



Land of *Extremes*

Mesquite Flat Sand Dunes at Death
Valley National Park
(Marcin Zajac)



Follow this route from the lights of Las Vegas to the Eastern Sierra, plus three national parks, and see how nature seriously pushes the limits. These lowest, hottest, oldest and tallest places are just waiting to be discovered.



We so often find beauty in soft things: a pink sunset, a bouquet of flowers, a powdered sugar beach. Many of us write off the extremes of the spectrum as harsh places not worth considering, but this road trip leans into them.

Start among the loud and glittering scene of the Las Vegas Strip, the brightest spot on the planet, before pointing your wheels westward. You'll find Death Valley National Park, which is a land known for its extremes. Its elevation ranges from 282 feet below sea level (the lowest point in North America) to 11,049-foot Telescope Peak, plus the world's hottest temperature of 134°F was recorded here in 1913.

From Death Valley, head toward the towering Sierra Nevada. There grows the oldest living thing on Earth, the Methuselah Tree near Bishop. Take Tioga Pass into Yosemite where you'll encounter looming rock formations and pounding waterfalls in California's most visited national park. Stop in Madera County for lakeside fun and railroad history on your way to Sequoia and Kings Canyon national parks, home to some of the world's tallest trees. Just walking underneath them will make you feel small.

As you finish the route, passing through the towns surrounding the parks like Visalia, Exeter, Fresno and, farther south, Bakersfield, you'll realize that extremes can be beautiful too. Read on to discover our favorite route through this landscape.



Death Valley Top 6

Death Valley National Park is a terrain of extremes, not only as the hottest and driest, but also the largest national park in the Lower 48. Rich history and impressive views await any avid explorer. After living in Death Valley, these are my picks for an amazing adventure.

By Gianna Ruland

Death Valley National Park
(Martin Branten)



1

Watch the Sunrise

Zabriskie Point, located off CA-190, is an easily accessible and stunning overlook to start your day. Get to the parking area about 30 minutes before sunrise so you have time to ascend the 0.25-mile paved trail and find a spot to settle in before the sun comes up over the colorful badlands. Dantes View lookout is another great spot, with a short hike along a ridge allowing you a pristine spot to view Badwater Basin.



2

Stand in the Lowest Place in the U.S.

Badwater Basin is one of the most iconic spots in the park, boasting 200-plus miles of salt flats at the lowest elevation in the United States (282 feet below sea level). The boardwalk is easily accessible from the parking area, but the best views are to be seen on a 1-mile trek onto the salt flats where the Panamint Range and Telescope Peak are visible. It's not recommended to hike out onto the salt flats past 10 a.m. in the summer due to extreme heat.



3

Go on a Scenic Drive

Take a break from the heat by touring Artists Drive, a 9-mile scenic route through stunning eroded hills and colorful landscapes. Be sure to reduce your speed on this drive to help you glimpse the magnificent views and be safe on the roadway with its many sharp turns and dips. We recommend taking the drive in the afternoon for the best lighting and views of the painted hills.



4

See the Stars

Park at the paved lot at Mesquite Flat Sand Dunes and begin the 2-mile cross-country trek across the sand. There is no paved trail, which allows you to choose your route on this easy/moderate outing. You will wind through beautiful mesquite trees before the terrain opens up to impressive dunes that look straight out of a movie. In fact, many movies have been filmed here, including *Star Wars Episode IV*. The sunsets from the top of the dunes are amazing, but the real treat comes once the stars appear. Be prepared to glimpse the Milky Way with a starscape that leaves you breathless. Don't forget your camera.



5

Take a Hike

Head to Golden Canyon Trailhead early, as temperatures heat up quickly during the day. This 2.9-mile out-and-back trail navigates through an alluring maze of slot canyons to the base of the Red Cathedral formations. Amazing red rock walls spring up on each side of the trail as you gradually gain 567 feet of elevation. Another pick for beautiful slot canyons is Mosaic Canyon, a 4-mile out-and-back with 984 feet of elevation gain that passes through marble narrows.



6

Spend the Night

The Inn at Death Valley is a charming, historic oasis offering spring-fed pools, palm gardens, patios, restaurants, saunas and massage therapy. This escape is where five-star luxury meets rugged outdoor landscapes. The historic inn was built in 1927 as an amenity attached to the Death Valley Railroad. Today, golden stucco and turquoise are part of the authentic mission-style architecture, which makes for an unforgettable lodging experience. Reservations open 13 months in advance and fill up quickly in the spring and early summer, so be sure to plan your stay ahead.

