images)



From the Golden City, wind your way through unpretentious wine country, orchards and gold rush towns to reach Yosemite.



High up in the Sierra Nevada, a snowflake falls. When spring's warm sun turns winter snow to water, that snowflake takes a circuitous route, running in mountain streams, winding across wildflower-dotted meadows, through tributaries like the American and Tuolumne rivers and eventually ends up in either the Sacramento or the San Joaquin rivers, flowing through a giant expanse of wetlands known as the Bay-Delta. From here, the snowflake flows into the San Francisco Bay and passes under the Golden Gate Bridge to reach the Pacific Ocean. This tiny snowflake—and unfathomable numbers of its companions—water two-thirds of California.

On this road trip, you'll trace the snowflake's route backwards. Start by exploring the San Francisco Bay and the fascinating history of Alcatraz Island, before heading inland. You'll pass through one of the country's most productive agricultural regions, including towns like Livermore where you'll find a laid-back wine region, with grapes nourished by that snowflake. In Pincrest, explore peaceful, snowmelt-fed lakes or head to Sonora where you'll find apple orchards producing cider.

When you make it to Yosemite, be sure to visit the Hetch Hetchy area, where less than 1% of park visitors ever venture. There's a lovely, historic lodge to stay in nearby and you can hike around the reservoir and discover its history. Before the Tuolumne River was dammed to create the reservoir, this hidden gem was likened to Yosemite Valley in its grandeur. The gorgeous forests, expansive views and breathtaking waterfalls aren't just another stop on your road trip, they're someone's home. Get to know the folks that live in and around Yosemite in our feature on page 48, before pitching camp underneath the stars.

After Yosemite, eat local in Mariposa County and then wind your way back through beautiful farmlands and orchards, stopping in Modesto where you'll find a sea of ethereal white blossoms in the spring, thanks to the city's groves of almond trees. As you make your way toward the coast, consider that little snowflake and its incredible journey. All the wine you've sipped, streams you've hiked beside and produce you've eaten along the way are all thanks to Sierra Nevada snowmelt.



SAN FRANCISCO

Leave Your Heart

Start your road trip in one of California's most intriguing cities: San Francisco.

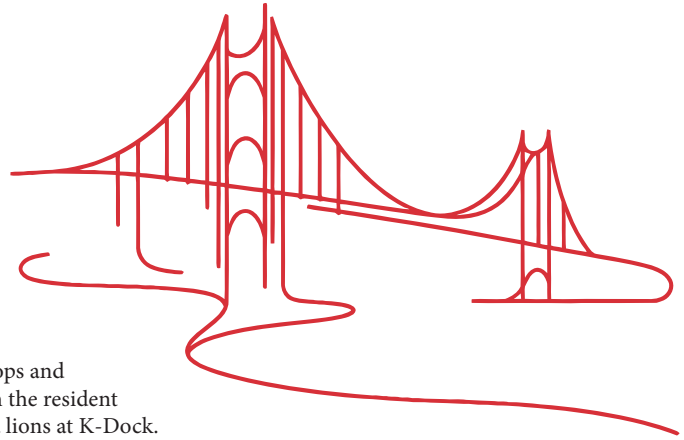
By Mikaela Ruland

Explore this metropolis known as the "Golden City" by taking an unforgettable trip across the famous Golden Gate Bridge. It's a 1.7-mile one-way walk or bike across the bridge painted "International Orange," so ships can see it in the fog. Speaking of fog, your views from the bridge might be dampened (literally) by the persistent weather phenomenon locals call Karl the Fog, named after the misunderstood giant

in the movie *Big Fish*. The city has, on average, 108 days of foggy weather a year.

Head to PIER 39 to stroll the promenade full of shops and restaurants and watch the resident herd of California sea lions at K-Dock. The population fluctuates depending on the season, but the record was more than 2,100 in May 2024. From PIER 39 you can walk along the Embarcadero and find lots of other tourist attractions from the much-loved Boudin Bakery where sourdough has been made since 1849, to the Ghirardelli Chocolate Factory.

