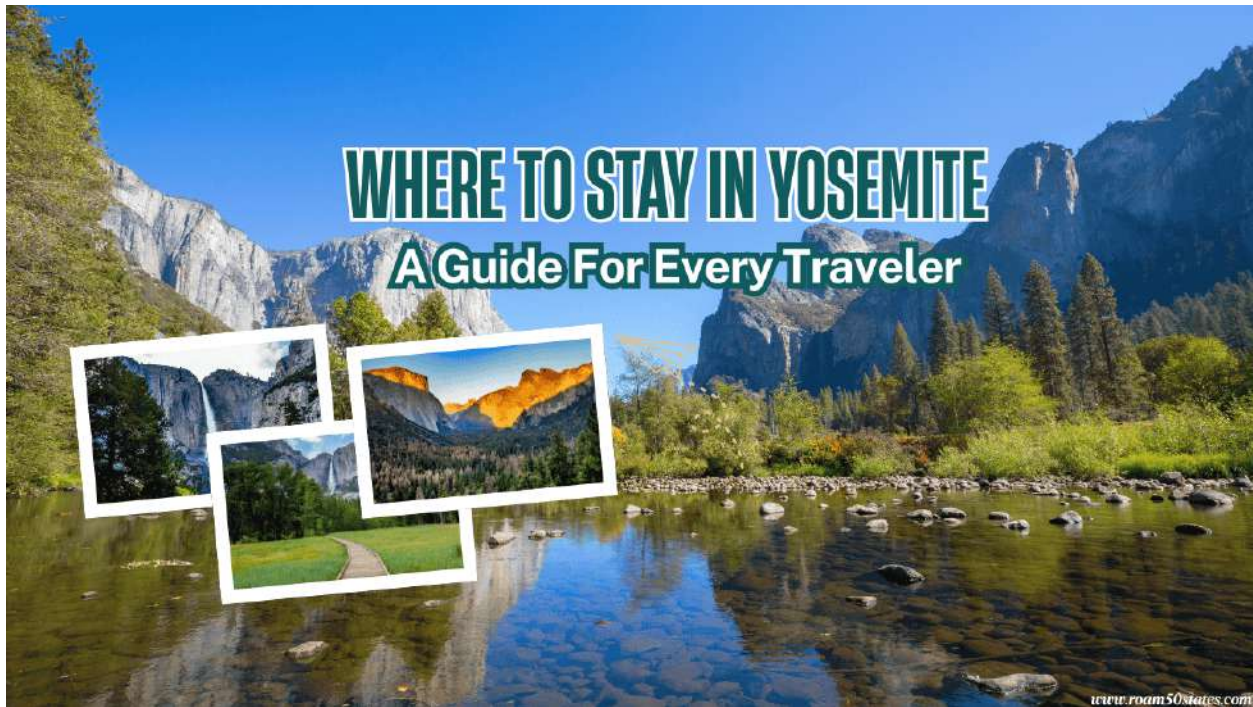


Where To Stay In Yosemite: A Guide For Every Traveler



Yosemite National Park is one of America's most iconic destinations, drawing travelers from around the world with its granite cliffs, giant sequoias, and endless outdoor adventures.

Choosing where to stay in Yosemite can shape your entire trip. The park covers thousands of square miles and has several different entrances. Some areas place you close to famous sights like El Capitan and Half Dome, while others offer quieter escapes near meadows, lakes, or historic lodges.

Whether you are seeking convenience inside the park or a charming town nearby, Yosemite offers options for every traveler and budget.

Quick Facts about Yosemite

Essential details every traveler should know before booking their stay.

- **Location:** Eastern California, within the Sierra Nevada mountains
 - **Size:** About [*1,169 square miles*](#) (larger than the state of Rhode Island)
 - **Established:** Became a national park on October 1, 1890
 - **Famous Landmarks:** El Capitan, Half Dome, Yosemite Falls, Glacier Point, and Mariposa Grove of Giant Sequoias
 - **Park Entrances:** Five main entrances, Arch Rock (Highway 140), Big Oak Flat (Highway 120 west), South Entrance (Highway 41), Tioga Pass (Highway 120 east, seasonal), and Hetch Hetchy
 - **Best Time to Visit:** Late May through October for full access; spring for waterfalls, winter for fewer crowds and snow activities
 - **Accommodation Options:** Inside the park (lodges, cabins, campgrounds) or in nearby gateway towns like Mariposa, El Portal, and Oakhurst
 - **Annual Visitors:** Over 3.5 million people visit Yosemite each year
 - **Elevation Range:** More than 2,100 feet (El Portal) to 13,100 feet (Mount Lyell, the park's highest peak)
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Best Areas to Stay in Yosemite

Each part of Yosemite offers a different experience, from iconic valley views to peaceful mountain retreats.