Death Valley has recorded the highest temperatures on Earth, and in the summer it often exceeds 120°F. The park is best visited in the cooler months. Check the weather ahead of time and avoid venturing out on hot days. Most of the park has no cell service, so be prepared at all times with lots of water, even if you don't plan to leave your vehicle. Flooding in 2025 also damaged many park roads, so check ahead for closures before visiting in 2026.

PHOTOS: Zabriskie Point overlook at sunrise (Lindsay Kristel), Artists Palette (Depositphotos), Milky Way over the Mesquite Flat Sand Dunes (Tony Prince), Hiking Golden Canyon Trail (NPS/Kurt Moses), The Inn at Death Valley (Courtesy of The Inn at Death Valley)



Tioga Pass Panoramas

By Gloria Wadzinski

Driving Tioga Road in summer is exhilarating. Meadows are laden with colorful wildflowers, pristine lakes are perfect for picnicking beside, and nearby peaks shed enough of their snow blanket to be accessible to hikers and alpine climbers. Although just about every bend in the road reveals another awesome view, there are three famous stops you won't want to miss on the eastern section of the road at Tioga Pass.

The iconic granite Half Dome is visible in many areas of the park, but pull over at **Olmsted Point** and you'll see a different view. With a pair of binoculars, you can often spy a line of hikers like ants, climbing up cables to the top of Half Dome. To the left is the northwest side of Clouds Rest at 9,926 feet above sea level. Its face drops nearly 5,000 feet to lower Tenaya Creek.

Don't get back in your car quite yet. Olmsted Point has one of the shortest hiking trails in the park at 0.2 miles. It opens up to spectacular views of Tenaya Peak, Tenaya Lake and Mount Conness. As if by design, a boulder sits plunk in the middle of the flat, offering a place to lounge and soak in the view. Speaking of **Tenaya Lake**, it's the next can't-miss stop along the road. Turn to page 13 for an excellent afternoon excursion there.

Venture into the Tuolumne Meadows area off of Tioga Road and you'll find a short trail to the white granite form of **Lembert Dome**. It's a popular spot for climbers and offers an excellent view across the meadows. The dome's backside is also fun to walk on as its base has a low incline. There's a 2.8-mile roundtrip hiking path starting on the east side of the parking lot which is steeper and more challenging with an elevation gain of 800 feet. Be careful in rainy weather as the rock can get slick, and hold on to your hat. The dome has no obstruction to wind so it can get breezy.

Tioga Road is usually open from late May through early November, weather permitting. In 2023, unprecedented snows led to the road staying closed until July 22, so be sure to check conditions before planning your trip, even well into the summer. Keep in mind the Tuolumne Meadows' store and visitor center may not open even if the road is. When Tioga Road is closed, it is not possible to drive to Tuolumne Meadows or enter through the east entrance.

Half Dome view from Olmsted Point
(Grant Ordeltjeide)



Bishop's Big Backyard

By Mikaela Ruland

More than 4,000 years ago, a young bristlecone pine seedling burst through the soil. Today, that sprout, known as the "Methuselah" tree, is still alive after 4,857 years, making it the oldest living organism on Earth. See it and other ancient bristlecone pines, many more than 2,000 years old, in the Ancient Bristlecone Pine Forest in the White Mountains an hour's drive east of Bishop. It's just one of many unique experiences you can have in this area where crowds are rare, trout fishing and bouldering are world class and locals are happy to see you.

Afterwards, stop at Mountain Rambler Brewery for dinner and a pint. It's the beginning of the Eastern Sierra Ale Trail, which connects Bishop to Yosemite and has six stops that you can visit along the way to earn a patch. If you're a wine drinker, Good Earth Yogurt combines the best of both worlds: a wine bar for parents to relax at and an organic frozen yogurt shop for kids to enjoy.

Eastern California has a rich history of Native American culture. Don't miss Owens Valley Paiute-Shoshone Cultural Center that provides a detailed look at the local Paiute and Shoshone tribes from beautiful baskets to intricate beadwork and tools. The gift shop is also worth a stop, with locally made arts and crafts for sale.

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Around the Clock

Photograph Yosemite's most jaw-dropping scenes from sunrise to sunset to night skies.

by Mikaela Ruland

As a photographer, you'll be hard pressed to find time to sleep when you visit Yosemite. This park offers spectacular opportunities for photography all day long from when the first rays of light crest the horizon, to when the sun melts into the mountains and paints the sky pink, to when the stars come out. Each time of day comes with unique conditions for photographers, so we've compiled our favorite locations and tips from Tamron on how to get the best photos of this park.