Head inland on one of the city's famous cable cars to Chinatown. The largest and oldest in North America, this area is a fun



place for visitors to shop, eat and experience a wide variety of Chinese culture, but it's not a tourist attraction. It's the home and community of 15,000 residents, 81% of which identify as Asian. Visit [MyYosemitePark.com/things-to-do/attractions/chinese-history-in-yosemite](https://www.MyYosemitePark.com/things-to-do/attractions/chinese-history-in-yosemite) to learn about the connections between California's Chinese population and the national park. It's an important piece of American history.



Alcatraz citycruises

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- ✓ Cell House Audio Tour
- ✓ San Francisco Views
- ✓ Historic Gardens
- ✓ Exhibits



SCAN TO BOOK NOW!



Explore Alcatraz

By Susanna Klingenberg

You likely know of Alcatraz, the small island 1.25 miles off the coast of San Francisco, as a notorious federal penitentiary that's held mob bosses and larger-than-life criminals.

But Alcatraz's history goes far beyond jail time, from Indigenous people who thrived there to its role as a prison for Confederate sympathizers, to its occupation by Native Americans during the Nixon administration.

A visit to the island with Alcatraz City Cruises is your ticket to a fascinating past. Dive deep into the island's history and natural wonders that get overshadowed by chilling (and admittedly, enthralling) tales of gangsters and escape attempts.

To visit Alcatraz, book a spot on Alcatraz City Cruises, the island's only authorized ferry service, at least three months out from your Bay Area trip. Choose a day tour and take your time, hopping on any returning ferry that suits your schedule. Or book a night tour to watch the sun set over the Golden Gate Bridge and experience the island in peaceful quiet.

Explore the cellhouse using the audio tour and don't miss the gardens and extensive exhibits that bring the island and its many characters to life.

Book your tickets at [AlcatrazCityCruises.com](https://www.AlcatrazCityCruises.com).



Explore & Stay *the Tri-Valley Way*

Explore California's oldest (and friendliest) wine country, just 35 miles east of San Francisco. Pair award-winning wines with locally-driven cuisine, charming downtowns, and stunning outdoor escapes. Come on over – *We're closer than you think.*

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Authentically California

Get a genuine taste of the Golden State 35 miles east of San Francisco in the Tri-Valley, an inviting collection of four cities, one town and plenty of heart. Here's four things to experience.

By Susanna Klingenberg

■ Livermore Valley Wine Country

Before there was Napa Valley, there was Livermore Valley, where wine enthusiasts and wine beginners alike find delicious sips and memorable experiences. Livermore Valley runs east to west—unusual for wine country—creating an ideal environment for the vineyards: Coastal fog comes in at night to cool the grapes, then retreats in the morning, letting them bask in the California sun. Live music among the vines is common here, as is rubbing elbows with the vintners themselves. Don't miss Wentle Vineyards, family run for five generations, and known worldwide for its Chardonnay. While you're in Livermore, catch a big-name show at the Bankhead Theater and stop for a meal at Range Life, beloved by locals for its creative, seasonal fare and welcoming atmosphere.

■ Lake Del Valle & Pleasanton

Just minutes away from Livermore, Lake Del Valle State Recreation Area is a favorite spot for residents of the Tri-Valley to relax and explore outdoors. Featuring 16 miles of shoreline (with two swim beaches) you can get out on the water with a stand-up paddleboard or a boat rental from the marina. Stick around until dark: With close to zero light pollution, it's a fantastic place to spot all kinds of celestial beauty.

For a slice of what day to day life is like in the Tri-Valley, visit downtown Pleasanton. Main Street is a throwback to the Wild West era, but instead of saloons, you'll find a walkable culinary scene dotted with one-of-a-kind boutiques, galleries for every taste and local theater at the Firehouse Arts Center.



