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ZOOM
in on america

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YOSEMITE

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Zoom in on America

Half Dome. Photo Bozena Pilat

Good Planning Is Half the Battle

Plan your trip to Yosemite National Park well in advance. The park ranks third on National Geographic's list of Top 10 Most Visited Parks in the United States. Hotel rooms during the peak summer travel season are sometimes fully booked six months in advance. Even if you plan to camp in a tent or travel in a Recreational Vehicle (RV), you still need to reserve space in a campground. There are more than a dozen campgrounds in Yosemite. It is fun to move from campground to campground as you tour the park.

Visitors who choose not to stay in the park itself, either because it is harder or more expensive to find accommodation in the park, can choose from a range of lodges or hotels in one of the surrounding communities, such as Mariposa, Chowchilla, Ahwahnee, or Groveland.

Visitors can enter Yosemite from one of several entrances: the southern entrance in Mariposa Grove; the western entrances of Arch Rock, Big Oak Flat, and Hetch Hetchy; or the eastern entrance, Tioga Pass.

Some roads leading to and through the park are closed in winter, from November to May, so it is advisable to check their availability while planning your trip. It is possible to buy an entry permit for individual National Parks. For visitors who plan to see multiple parks, it is cheaper to buy an

annual "America the Beautiful" pass, which costs \$80 but provides access to all National Parks and Federal Recreational Lands.

A stop at a Visitor Center or Information Station is a must for any well-planned tour. Visitor centers, which function in all National Parks, are a great source of information for tourists. They offer maps of hiking trails, useful telephone numbers, and information on different amenities in the park (e.g., the location of picnic areas and rest rooms or places to buy food and drink or gasoline). Visitors also can get information on current events in the park, including ranger-guided walks or talks, and updates on weather conditions, recommendations and warnings. Park rangers are on hand at the visitor centers to answer questions from and advise visitors.

The biggest visitor center in Yosemite is the Yosemite Valley Visitor Center, which is located near both the Arch Rock and Big Oak Flat entrances. Visitors can leave their car vehicle in one of the two big visitor parking sites and use the free shuttle bus, which runs on a continuous loop through Yosemite Valley throughout the day. There are also pedestrian and bicycle trails in the vicinity of the Visitor Center worth exploring.



Cars move in slowly to Tioga Pass entrance. Photo Bozena Pilat

Experiencing Yosemite Falls

An easy walk to the base of **Lower Yosemite Fall** is an ideal way to start exploring the wonders of Yosemite National Park. The walk includes impressive views of both the upper and lower falls.

Don't be surprised if you catch a glimpse of a black bear eating berries in the forest near the path. Yosemite, after all, is famous for its black bears (which in fact have brown, blonde or reddish fur.) The park's bear population ranges from 300-500.

While many visitors hope to see a bear during their visit, it is prudent to learn beforehand how to behave if you do encounter a bear in the wild. There are strict regulations concerning food storage in the park, for example, to prevent bears from rummaging through camp sites and picnic spots. Failure to obey these regulations may result in a fine. Worse still, failure to follow the rules may endanger the animal, people, or vehicles.

Both Upper and Lower Yosemite Falls dry up by the end of the summer. The walk to **Upper Yosemite Fall** is the more difficult of the two. It is two miles round trip and takes between 2 to 3 hours to complete. An even more strenuous trail leads to the very top of Upper Yosemite Fall. While the views from the top are breathtaking, you must walk a distance of 7.2 miles, which takes from 6 to 8 hours, to get there.

Bridalveil Fall in the southern part of Yosemite Valley, is often the first waterfall visitors see upon entering the park. It has characteristic light, swaying flow except in the spring

when it thunders. It is an easy, 20-minute walk from the Bridalveil Fall Parking Area and makes a nice addition to the Yosemite waterfall experience.

Yosemite has other waterfalls of outstanding beauty. Located on the south side of Yosemite Valley, **Sentinel Waterfall** is comprised of multiple cascades ranging in height from 50 to 500 feet in height.