Valley View (Ken Hubbard)
F/16; ISO 200; 1/25 second

Sunrise at Valley View

While there's no shortage of stunning viewpoints in Yosemite, Valley View makes for one of the best to capture sunrise. Located on the western end of Yosemite Valley, this viewpoint overlooks the Merced River with views of El Capitan, Sentinel Rock, Cathedral Rocks and Bridalveil Fall in the background. It's situated along Northside Drive, the one-way road leading out of Yosemite Valley.

Use caution around the river, especially in the spring when it's running swiftly. Arrive 45 minutes before sunrise to give yourself time to set up and capture all the stages of dawn before the sun finally appears. Be sure to bring a headlamp.

► **Tamron Tips:** Clean the front element of your lens when shooting into the rising sun. If there's dirt or dust on your front element, you might end up

with lens flares in your image. Sunrise is usually a high contrast situation, so be sure to expose for the highlights to maintain detail. To create a starburst effect with the rising sun, stop down your aperture to F/16 or F/22 and wait until the sun just crests the horizon. A wide-angle zoom lens like the Tamron 16-30mm F/2.8 Di III VXD G2 or the 25-200mm F/2.8-5.6 Di III VXD G2 is a great choice for both sunrise and sunset.

Sunset at Glacier Point

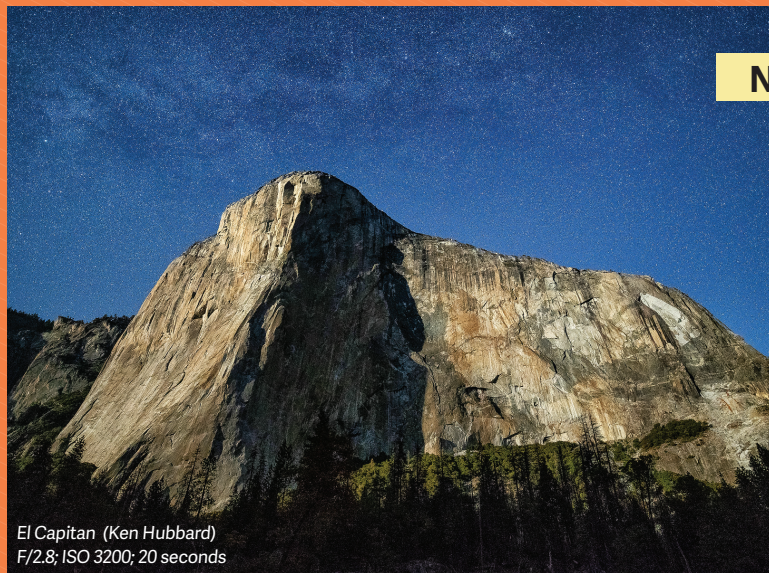
Capture sunset from one of the most iconic spots in the park. Glacier Point is set up high, offering sweeping views of Half Dome, Yosemite Valley, Yosemite Falls and the Sierra Nevada as far as the eye can see. A large, paved overlook provides plenty of places to set up your tripod and easy access back to the car after dark. Plan ahead for a one-hour drive from Yosemite Valley when outlining your sunset mission. Aim to be at Glacier Point 30-45 minutes before sunset to give yourself time to set up.

Be sure to stick around after the sun sets and the colors begin to fade for blue hour. This time of day is the hour just before sunrise or just after sunset when a serene blue tint envelopes the landscape. It's a great time to take photos.

► **Tamron Tips:** When shooting sunset, set your aperture to F/16 or F/22 to maximize your depth of field. If you're using a tripod, use the lowest ISO to maximize quality. If you're hand-holding, set your ISO to the lowest value that allows a fast enough shutter speed to get a clear image.



Glacier Point (Ken Hubbard)
F/8; ISO 100; 1/40 second



El Capitan (Ken Hubbard)
F/2.8; ISO 3200; 20 seconds

Night at El Capitan Meadows

Thanks to its commanding rock formations providing a sense of place, Yosemite is an excellent park to try your hand at night sky photography. Valley View or Glacier Point would also be great spots to capture the stars, but for a unique shot, head to El Capitan Meadow between sunset and midnight on an evening close to a new moon for the darkest skies. In addition to capturing stars over the imposing face of El Capitan, spring through fall you'll likely also catch a strange-looking scene. While it might appear that stars have fallen onto the rock, it's actually the headlamps of climbers camped out on routes on the formation's granite faces. A headlamp with a red light will be helpful for setting up your gear in the dark while still preserving your night vision.