Wentle Vineyards (Courtesy of Visit Tri-Valley)



Hiking Mount Diablo in Rock City Park (Courtesy of Visit Tri-Valley)

■ Mount Diablo State Park

The Julpun people who lived in the area 200 years ago understood Mount Diablo as the birthplace of all creation, and a visit to this 20,000 acres of wilderness makes it obvious why. On a clear day from the mountain's summit observation deck, you can see forever, from the Golden Gate Bridge, to Yosemite National Park's Half Dome to the Sierra Nevada. Robin Fahr of Visit Tri-Valley recommends Mount Diablo State Park's Rock City hike, a somewhat challenging 0.9-mile loop that will capture your imagination and engage your senses. "With its windswept limestone caves and manzanita trees, you can imagine what it was like for Native Americans who lived here," says Fahr. "If you're feeling brave, don't miss tarantula mating season in late summer and early fall." The usually shy arachnids leave their burrows and scurry about during this short period, so you can get a peek. They might be creepy, but there's nothing to fear: Tarantulas mind their own business unless provoked.

■ Dublin's Diverse Food Scene

Dublin is one of the fastest growing cities in California, thanks to its proximity to San Francisco and Silicon Valley. Its popularity has attracted people from across the globe, and they bring with them more than just impressive tech skills: they also bring recipes. This unexpected influx has made Dublin a hub of cuisines from all over the world. Fahr says, "The flavors are unique and wonderful, and they're all versions of home cooking, so you know it's going to be delicious." The city boasts just about every cuisine you can think of, often in unassuming surroundings, where you'll meet the chef and the owner's family. Don't expect white tablecloths and sommeliers, but if you seek authentic, delicious food that will expand your palate and create memories, Dublin is your place. Check out Burma! Burma! for traditional Burmese fare (think spicy and salty curries, noodles and fritters) and Kanpai Sushi.

Learn more at VisitTriValley.com.



TWAIN HARTE



Family in Twain Harte (Visit Tuolumne County)

At the Doorstep

More than half of Yosemite lies within Tuolumne County, and though you might be tempted to rush right to the entrance, you'll be well rewarded for slowing down and spending some time outside the park boundaries in these awesome spots.

By Kristen Arendt

1 Soak in the Views at Dodge Ridge Mountain Resort

In the summer, you can enjoy the mountain by hopping on the chairlift for a scenic ride to the top and then grabbing a bite to eat at Basecamp Bar and Grill. Kick back in an Adirondack chair on the restaurant's deck to enjoy the vantage point from 6,600 feet. Love mountain biking but not super excited about pedaling uphill? Grab a bike park lift ticket and toss your bike on the chairlift for some gravity-aided downhill sessions that will have you smiling ear to ear. The resort also offers bike rentals to outfit you for the day.

2 Get Away in Groveland

Swing into Mountain Sage Coffee & Nursery in historic downtown Groveland to enjoy your daily dose of caffeine in a unique setting. The 1867 family homestead has been turned into a coffee shop, art gallery, retail store, plant nursery and event center.

Satisfy your sweet tooth and do a little souvenir shopping at the Grove Mercantile, which serves 12 rotating flavors of homemade ice cream alongside a curated selection of outdoor inspired gifts and goodies. Another can't-miss stop in downtown is the Iron Door Saloon, which opened in 1852 and is the oldest continuously operating saloon in the state.

3 Sample the Flavors of Sonora

Originally founded in 1850 by miners from Mexico, today Sonora boasts plenty of historic gold rush character along with art galleries, boutique shops and restaurants.

Indigency Reserve, founded by Jay and Judy Watson, is a great spot to spend a sunny afternoon. The Watsons produce hard ciders, brandy and vodkas that you can sample in their sustainably built tasting room. You're also welcome to bring a picnic to enjoy on site, play a round of disc golf or head out on the hiking and biking trails to explore the 160 acres of organic apple orchards.

4 Enjoy a Taste of the Old West

Stop at Columbia State Historic Park to see what life was like during the California Gold Rush when more than \$150 million was mined in the area between 1850 and the early 1900s. Walk the streets to see a stagecoach loading passengers, browse the 1850s-era shops, dine at a restaurant or pan for gold.

Fifteen minutes down the road, you'll find the quaint town of Jamestown, the spot where gold was first discovered in the county. It's a great place to stop for a meal or overnight, especially if you want to see Railtown 1897 State Historic Park. During your visit, you can take a ride behind a historic steam or diesel locomotive through California's scenic gold country.