The waterfalls can look particularly spectacular in winter. At sunset, shafts of sunlight sometimes glow on Yosemite waterfalls. The setting sun illuminates waterfalls so precisely that the water resembles molten lava as it flows over a fall's sheer granite face. This phenomenon often occurs on **Horsetail Fall** (see photo on page 8), which appears to be on fire as it reflects the orange glow of the setting sun from mid- to late February. It is best seen from just east of El Capitan.

At 2,200 feet, **Chilnualna Falls** is only a little shorter than Yosemite but it hides in and twists through rock and is impossible to see in its entirety. Located in Wawona, not far from the South Entrance to the Park, Chilnualna Falls flows all year round, with peak flow in May. **Illilouette Fall** is a little hidden from view. It cannot be seen from any road. Only persistent hikers who accept the challenge of hiking on the Panorama Trail, a few miles from Glacier Point, are rewarded with a view of this waterfall.

Finally, **Wapama Falls** in Hetch Hetchy Valley is a roaring waterfall. Sometimes in spring, the water from this fall flows over the footbridges near its base.



Yosemite's Greatest Treasure

John Muir (1838-1914), an ardent advocate of wilderness preservation in the United States, to whom Yosemite Valley and Sequoia National Park owe a great deal, said this about **Half Dome**: *It is by far the grandest of all the special temples of Nature I was ever permitted to enter.*

Half Dome is Yosemite National Park's best known icon. It rises nearly 5,000 feet above the Yosemite Valley and 8,800 feet above sea level. In 1865 a report declared that it was: ... *perfectly inaccessible, being probably the only one of the prominent points about the Yosemite which never has been, and never will be, trodden by human foot.*

Just ten years later, in October 1875, Scottish climber George Anderson (1839-1884) placed his foot on Half Dome's summit after completing a daring climb to the top. In order to accomplish this feat he drilled holes in the rock and placed iron spikes drilled into the rock for protection. These holes are now used to house the cables of the popular climbing route up Half Dome.

Today's cable route offers a challenge to thousands of climbers who want to reach Half Dome summit. A permit is required to hike to Half Dome when the cables are up. It is an arduous hike and not everybody is capable of making it

to the top. Park rangers provide assistance to hundreds of people on the Half Dome trail every summer.

The 10- to 12-hour hike is 14- to 16-miles round-trip. The trail includes a total vertical climb of 4,800 feet and reaches an elevation of 8,836 ft. (2,693 meters). Along the way, hikers are rewarded with views of Vernal and Nevada Falls, Liberty Cap, Half Dome, and--from the shoulder and summit--panoramic views of Yosemite Valley and the High Sierra. Park rangers advise hikers to start around sunrise and then have a non-negotiable turn-around time of about 3:30 pm. Those who don't make it to Half Dome by then should turn around. Each hiker should also carry a flashlight or headlamp with good batteries.

There are many viewpoints from which Half Dome can be seen in all its beauty. **Glacier Point** is thought by many to be the most spectacular viewpoint anywhere in Yosemite. Further south, **Washburn Point** offers similar views. Another viewpoint is **Cook's Meadow**, between Yosemite Village and Yosemite Lodge. **Olmsted Point**, along the Tioga Road, overlooks Half Dome from the east and from a very different angle. Even though the distance between Tioga Road and Half Dome is much bigger, the characteristic shape of Yosemite's greatest treasure is easily recognizable.



Half Dome as seen from Olmsted Point. Photo Bozena Pilat

Yosemite in Photos



Yosemite Inspirations

Yosemite, with its sheer granite cliffs, bucolic meadows, high waterfalls, majestic mountains, the Merced River that cut this deep canyon about three million years ago, and sequoia groves that are home to trees that can live over two thousand years, has fascinated people for centuries.

For centuries the Yosemite Valley was home to the Ahwahneechees. In 1851, the Mariposa Battalion, which was comprised of gold diggers, decided to drive the tribe out of the valley. One member of the Battalion, **Lafayette Bunnell**, however, was so enchanted by the beauty of the place that he insisted on naming it before they proceed with the war.

The Ahwahneechees called Yosemite “Awooni” or “Owwoni,” which meant (gaping) “large mouth” because the valley walls resembled a gaping bear’s mouth. The Battalion commander, James D. Savage, thought that the name of the local Indian tribe was “Yosemite” and decided to name the valley after them.