Yosemite Valley



Yosemite Valley is the heart of the park, home to landmarks like El Capitan, Half Dome, and Yosemite Falls. Staying here means you're within walking or shuttle distance of major attractions, making it the most convenient base. Lodging options include the historic Ahwahnee Hotel, Yosemite Valley Lodge, and campgrounds for those who prefer the outdoors. Because of its central location, this area is in very high demand, so reservations often book up months in advance.

Pros and Cons of Staying in Yosemite Valley

- **Pros:** Closest to iconic sights, shuttle access, limited need for driving
- **Cons:** Expensive, crowded, difficult to book last-minute

Wawona



Located near the South Entrance, Wawona is a quieter community within Yosemite that offers a historic atmosphere. The highlight is the Wawona Hotel, a Victorian-era lodge with rustic charm. The area is also close to Mariposa Grove, home to hundreds of giant sequoias, and offers easy access to Glacier Point Road. Wawona is great for those who want a slower pace while still staying inside the park.

Pros and Cons of Staying in Wawona

- **Pros:** Peaceful setting, historic charm, close to Mariposa Grove
- **Cons:** Longer drive to Yosemite Valley, fewer dining and lodging options

Tuolumne Meadows



Tuolumne Meadows, along Tioga Road, offers alpine scenery with granite domes, meadows, and pristine lakes. It's a summer-only destination, open roughly from late May to October depending on snow. This area is ideal for hikers and backpackers who want to escape the crowds of Yosemite Valley and enjoy higher elevation trails. Lodging is very limited, mostly consisting of the Tuolumne Meadows Lodge (tent cabins) and campgrounds.

Pros and Cons of Staying in Tuolumne Meadows

- **Pros:** Stunning alpine scenery, fewer crowds, excellent hiking
- **Cons:** Seasonal access only, very limited lodging options

Glacier Point Road Area



Glacier Point Road offers one of the best panoramic views in the park, looking out over Yosemite Valley, Half Dome, and beyond. While there are no hotels right at Glacier Point, nearby campgrounds and lodges along the road provide access to this scenic overlook. It's also a great area for stargazing and photography. Lodging includes Glacier Point area campgrounds and nearby accommodations in Wawona.

Pros and Cons of Staying in Glacier Point Road Area

- **Pros:** Incredible views, access to trails, good for photography
- **Cons:** No major hotels, seasonal access, requires driving for amenities

El Portal



Image credit: tripadvisor.co.uk

El Portal is one of the closest gateway towns, located just outside Yosemite's Arch Rock Entrance on Highway 140. It's ideal for travelers who couldn't secure lodging inside the park but still want quick access to Yosemite Valley, only a 15–20 minute drive away. El Portal offers a few hotels, motels, and vacation rentals, making it convenient without being overly crowded. This spot is especially good for families or those who want a balance between proximity and affordability.

Pros and Cons of Staying in El Portal

- **Pros:** Closest town to Yosemite Valley, affordable hotels, easy access year-round
 - **Cons:** Limited dining and entertainment, smaller town feel
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Groveland



Image credit: visitcalifornia.com

Groveland is a charming Gold Rush–era town located along Highway 120 near Yosemite’s Big Oak Flat Entrance. It has historic character with saloons, shops, and inns that give visitors a glimpse of California’s past. The town offers bed-and-breakfasts, hotels, and vacation rentals. It’s also a convenient stop for those coming from San Francisco. While it’s farther from Yosemite Valley, Groveland makes up for it with personality, history, and lower lodging costs compared to staying inside the park.

Pros and Cons of Staying in Groveland

- **Pros:** Historic charm, budget-friendly, good stop from San Francisco
 - **Cons:** Longer drive to Yosemite Valley, fewer modern resorts
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Mariposa



Mariposa is a larger gateway town about 45 minutes from Yosemite's Arch Rock Entrance. It offers a wide range of hotels, motels, inns, and vacation rentals, plus a variety of restaurants, shops, and museums. The Mariposa Museum and History Center provides insight into the Gold Rush history of the region. Staying here is convenient for travelers who prefer having more amenities and flexibility while still being within driving distance of the park.