5 Have a High Sierra Adventure

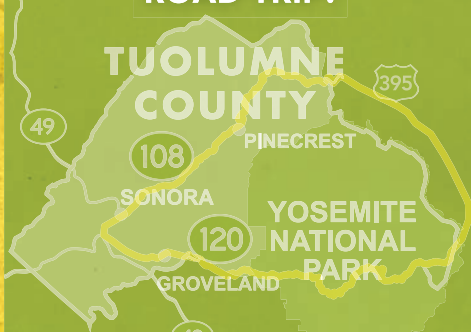
No trip to Tuolumne County would be complete without experiencing the grandeur of the Sierra Nevada—and you don't have to go into Yosemite to seek those iconic views. Take a scenic drive up to Sonora Pass on State Route 108. The paved road climbs through forested hillsides, past picturesque lakes and jutting granite formations before topping out at 9,624 feet above sea level.

Learn more at VisitTCToday.com/YosemiteJournal.

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EPIC HIGH SIERRA LOOP
ROAD TRIP!



EXPLORE CALIFORNIA'S
TWO HIGHEST
MOUNTAIN PASSES



 Hetch Hetchy Reservoir, Yosemite National Park

Endless adventure awaits where the iconic wonders of Yosemite National Park, the authentic history of California's Gold Country, and the rugged beauty of the High Sierra come together. Trade your to-do list for a trail map, lace up your boots, and let your wild spirit lead the way. Good times are calling — answer in Tuolumne County, just 2.5 hours east of the San Francisco Bay Area.

VisitTCToday.com/YosemiteJournal

HIGH SIERRA - - - - GOLD COUNTRY - - - - YOSEMITE



Three Sisters

First Light Resorts offers three remarkable lodges at the entrance to Yosemite, each unique but all featuring the same warm approach to hospitality, connection to their beautiful surroundings and unmatched amenities with no hidden resort fees.

By Mikaela Ruland

■ Evergreen Lodge

Located just a mile from Hetch Hetchy—the secret region of Yosemite that only 1% of park visitors ever frequent—historic Evergreen Lodge feels like a warm hug in the woods. This beautiful property was built in 1921 and offers a variety of lodging options ranging from cozy cabins to cottages, luxury guest houses and even glamping sites (with full resort access), all nestled in a peaceful forest. After a day in the park, relax in the lodge's saltwater pool or hot tub and enjoy a meal made of locally sourced ingredients at the tavern or restaurant on site.

Evergreen Lodge was the inaugural First Light Resorts property decades ago and set the standard for the group's other resorts to come. There are tons of on-site amenities from daily activities like craft classes and nightly fireside s'mores, to wellness treatments. You'll also find gear rentals to equip you for your park adventure and guided excursions you can book from the lodge like hiking, rafting and flightseeing.

■ Rush Creek Lodge & Spa

Just down the road from Yosemite's Big Oak Flat Entrance and on a YARTS bus stop to make accessing the park a breeze (no peak-hours reservation needed), Rush Creek Lodge is a grand hillside resort that combines luxury with a mountainside getaway. You'll find a mix of hotel rooms, suites and villas on the sprawling 20-acre campus anchored by an impressive main lodge. Enjoy a beautiful swimming pool, an indoor game area in front of a big fireplace, and eateries that serve up impeccable food across the resort from a pool bar to a restaurant and tavern.

Activities abound at Rush Creek, so start your day at the Recreation Desk in the Guest Lounge for free planning advice, from exploring local trails to booking professionally guided excursions. Whatever you choose, spend at least a few hours pampering yourself at the gorgeous, Yosemite-inspired full-service spa featuring warm waterfalls coves to sit under, mineral hot tubs and aromatherapy rooms.



■ Firefall Ranch

First Light Resorts' newest property, Firefall Ranch, brings a serious dose of luxury to the Sierra. Yosemite enthusiasts know and love Evergreen and Rush Creek Lodges, but Firefall Ranch adds an exciting new option to the Yosemite experience. Nestled along Highway 120 on 300 meadowed acres, this stunning property is the place to go for a next level vacation. Check in to a stand-alone private cottage or villa and then take advantage of the amazing amenities like the opulent outdoor area with a large heated saltwater swimming pool, two hot tubs and a poolside game pavilion. Firefall Ranch is a quick 20-minute drive to the Big Oak Flat Entrance, but there's so much to do on site from free bikes to cruise around the property, to a forest disc-golf course and horseback riding. You don't even have to leave to have a fantastic time. At night, head to the resort's Jackrabbit Ridge for amazing hilltop stargazing. Firefall also welcomes dogs, so your furry friend can join the fun.