► **Tamron Tips:** A fast aperture, wide angle lens like a Tamron 16-30mm F/2.8 Di III VXD G2 for full-frame or 11-20mm F/2.8 for crop-sensor is best for night photography. Settings will vary based on conditions, but start at F/2.8 at an ISO between 1600 and 6400 and a shutter speed between 10 and 30 seconds. Be sure to have a stable tripod and shutter release or remote timer so you don't shake your camera while taking a long exposure, and turn off your lens' image stabilization.

You'll likely need to manually focus as your auto-focus won't be effective in the dark. Use the magnifier on your camera's LCD screen to enlarge a bright star or planet, then move your focus ring back and forth until the point of light is sharp. Zoom in on your first few images to make sure the stars aren't blurry. You can use a piece of tape to secure the focus ring, so you don't accidentally bump it.

These tips were sponsored by Tamron. Learn more and find your perfect camera lens at [Tamron-Americas.com](https://www.tamron-america.com).

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FISH CAMP



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

All Aboard

Feel like you've slipped into the past on a ride with 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 sell out, 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-and-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 barbeque 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 outfit and get ready for an incredible musical evening with both up-and-coming performers and some of the biggest names in jazz. Enjoy appetizers before boarding the train to the Lewis Creek Amphitheater. There, you'll be treated to an open-air performance like no other. Then head back up to the station for a meet and greet with the artists. Be sure to book all specialty rides at least two weeks in advance.

Book your ride at YMSPRR.com.

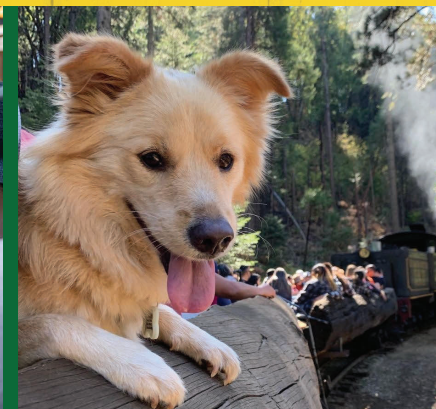
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Basecamp Madera

Located at the southern entrance to Yosemite National Park, Madera County offers fascinating history and accessible outdoor fun. Don't miss these four experiences.

By Susanna Klingenberg

Yosemite Trails Horseback Adventures

To see the area from a different perspective, sign up for a beginner friendly horseback ride, ranging from one to five hours, through a scenic Sierra Nevada forest. All participants get a hands-on riding lesson in an arena before hitting the trail. When you and an American Quarter Horse embark on your ride, you'll navigate through meadows, gigantic pines and several mountain streams, always led by a knowledgeable guide. Book early for the exclusive trail ride to visit Grizzly Giant in Yosemite's Mariposa Grove. It's one of the world's largest sequoias. You're in for a taste of what early explorers would have experienced as they rambled the area on horseback years ago.

Bass Lake

Take in the area's natural beauty with the locals at Bass Lake, a five-mile body of water known for its seasonally warm temperature, excellent fishing and endless outdoor activities. Swim, kayak or paddleboard around the lake, or try your hand at wakeboarding in the wider waters. Many of Bass Lake's trails lead into Sierra National Forest, so there are plenty of miles to cover for every fitness level. For an overnight trip, check out



the more upscale Pines Resort or get a summer camp vibe at The Forks or Miller's Landing Resort (pg. 70).

Fresno Flats Historic Village and Park

For a peek at the daily life of early "Wild West" settlers, visit Fresno Flats Historic Village in Oakhurst. There, you can explore several furnished pioneer houses, two one-room schoolhouses, a blacksmith shop and two jails, time traveling back to the 1800s and life on the frontier. The area was part of the historic California Gold Rush, but the Fresno Flats exhibits offer a poignant reframing: The settlers didn't come primarily to chase gold but to chase a new way of life for their families. Fresno Flats Village and the grounds are open dawn to dusk, year round. Take a self-guided tour and check the village's website for events.

Madera Wine Country

A collection of small, family run wineries, Madera Wine Country makes an accessible

and fun excursion for wine enthusiasts and beginners alike. The region's warmer weather is conducive to grape growing. The historic wine region is known for its distinctive, sweeter-than-average grapes. Because of this, wineries in the area originally specialized in port and dessert wines, like those still created at Ficklin Vineyards and Quady Winery. Most operations in the area, though, have now expanded their options, offering a variety of wines for every palate and budget. The day to day work at these wineries remains local and intimate—you might even meet the winemaker in the tasting room. Another great stop is Idle Hour Winery and Kitchen, with its scratch made food, generous tasting room and Saturday night concerts.