Pros and Cons of Staying in Mariposa

- **Pros:** Plenty of lodging and dining, cultural attractions, affordable options
- **Cons:** Longer commute into Yosemite Valley, can feel less "immersive"

Oakhurst



Image credit: jameskaiser.com

Located near Yosemite's South Entrance, Oakhurst is one of the most popular gateway towns. It's about 16 miles from the park, offering a wide variety of hotels, motels, vacation rentals, and restaurants. Oakhurst is also close to Bass Lake, a scenic spot for water activities, making it a good choice for families looking for a mix of Yosemite and lake recreation. With more conveniences like grocery stores and chain hotels, Oakhurst is practical but less scenic compared to inside the park.

Pros and Cons of Staying in Oakhurst

- **Pros:** Wide variety of accommodations, close to Bass Lake, family-friendly amenities
 - **Cons:** Not inside the park, longer drive to Yosemite Valley
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Mammoth Lakes



Mammoth Lakes is located on the eastern side of the Sierra Nevada, near Yosemite's Tioga Pass Entrance. It's a great option in summer and early fall when the pass is open, providing direct access to Tuolumne Meadows and Yosemite's high country. Mammoth Lakes itself is a year-round resort town with ski slopes in winter, hiking and lakes in summer, and plenty of restaurants and lodging options. While it requires a longer drive to Yosemite Valley, it's ideal for those who want to combine a Yosemite visit with outdoor adventures beyond the park.

Pros and Cons of Staying in Mammoth Lakes

- **Pros:** Year-round activities, plenty of lodging, access to Tuolumne Meadows in summer
- **Cons:** Seasonal access via Tioga Pass, long drive to Yosemite Valley

Fish Camp



Image credit: yosemite.com/

Fish Camp is a small community just two miles from Yosemite's South Entrance. Its most famous lodging is the Tenaya Lodge, a popular full-service resort offering everything from standard rooms to cabins. Fish Camp is perfect for those who want to be close to the park but still enjoy resort amenities like spas, pools, and dining. It's also a good location for visiting Mariposa Grove and exploring the southern part of Yosemite. However, options are limited outside of Tenaya Lodge, and the area can be quiet after dark.

Pros and Cons of Staying in Fish Camp

- **Pros:** Very close to South Entrance, Tenaya Lodge amenities, near Mariposa Grove
- **Cons:** Limited lodging outside Tenaya Lodge, longer drive to Yosemite Valley

Types of Lodging in Yosemite

Visitors can choose from a variety of lodging options inside and around Yosemite National Park. Each offers a different experience depending on comfort, budget, and how close you want to be to nature.

Hotels and Lodges

Yosemite has a small number of in-park hotels and lodges, such as The Ahwahnee and Yosemite Valley Lodge. These offer modern comforts with the advantage of being right in the valley. Outside the park, gateway towns like Oakhurst and Mariposa provide chain hotels and independent lodges at a wider range of prices.

Cabins and Cottages

For travelers seeking privacy and a cozy retreat, cabins and cottages are available both inside and near the park. Options like Curry Village cabins or vacation rentals in Wawona let you stay surrounded by forest while still having essential amenities.

Campgrounds

Camping is one of the most popular ways to stay in Yosemite. The park has 13 campgrounds, from Yosemite Valley's busy North Pines to quieter spots like Tuolumne Meadows. Reservations are essential, especially in summer, and sites book up months in advance.

Vacation Rentals

In nearby towns like Groveland, Mariposa, and El Portal, vacation rentals range from rustic cabins to large family homes. These are great for groups, families, or those wanting kitchens and extra space. Platforms like Airbnb and Vrbo offer plenty of options.

Luxury Stays

If you are looking for a luxury retreat, The Ahwahnee inside Yosemite is the crown jewel, known for its historic architecture and fine dining. Outside the park, resorts near Bass Lake and high-end lodges in Oakhurst provide spa services, upscale dining, and scenic views.

Tips for Booking Hotels in Yosemite



Planning ahead is the key to finding the right stay in Yosemite.

- **Book Early:** Hotels, lodges, and campsites inside the park sell out months in advance, especially for summer and holiday weekends. Aim to book 6-12 months ahead if possible.
- **Be Flexible with Dates:** If you can't find availability on peak weekends, try weekdays or shoulder seasons like late spring and early fall.
- **Check Multiple Gateways:** Towns such as Mariposa, Groveland, and Oakhurst often have more openings than in-park stays. They also provide easier access if one park entrance is congested.
- **Watch for Seasonal Closures:** Higher-elevation areas like Tuolumne Meadows are only open in summer. Confirm that roads and lodges are open before booking.
- **Compare Prices:** Staying inside the park is convenient but more expensive. Budget travelers can often save by booking just outside the gates.