YOVA is the property's flagship restaurant and it's well worth making a reservation for dinner at this fine dining spot. The menu features a California take on South American grilling techniques and is served in a dining room that could be considered a work of art itself. Featuring intricate woodwork and big windows, the restaurant pulls inspiration from the owners' heartfelt memories visiting Yosemite Valley (hence the name) as children. There's also a thoughtful wine list to peruse, which reflects the team's love of West Coast vintages.

Learn more and book your stay at [YosemiteHotels.com](https://www.YosemiteHotels.com).

PHOTOS: Rush Creek Pool (Kim Carroll Photography / Courtesy of Rush Creek Lodge), Cottage at Firefall Ranch (Tracy Barbutes / Courtesy of Firefall Ranch at Yosemite)

EXPLORE YOSEMITE IN STYLE

LODGING • DINING • RECREATION • TOURS • MEETINGS & EVENTS



EVERGREEN LODGE

A classic Yosemite experience at an iconic mountain resort with 88 cabins and 22 Resort Glamping sites spread throughout 20 acres of woods near Yosemite's western border and Hetch Hetchy entrance.

YOSEMITE RUSH CREEK LODGE & SPA

A relaxed yet sophisticated experience inspired by its 20-acre hillside setting near Yosemite's Highway 120 West entrance, the lodge features a tastefully appointed mix of 143 rooms, suites and villas, plus an award-winning Spa.



FIREFALL RANCH

New to the Yosemite landscape in Spring 2024, this luxurious resort features 55 standalone Cottages and Villas situated among 300 serene acres of sprawling meadows and Sierra foothills along Yosemite's Highway 120 West corridor.



YosemiteHotels.com



YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK

Did Someone Say S'mores?

Make your 2026 camping plans at one of the park's 13
campgrounds with this guide.

By Mikaela Ruland



Lower Pines Campground
(Grant Ordelheide)



It's hard to beat the convenience and ambiance of sleeping under the stars inside Yosemite, but scoring a coveted campsite can be a challenge. Reservations are required for all campgrounds inside the park April through October. Bookings open on Recreation.gov five months in advance on the 15th of the month for Upper, Lower and North pines campgrounds and Wawona and Hodgdon Meadows, and two months ahead for Tuolumne Meadows, Crane Flat and Bridalveil Creek. Yosemite Creek, White Wolf, Porcupine and Tamarack flats are available two weeks in advance. Reservations open at 7 a.m. PT and tend to sell out immediately. For your best shot at getting your dream site, create an account on Recreation.gov ahead of time and use a computer with fast Wi-Fi. Camping is only allowed in designated campgrounds, or in the backcountry with a permit. Use this guide to decide where you want to stay before the reservation window opens.

RV Friendly
 Has a Dump Station
 Potable Water Available
 Year Round
 Accessible Sites

Yosemite Valley Campgrounds

North Pines Campground



This campground is one of two in the park that can accommodate RVs up to 40 feet in length at a few of its sites. Be sure to check your site's specs before booking. This quiet campground has great views and is open late-April through October. Check for the early reservation lottery.

Upper Pines Campground



Offering the only dump station in the valley, this campground is open year round. Tall pine trees and views of Half Dome make this a stunning location.

Lower Pines Campground



This campground is the second of two in the park that can accommodate RVs up to 40 feet in length at a few of its sites. Be sure to check your site's specs before booking. Lower Pines is located along the Merced River and is beautiful in the fall. It's open late April through late October.

Camp 4



All of Camp 4's sites are walk-in, meaning you'll need to be prepared to carry your gear from your car to your campsite. Known for attracting rock climbers, this year round campground is near Yosemite Falls. Mid-April to mid-November, reservations are available one week in advance, while off-season sites are first-come, first-served.

Southern Campgrounds

Wawona Campground



This year round campground is located on Wawona Road close to Mariposa

Grove. Reservations are required mid-April through late October. The campground is situated along the South Fork of the Merced River, making it very peaceful.