The first tourists arrived in Yosemite in 1855. **James Mason Hutchings**, a failed gold prospector turned publisher, was enchanted by Yosemite’s scenery and promoted California’s wilderness in his magazine. It was Hutchings who

gave the name “Bridalveil Falls” to one of the most scenic waterfalls in Yosemite.

Yosemite has inspired many artists. The first was **Thomas A. Ayers**. James Hutchings brought Ayers to Yosemite to draw landscape pictures for use in his magazine. Photographer **Charles L. Weed**, likewise brought to Yosemite by Hutchings, took photographs on heavy glass plate negatives. These photographs were later exhibited in art galleries in New York.

Painter **Albert Bierstadt** earned much of his fame painting Yosemite landscapes. One of his paintings, “The Domes of the Yosemite,” measuring 9.5 x 15 feet, was priced at \$25,000--the highest price for a work of art in America at the time.

Ansel Adams is another famous photographer inspired by Yosemite. His black and white pictures of the valley attracted world-wide attention (see January 2013 issue of *Zoom*: Ansel Adams: Master of B&W Photography: <http://www.usinfo.pl/zoom/files/January2013/january2013.pdf>).



Yosemite Tunnel View as seen from Artist Point. Photo Bozena Pilat

Activity Page

Win a Prize!
February 2015
CONTEST

When was Yosemite National Park established?

Send the answer
(with your home address) to:
KrakowAIRC@state.gov

Deadline: March 15

Win a Prize!

In the January contest you
sent us names of your favorite
writers, among others:

Lem, Sapkowski, Capek,
Asimov

The winners are:

Piotr from Skarzysko-Kamienna,
Anna from Zamosc and
Karolina from Wroclaw

CONGRATULATIONS!!!

The prizes will be sent to you
by mail.



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Exercise 1 Reading Comprehension

Work with another student. Divide the text between the two of you. Read your part and then tell your partner how to behave if you see a bear.

What to Do if You See a Bear (the text below comes from National Park Service website on Yosemite: <http://www.nps.gov/yose/planyourvisit/scarebears.htm>)

You may not see a bear during your visit because bears naturally avoid people. If you do see a bear, what you should do depends on the situation. In any case, always let a ranger know or leave a message at 209/372-0322.

If you are in a developed area (e.g., campground, parking lot, lodging area) or if a bear approaches you, act immediately to scare it away: make as much noise as possible by yelling very loudly (don't worry about waking people up if it's nighttime). If you are with other people, stand together to present a more intimidating figure, but do not surround the bear. Bear spray/pepper spray is not allowed in Yosemite.

The intent is not to harm the bear, but to scare it from the area and restore its natural fear of people by providing a negative experience.

If you see a bear anywhere else, keep your distance (at least 50 yards, or about the distance four shuttle buses parked end to end would take up). If you get closer, you will be helping the bear become used to being around people.

Bears that become comfortable around people lose their natural fear of us and sometimes become too aggressive; sometimes they then have to be killed.

When a ranger sees a bear, the ranger may use non-lethal aversive tactics to chase the bear out of a developed area. During your overnight stay, expect to see and hear rangers patrolling public areas for bears. You may hear rangers yelling at and chasing bears. You may also see or hear rangers shooting noisemakers or non-lethal projectiles (such as rubber slugs from a shotgun or clear paintballs from a paintball gun). The intent is not to harm the bear, but to scare it from the area and restore its natural fear of people by providing a negative experience.

Exercise 2 Speaking

Work with a group of students. Look at the photo on the right and tell the class how the people in the photo spend their holidays. Let everyone in the group explain whether or not they would enjoy spending their weekend/vacation in this way: Why/Why not?

Now take turns and tell the group about your favorite way of spending vacations. Where would you like to travel for your dream holiday?

Your Dream Holiday



Trailer travelers who bring their rolling homes to the majestic vistas in Yosemite Valley, Yosemite NP, July 8, 1952. Photo AP

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In this February 16, 2010 photo, a shaft of sunlight creates a glow on the Horsetail waterfall in Yosemite National Park. Photo AP