- **Consider Travel Time:** Lodging outside the park may require long daily drives. Balance cost savings with time spent on the road.
 - **Look Beyond Hotels:** Vacation rentals, cabins, and campgrounds often offer better value and a more personal experience.
 - **Set Alerts:** Many booking sites allow you to track cancellations. If a room frees up inside the park, you may get lucky closer to your travel date.
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Best Things to Do While Staying In Yosemite



Yosemite is filled with iconic landscapes, outdoor adventures, and experiences that attract visitors from around the world.

Hike to Yosemite Falls

Yosemite Falls is the tallest waterfall in North America, dropping a total of 2,425 feet. The Lower Falls Trail is an easy walk suitable for families, while the strenuous hike to the Upper Falls rewards travelers with sweeping views of the valley. Spring is the best time to visit, when snowmelt creates a thunderous flow.

Even in late summer, the falls offer a stunning backdrop for photos and a reminder of Yosemite's dramatic geology.

Explore Glacier Point

Glacier Point provides one of the most iconic views in Yosemite. From this overlook, you can see Half Dome, Yosemite Valley, and the High Sierra peaks stretching into the distance. In summer, it's accessible by car or shuttle, while in winter, skiers and snowshoers make the trek for a magical snowy perspective. Sunset is especially spectacular, when the granite cliffs glow orange and pink. It's a must for photographers and first-time visitors alike.

Walk Among Giant Sequoias in Mariposa Grove

Mariposa Grove is home to over 500 giant sequoias, some more than 2,000 years old. Trails range from easy loops to longer hikes, taking you past trees with names like the Grizzly Giant and California Tunnel Tree. Walking here feels like stepping into another world, where time slows down under the shade of massive trunks. The grove is family-friendly and accessible by shuttle during peak months, making it a perfect stop for all ages.

Drive Tioga Road

Stretching across Yosemite's high country, Tioga Road offers one of the most scenic drives in the Sierra Nevada. The route is only open in summer and early fall due to snow, making it a seasonal highlight. Along the way, you'll pass crystal-clear lakes, alpine meadows, and granite domes. Popular stops include Tenaya Lake, Olmsted Point, and Tuolumne Meadows. For travelers who enjoy a slower pace, there are plenty of trailheads to explore right off the road.

Rock Climbing at El Capitan

El Capitan is Yosemite's legendary granite monolith, rising 3,000 feet from the valley floor. It's a mecca for rock climbers, drawing professionals from around the world. While the massive wall routes are only for experts, beginners can take guided lessons with Yosemite Mountaineering School. Even if you don't climb, it's

inspiring to watch climbers inch their way up the vertical face with binoculars from El Capitan Meadow. The sense of adventure here is unmatched.

Discover Tuolumne Meadows

Tuolumne Meadows is a serene high-altitude area filled with wildflowers, rivers, and granite domes. At 8,600 feet, it feels completely different from Yosemite Valley, cooler, quieter, and less crowded. Hiking trails here range from short walks to full-day treks, including Cathedral Lakes and Lembert Dome. The scenery is breathtaking, with alpine vistas and a slower pace that allows travelers to enjoy the peaceful side of the park. It's ideal for those seeking a more laid-back experience.

Visit Hetch Hetchy Valley

Often overshadowed by Yosemite Valley, Hetch Hetchy offers spectacular scenery with far fewer crowds. The valley features granite cliffs, waterfalls, and the Hetch Hetchy Reservoir, which provides drinking water to San Francisco. Trails here are excellent for hiking, with the popular Wapama Falls Trail offering dramatic views and close encounters with waterfalls. In spring, wildflowers cover the valley floor, making it a vibrant and colorful place to explore. It's a hidden gem for nature lovers.

Stroll Through Yosemite Village

Yosemite Village is the heart of visitor activity inside the park. Here, you'll find the Yosemite Visitor Center, Ansel Adams Gallery, and small shops selling local crafts. It's a great place to learn about the park's history, pick up trail maps, or grab a bite to eat before heading out on adventures. The village also hosts cultural exhibits and ranger talks that bring Yosemite's natural and cultural heritage to life. It's worth stopping here at least once.