Bridalveil Creek Campground



Located along Glacier Point Road, this area sits at 7,200 feet in elevation and is open mid-July through early September. Its location makes it a great spot for catching sunrise at Glacier Point and RVs up to 35 feet in length can fit.

Northern Campgrounds

Hodgdon Meadow Campground



Find this year round campground along Big Oak Flat Road, sitting at 4,900 feet in elevation. Fires and drought have affected trees in this area, so it's a good place to camp if you want full sun. First-come, first-served sites are available mid-October through mid-April.

Crane Flat Campground



With a late May to mid-October season, this area is located along Big Oak Flat Road and sits at 6,200 feet in elevation. This campground is situated conveniently for exploring both Yosemite Valley and Tioga Road.

Tuolumne Meadows



Located along Tioga Road, this is the park's biggest campground with 304 sites. It reopened in 2025 after a several year renovation. Some lucky campsites in A Loop are located along the Tuolumne River. A great choice for RVs up to 35 feet in length, there's a dump station here.

Bathrooms with flush toilets are available during the camping season, mid-July through September.

Tamarack Flat Campground



RVs aren't allowed at this primitive campground, tucked in the pines three miles off Tioga Road. It's a great place to get a quiet respite but still be less than an hour from Yosemite Valley in the summer months when it's open. Water is only available from Tamarack Creek, so must be filtered, boiled or treated.

White Wolf Campground



Located along Tioga Road, this 8,000-foot in elevation spot in the trees can accommodate RVs up to 27 feet and trailers up to 24 feet. Open late June to September, this small, quiet campground will let you feel worlds away from it all.

Yosemite Creek Campground



You'll need to take a rough dirt road to access, but the payoff is that most sites are close to the serene Yosemite Creek. The creek is the only water source, so water must be filtered, boiled or treated. It's open July through September most years.

Porcupine Flat Campground



One of the highest elevation campgrounds in Yosemite, Porcupine Flat sits at 8,100 feet, making it cooler than much of the rest of the park. Water is only available from Porcupine Creek, so must be filtered, boiled or treated. It's usually open mid-July through early October.





Feel the Gold Rush



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

From historic mining towns to luxury glamping and outdoor adventures, here are four reasons to visit Mariposa, Midpines, Fish Camp, El Portal and Coulterville.

By Mikaela Ruland

■ Explore More

A day spent adventuring in 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 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, beeline to 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 are 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 spot to stay, 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. 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 gander 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 an inspiring photo gallery with works by Tom Frost and Glen Denny.

Learn more at Yosemite.com.

FOR
-ALL-
TIME



STAND AMONG THE GIANTS

Yosemite Mariposa County is a place beyond wonder.

It's where you can hike beneath granite giants, explore Gold Rush-era towns and relax in nature, all in the same day. It's where there's always something to see and do, no matter the season — from outdoor activities to perusing quaint towns, museums, restaurants and shops — and there's always somewhere to stay for any budget and travel style.

It's where adventure, beauty and history live in harmony. And it's an experience that lasts for all time.



Visit Yosemite.com

The ultimate resource for planning your adventure to Yosemite National Park.





In Full Bloom

Nestled in the verdant Central Valley, halfway between San Francisco and Yosemite, Modesto is a well-situated stop for nature lovers and foodies alike.

By Susanna Klingenberg

Modesto has three visitor friendly almond orchards—a rarity in California. Picnic among the trees at Rodin Farms or enjoy a world famous almond butter milkshake at Robert's Ferry Gourmet. Stroll along the Stanislaus River at Knights Ferry Recreation Area, then hike the easy 2.8-mile Stanislaus River Trail nearby (a favorite of local birders) and admire the longest covered bridge west of the Mississippi River.

To experience the orchards at their most magical, visit mid-February to mid-

March and take in more than 120,000 acres of white and pink almond blossoms that flutter in the breeze to create "California snow."

Downtown, explore the nearly 100 murals brightening the streets. For hyper-local fruit, nuts, herbs and artisan wares, drop by the farmers market on Thursdays and Saturdays from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m., on 16th Street between H Street and I Street. Afterwards, grab a small-batch coffee or beer at 18Seventy Brewing Company, a women-owned and operated spot to drink locally.