Learn more at YosemiteThisYear.com.

PHOTOS: Hiker enjoying the views of Bass Lake, Quady Winery, Mariposa Grove of Giant Sequoias in Yosemite (All images courtesy of Madera County)



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Winter Wonderland

The park's snowy season is a beautiful time to explore. With fewer visitors, you can find peace—and adventure without lines—in this winterscape.

By Mikaela Ruland

When the snow starts to fall, Yosemite turns into a sparkling winter paradise. From snow blanketing the hulking forms of Half Dome and El Capitan, to golden waterfalls and outdoor activities galore, this national park is truly a gem in the colder months.

Badger Pass Ski Area offers some of the only lift-accessed skiing and riding in U.S. national parks. Featuring mostly beginner

and intermediate runs, it's a great place to learn how to ski, with gear rentals on site. You can also rent cross-country skis at Badger Pass and hit the Nordic center's trails, many of which are groomed for both skate and traditional. Try the 3.5-mile trek to Dewey Point. And if skiing isn't your speed, the tubing hill is sure to delight.

Perhaps one of the most iconic winter activities in Yosemite is snowshoeing

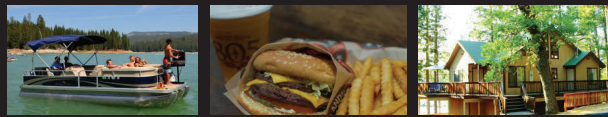
through Mariposa Grove of Giant Sequoias. While snow is less reliable at this lower elevation area of the park, during wet years you'll feel as if you've entered Narnia as you tromp along the Washburn Trail on a self-guided or ranger-led tour.

In mid-to-late-February, photographers and tourists from across the world flock to Yosemite to witness a stunning celestial illusion. Weather permitting, as the sun sets, Horsetail Fall is

illuminated making the streaming liquid look like molten lava cascading down the face of El Capitan. Reservations are usually required to enter the park on February weekends during the event.

Yosemite Valley hotels stay open through the winter, allowing you to stay in the heart of the park. Make sure to visit Curry Village (pg. 90) to take a twirl on the ice skating rink under Half Dome.

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Find Me at the Lake

By Tori Peglar

Just 20 minutes from Yosemite lies Miller's Landing Resort, a lakeside paradise where contemporary cabins are just a stroll from the shore, boats of all sizes are available for rent and the water in the summer reaches almost 80 degrees.

The resort on breathtaking Bass Lake has become the place of memories for thousands of people who have stayed over the years.

"We've been here for 42 years and are still family owned and operated," says manager Michelle Miller. "We pride ourselves on making our customers feel like family."

The resort offers a number of cabins for rent, including many that fit two families. Most have laundry, making it easy to pack lightly. Each cabin is equipped with an outdoor firepit where you can roast s'mores. Once you check in, you'll want to head to the lake where you can rent all sorts of boats. The best part about boating is that you can order lunch on the go. All you have to do is call in your order (pro move, get the legendary Miller Burger), and staff will meet you at the dock with your food. Afterward, hit the Ice Cream Fountain for banana splits.

Learn more at MillersLanding.com.

3 Park Adventure

Take the Majestic Mountain Loop, a self-guided itinerary, to explore Yosemite, Sequoia and Kings Canyon national parks. Discover our top highlights for Sequoia and Kings Canyon below, and find Yosemite's best experiences on pages 12-13.

By Mikaela Ruland

1 Climb Moro Rock in Sequoia

This quarter-mile, 350-plus step climb offers spectacular views. Park at the Giant Forest Museum and take the seasonal free shuttle to the trailhead to avoid circling for parking in the small lot at the rock's base. On summer weekends, the shuttle is the only way to get to the trailhead.

2 Drive through Sequoia's Tunnel Log

No trip to this park is complete without driving under the iconic Tunnel Log. In 1937, the 2,000-year-old tree fell across the road and is now a tunnel. It's only eight feet high, so taller vehicles must drive around.

3 See the World's Largest Tree in Sequoia

General Sherman reigns king over the giant sequoias at 275 feet tall. See this noble tree via the half-mile Main Trail. To see more breathtaking giants, continue past General Sherman on the 2-mile paved Congress Trail.

4 Go Underground at Boyden Cavern near Kings Canyon

Join a walking tour into the cavern that departs on the hour to see awe-inspiring marble formations. The cavern is open late May through early November and tickets can be purchased at the cavern's entrance. The cavern remains a steady 55 degrees year round, so bring a jacket. In winter, try hiking the 1.5-mile Big Stump Trail instead, which offers a chance to see the remains of giant sequoias that were cut down in the 1800s.