Hike the Mist Trail to Vernal and Nevada Falls

The Mist Trail is one of Yosemite's most popular hikes, leading to two stunning waterfalls. The trail climbs steep stone steps alongside Vernal Fall, where the spray of water creates rainbows on sunny days. For those with more stamina, the hike continues to Nevada Fall, where the Merced River cascades down in a powerful

display. This trail is challenging but rewarding, offering close-up waterfall views that you won't forget. It's best hiked in spring or early summer.

Take Scenic Photos at Tunnel View

Tunnel View is Yosemite's most famous viewpoint and a must for photographers. From here, you can see El Capitan, Half Dome, and Bridalveil Fall all in one frame. The view is especially magical at sunrise or sunset, when the light casts warm colors on the granite walls. It's easily accessible by car, making it one of the most convenient yet breathtaking stops in the park. Even if you've seen photos before, the real view will take your breath away.

Go Horseback Riding in Wawona

For a unique way to experience Yosemite, head to Wawona for guided horseback riding tours. These trips take you through meadows, forested trails, and riverside paths while offering a slower pace than hiking. Riders of all levels are welcome, making it a family-friendly activity. The connection to the park's pioneer past is strong here, as horseback riding has been part of Yosemite's history for centuries. It's a memorable way to see the landscape from a different perspective.

Stargazing in Yosemite's Night Skies

With little light pollution, Yosemite offers some of the best stargazing opportunities in California. On clear nights, the Milky Way stretches across the sky, and countless stars sparkle above the granite cliffs. Glacier Point and Tuolumne Meadows are popular spots for night viewing. The park often hosts ranger-led astronomy programs that include telescopes and expert insights. Whether you join a program or simply find a quiet spot on your own, stargazing here is unforgettable.

Conclusion

Choosing where to stay in Yosemite can shape your entire trip. Whether you book a historic lodge in the valley, a cozy cabin in Wawona, or a budget-friendly hotel in

a gateway town, the right base makes exploring this incredible park much easier. With planning, you can balance convenience, cost, and comfort while enjoying everything Yosemite has to offer.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the best area to stay in Yosemite for first-time visitors?

Yosemite Valley is the best choice for first-timers because it puts you close to major sights like El Capitan, Half Dome, and Yosemite Falls.

How early should I book Yosemite hotels?

It is best to book 6 to 12 months in advance, especially for summer or holiday weekends, since in-park lodging sells out quickly.

Are there budget-friendly places to stay near Yosemite?

Yes, towns like Mariposa, Groveland, and Oakhurst have more affordable hotels, motels, and vacation rentals compared to in-park options.

Is it better to stay inside or outside Yosemite?

Staying inside saves travel time and puts you close to attractions, but it's more expensive. Outside the park is cheaper and offers more availability.

Can I find cabins or vacation rentals in Yosemite?

Yes, options like Curry Village, Wawona cabins, and vacation homes in nearby towns are popular for families and groups.

Which Yosemite entrance has the most lodging nearby?

The South Entrance near Oakhurst and Bass Lake offers the most hotels, while Mariposa (West Entrance) also has plenty of options.

Are there luxury hotels in Yosemite?

Yes, The Ahwahnee inside Yosemite Valley is a luxury lodge. Outside the park, upscale resorts can be found in Oakhurst and near Bass Lake.

What's the best place to stay for hiking Half Dome?

Yosemite Valley is the closest base for Half Dome hikers, but Curry Village and Yosemite Valley Lodge are particularly convenient.

Where should families stay in Yosemite?

Families often prefer Wawona cabins, Curry Village, or vacation rentals outside the park for extra space and kitchen facilities.

Is camping available year-round in Yosemite?

Not all campgrounds are open year-round. Lower Pines and Camp 4 operate longer seasons, while high-elevation sites like Tuolumne Meadows open only in summer.

Can I visit Yosemite without staying overnight?

Yes, day trips are possible, but staying overnight is recommended since Yosemite is large and distances between attractions are significant.

What's the best season to stay in Yosemite?

Summer has the most availability and access, but spring offers peak waterfalls, and fall brings colorful foliage with fewer crowds.

Do Yosemite lodges have dining options?

Yes, The Ahwahnee, Yosemite Valley Lodge, and Curry Village all have restaurants or dining halls, though reservations are recommended.

Are pets allowed in Yosemite hotels and rentals?

Some hotels and vacation rentals near Yosemite are pet-friendly, but most in-park lodges do not allow pets. Always confirm before booking.

Which town is best for a quiet stay near Yosemite?

Groveland and Fish Camp offer quieter alternatives compared to busier towns like Mariposa or Oakhurst.