Savor dinner at Galetto's, which is owned by the Gallo winemaking family and features seasonal dishes and locally famous pizza. Then, take in an evening show at the Gallo Center for the Arts, which includes a mix of big-name performances and homegrown talent.

End your night at Camp 4, a casual, buzzy wine bar named after Yosemite's famous rock climbing basecamp and owned by the son of Royal Robbins, the first climber up Half Dome in 1957.

Learn more at VisitModesto.com.

EVERY ADVENTURE NEEDS

A GREAT BEGINNING

VISITMODESTO.COM (90MI FROM YOSEMITE)

A More Sustainable Road Trip

With some forethought, you can make your Yosemite road trip a little greener by opting for an electric vehicle. In Yosemite Valley, you'll find J-1772 charging stations in the parking lots of the Yosemite Valley Welcome Center, Yosemite Valley Lodge, The Ahwahnee, Curry Village and Yosemite Falls. Plan to stay at Evergreen or Rush Creek lodges, or Tenaya at Yosemite near the Hetch Hetchy, Big Oak Flat and South entrances respectively where you'll find charging stations for guests. J-1772 chargers can also be found at the Tuolumne Meadows, Wawona and El Portal stores. On the park's east side, there's a J-1772 charger at the Gus Hess Community Park in Lee Vining. Along the way, you'll also find charging stations in gateway towns like Groveland, Mariposa, Oakhurst and Mammoth Lakes.

Visit MyYosemitePark.com for additional ideas to make your road trip more sustainable.



They Might Be Giants

Wander along the canopy floor at one of the oldest national monuments in the United States.

By Giorgia Menetre

Hiking in Muir Woods National Monument (Deposit Photos)

Nothing makes you feel smaller than standing beneath a giant coastal redwood tree. Walking beneath the canopy, among the ancient horsetail ferns and banana slugs at Muir Woods National Monument, gives you the opportunity to try it yourself.

The monument sits in the coastal redwood latitudinal range that stretches from California to Oregon. Redwoods only grow up to 50 miles inland, thriving in the coastal climate. Many live for upwards of 2,000 years and they can grow to be more than 300 feet tall, making them the tallest trees on Earth.

Muir Woods has been shielded from human development as a symbol of nature since 1908. The tiny monument, just 558 acres, is part of a larger swath of public lands known as the Golden Gate National Recreation Area which includes the Marin Headlands and Alcatraz Island. Muir Woods is a haven, completely juxtaposed to its surrounding environment.

Get into the presence of the redwoods via the main trail, Redwood Creek. Along the way there are three groves that have been designated as spaces where the trees are a bit more magnificent than other areas: Cathedral Grove, where the oldest redwoods in Muir Woods are located and there is a silent preserve; Founders Grove, featuring some of the largest trees in Muir Woods; and Bohemian Grove, a place to dive into the root of what makes this redwood forest so unique. One of the must-stop spots in this area is the selfie tree, where a burn scar makes the perfect cave to take a picture in.

Wishing to spend all day among the redwoods? Head all the way to the end of the boardwalk and continue up the Ben Johnson Trail. From here you can follow the Dipsea Trail to Stinson Beach and back for an 11-mile hike with 2860 feet of elevation gain.

These ancient trees that once covered the coast of Northern California now appear

on the IUCN endangered species list. In the 1800s they were logged extensively to fuel the Gold Rush expansion and demand for lumber, space and other resources. Today, only 5% of the original redwood forest still remains intact in isolated pockets, with much of the coastal redwoods being young compared to the old growth trees lost. Places like Muir Woods are protected as an effort to save what is left of this impressive forest.

Peak season to visit Muir Woods is the end of May to the beginning of September. Ironically, summer is the high fog season, which is exactly what makes the redwoods and the ecosystems they support thrive. The redwood needles actually catch the fog, which trickles down through the canopy to replenish the creek and helps support life on all levels of these gentle giants' ecosystems.

Note that timed parking reservations are required year round (nps.gov/redw/), or you can ride a shuttle into the monument.