5 See the Nation's Christmas Tree at Kings Canyon

Given its nickname by President Coolidge, the General Grant Tree is the second largest in the world. On the second Sunday of December, join the annual "Trek to the Tree" at 2:30 p.m. to celebrate the holidays, an event that's been taking place for almost 100 years.

6 Hike Kings Canyon's Zumwalt Meadow

You'll see the best of Kings Canyon from granite walls to verdant green meadows on this 1.5-mile trail in the park's Cedar Grove area. Heavy spring rains can flood this meadow, so always check trail conditions at the visitor center before heading out on the trail. The road to this trailhead, Highway 180, is closed in winter. In this season, enjoy a picnic at the park's Panoramic Point instead.

Learn more at MajesticMountainLoop.com.



SEQUOIA & KINGS CANYON NATIONAL PARKS

General Sherman Tree at Sequoia National Park (Depositphotos)



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DAY 1 Sequoia National Park

- STOP 1 - GIANT FOREST MUSEUM
- STOP 2 - DRIVE THROUGH TUNNEL LOG
- STOP 3 - MORO ROCK
- STOP 4 - GENERAL SHERMAN TREE
- STOP 5 - CRYSTAL CAVE

DAY 2 Kings Canyon National Park

- STOP 1 - GENERAL GRANT TREE
- STOP 2 - PANORAMIC POINT
- STOP 3 - BIG STUMP TRAIL
- STOP 4 - ROARING RIVER FALLS
- STOP 5 - THE ROAD'S END

DAY 3 Yosemite National Park

- STOP 1 - MARIPOSA GROVE - GIANT SEQUOIAS
- STOP 2 - WAWONA PIONEER HISTORY CENTER
- STOP 3 - GLACIER POINT (Closed 2022)
- STOP 4 - TUNNEL VIEW
- STOP 5 - YOSEMITE VALLEY



Background photo by:

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VISALIA



Kearsarge Pinnacles in Kings Canyon National Park (Getty Images)

Natural Bounty

The gateway towns to two of California's national parks offer rich history, farm fresh food and enticing events all year round.

By Susanna Klingenberg

Bordering Sequoia and Kings Canyon national parks, towns like Visalia, Tulare, Porterville, Dinuba and Exeter offer travelers a range of experiences, all within an easy drive. The seventh largest county in California, Tulare County is around three hours from Yosemite National Park and balances outdoor pursuits with creative dining and culture-focused leisure. It's also an agricultural hub, with farms that roll up to the towering Sierra Nevada mountains fueling both local eateries and visitors' curiosity.

Whether you visit for the spring bloom of citrus and almond trees or make a pit stop to hike among some of the world's largest trees, Tulare welcomes you with open arms and a culture all its own.

Many Indigenous populations call Tulare County home including the Yokut, Wukchumni, Yaudanchi, Western Mono and Tübatulabal peoples. At the Tulare County Museum at Mooney Grove Park,

you'll learn about Native cultures through a surprising medium: one of the country's largest collections of Yokut woven baskets. At the Three Rivers Museum, you'll find the "Native Voices" exhibit that explores the lives of the people who inhabited what is now Sequoia National Park before European settlers arrived, and several authentic dwellings represent different Indigenous populations.

With an enormous segment of Tulare County dedicated to farmland, it's no surprise that they're known for hyper-local farm stands and extraordinary farm-to-table dining. If you're in the mood for fine dining, check out the Vintage Press in Visalia for brunch, lunch or dinner. You can expect a thoughtfully curated wine cellar and elegant, locally sourced entrees, like Mary's Chicken with roasted garlic, candied lemon peel and sliced fingerling potatoes.

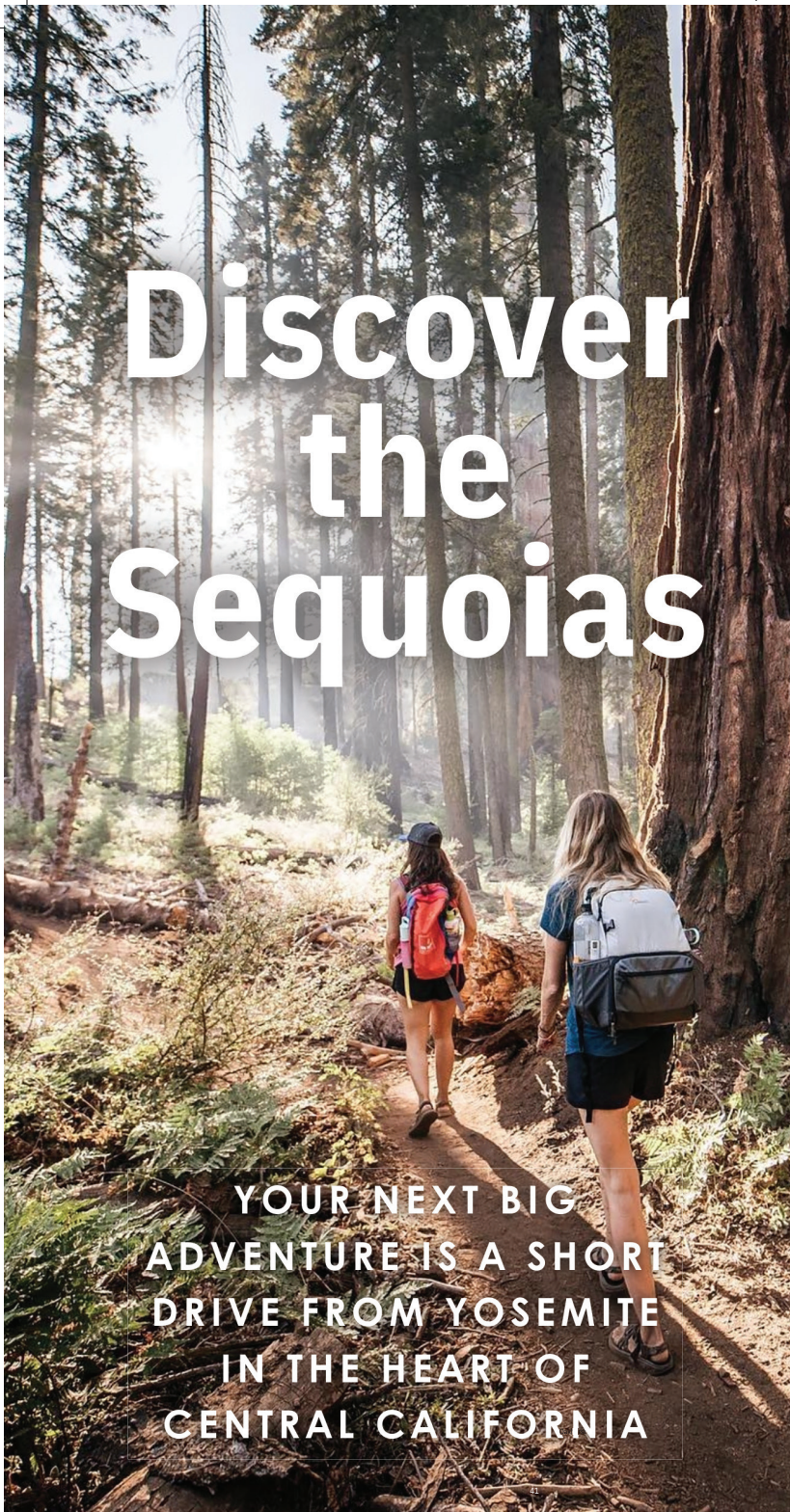
For a more casual experience with high quality local ingredients, try one of Bravo Farms' restaurants, with several locations

throughout the county, ranging from upscale to quirky. Watch artisanal cheese in production at the Bravo Farms outpost off Highway 99 in Traver, which invites travelers to sample their products paired with California wine. To entertain your sweet tooth, visit Stafford's Chocolates in downtown Porterville for sweets or Ciderhouse Foods in Springville for homemade apple butter. For a retro diner vibe, regional favorites include Boss Hogg's Country Kitchen in Farmersville and The Runway Cafe in Woodlake, known for its hearty country breakfast.

Each town in Tulare County has its own personality, but it's often in the downtown corridors where their individuality shines. In downtown Exeter, visit an outdoor art gallery of sorts, where 31 vibrant murals tell the story of the quaint town with nods to the community's rich history, like a scene from a 1950s citrus packing house.

Don't miss Lindsay's Friday Night Market, where live music and a carnival atmosphere bring up to 6,000 residents downtown every Friday to hang out, browse the fresh produce (often sold by the farmers themselves) and enjoy a wide selection of food, including local favorite Ricas Enchiladas.

Learn more at DiscoverTheSequoias.com.



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LAND OF EXTREMES

Fresno County Fruit and Blossom Trail
(Courtesy of Visit Fresno County)

Unexpected Fresno

Here are four things to do in Fresno County, the closest major city to Yosemite's South Entrance, and Kings Canyon and Sequoia national parks.

By Amelia Arvesen

1 Fresno County Blossom and Fruit Trail

Often named the "Raisin Capital of the World," Fresno ranks as one of the top agricultural producers in the U.S. of grapes, peaches, almonds, pistachios, and more than 300 other types of produce. If you happen to visit early spring, from mid-February to mid-March, visit the Fresno County Blossom Trail. Before the trees produce juicy fruits and flavorful nuts, they flower with gorgeous white and pink blooms, much like cherry blossoms, which the farms celebrate with festivals and events like the Kings River Blossom Trail Bike Ride. The best way to see the blossoms is by driving or biking, and making frequent roadside stops.

A few months later, visitors can sample the area's tasty offerings on the Fresno County Fruit Trail, which stretches along 70 miles of roads past farms that open their gates from mid-May to July. Bite into ripe peaches, plums, apricots and cherries from farm stands and fully operational farms where you can learn about

the region's history and culture. Noteworthy stops along the way include Simonian Farms, which offers wine and soda tastings inside their Old Town Saloon, and Sunshine's Farm where you can pick your own strawberries. At the fourth-generation Basilwood Farm, stock up on nuts, dried fruits and other sundries.

2 Old Town Clovis

Neighbors with Fresno, Clovis's historic downtown dates back to 1912. Many of the buildings are original, now filled with independently owned boutiques, restaurants and coffee shops. Stop by On the Edge Coffee House, which features local artists and has a piano out front that's often played by a passerby. Spring through fall, don't miss the farmers market on Fridays. Any time of year, go on a craft beer crawl of the city's best breweries, including Burning Sun Brewing, Crow & Wold Brewing Company, Summer Fox Brewing Company, and Machinehead Brewing Company. The Big Dry Creek Museum is also perfect for families to learn about the city's early history.

3 Forestiere Underground Gardens

A series of peculiar subterranean structures, built by Sicilian immigrant Bandassare Forestiere, makes for a curious afternoon. In 1906, he began tunneling out an underground wonderland and, over 40 years until his death, created a home full of underground rooms, passageways and courtyards teeming with plants. It's more beautiful than it is creepy, preserved for the public to wander from mid-March through November on select days of the week. Reservations for the hour-long guided walking tour through this architectural marvel are required.

4 Fresno Chaffee Zoo

Families will love a visit to the Fresno Chaffee Zoo in Roeding Park. Across 39 acres, the zoo houses more than 190 species, from stingrays and sea lions to tigers and giraffes, and features multiple attractions including Dino Dig, Valley Farm, African Adventure and Ross Laird's Winged Wonders Bird Show. Feed the giraffes at Twiga Terrace, pet the stingrays at the touch tanks, and cool off in the kid's water playground. Zoo experts also host educational chats all day long for you to learn about reptiles, lions, African elephants and more of the amazing creatures.

Learn more at VisitFresnoCounty.org.



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BAKERSFIELD

Beeline to Bakersfield

Discover award winning food, music history and California wildlife in this city.

By Tori Peglar

As you head south, you'll enter Bakersfield, the ninth largest city in California. It's a hub for oil production, agriculture and the birthplace of Bakersfield Sound, a twangy genre of country music that was influenced by rock and electrical instruments.

On the streets of Bakersfield, there's so much to be discovered. Be sure to check out its brewery and wine trails for great drinks. Then, there's the seven restaurants included on Guy Fieri's *Diners, Drive-Ins and Dives* show, an Indian food truck, Punjabi Dhaba, that was featured in *The New York Times* and *Nuestro México*, hailed by *Thrillist.com* as having the best

tacos in California. There are also more Basque restaurants here than any other place in the country.

Bike or walk along more than 30 miles of the Kern River Parkway Trail, where you might see rabbits, roadrunners and other wildlife, all protected from development. Check out several hiking options, like the Panorama Bluffs Walking Trail overlooking the Kern River or Hart Park, where you can spot wandering peacocks.

Then stop by the California Living Museum to see more than 250 native California animals, including mountain lions, endangered desert

bighorn sheep and California condors, that can no longer live in the wild because they were orphaned or have physical disabilities. At Kern County Museum, explore Pioneer Village composed of more than 60 original historic buildings, plus country singer Merle Haggard's childhood home.

On your way out of town, stop at California Fruit Depot for amazingly fresh fruit, including navel and Valencia oranges, dates and nuts. Don't miss out on the free samples and make sure to buy a date shake to-go.

Learn more at VisitBakersfield.com.





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