

# YOSEMITE

Yosemite is not just a great valley, but a shrine to human foresight, the strength of granite, the power of glaciers, the persistence of life, and the tranquility of the High Sierra. First protected in 1864, Yosemite National Park is best known for its waterfalls, but within its nearly 1,200 square miles, you can find deep valleys, grand meadows, ancient giant sequoias, a vast wilderness area, and much more.

Yosemite National Park covers nearly 1,200 square miles of mountainous terrain in the Sierra Nevada of California. Yosemite is open all year, though some areas of the park are inaccessible by car from approximately November through May due to snow. You can drive your car into and around Yosemite, though we encourage you to use [shuttles](#) in some areas.

**Yosemite National Park is open 24 hours per day, 365 days per year, and no reservations are required to visit.** However, the Hetch Hetchy Entrance Station is open only during daylight hours (approximately) and some roads are closed due to snow from around November through May or June. ([Check road conditions and Hetch Hetchy hours.](#))

Reservations are not required to enter Yosemite, however we strongly recommend that you make reservations for [camping or lodging](#) if you plan to spend the night

**Is there a best time to visit Yosemite?** It depends what you're looking for, and each season has its advantages. Learn more about Yosemite in [summer](#), [fall](#), [winter](#), or [spring](#), and find out what kind of [weather to expect](#).

## Spring (April & May)

The perfect season for waterfalls!

[Areas to visit](#): While Yosemite Valley and Wawona remain accessible by car all year, the Tioga and Glacier Point Roads remain closed due to snow, often until late May (see a [list of opening dates](#) since 1980). [Tire chains sometimes are required even during spring](#). When they are, you should carry and know how to use them, regardless of the type of vehicle you are driving.

[Weather](#): Highly variable, with sunny and relatively warm days, but still an occasional winter storm.

Yosemite Valley & Wawona (4,000 ft / 1,200 m): 69°F (21°C) / 39°F (4°C)

[Rivers & Waterfalls](#): As warmer weather begins to melt the snow, even the smallest creeks are rushing with water. You may see many small, unnamed waterfalls and cascades all along the Valley rim. Larger creeks and rivers, along with the better known waterfalls, tend to reach peak runoff in May or June.

[Wildflowers](#): It's too early for wildflowers in the park, though you might see California poppies and other species at lower elevations on your way to Yosemite. Redbud and dogwood also tend to bloom in May.

[Hiking](#): While most of Yosemite remains snowy through May and into June, some hikes from [Yosemite Valley](#), [Wawona](#), and [Hetch Hetchy](#) are often snow-free by April, and most are usually snow-free by sometime in May. However, as in winter, [backpacking options are very limited](#).

## Summer (June through September)

See lots of the park...and other visitors

[Areas to visit](#): All areas of the park are usually accessible by car by late May or early June, although services along the Tioga Road often open a bit later in June.

[Weather](#): Warm to hot, with occasional rain (usually as afternoon thundershowers, especially at the higher elevations).

Yosemite Valley & Wawona (4,000 ft / 1,200 m): 87°F (31°C) / 51°F (10°C)

[Rivers & Waterfalls](#): Most of the water flowing in Yosemite comes from snowmelt in the high country, so runoff decreases during the dry summer. Peak runoff typically occurs in May or June, with some waterfalls (including Yosemite Falls) having often only a trickle or being completely dry by August. Other waterfalls, including Vernal, Nevada, and Bridalveil, run all year; however, their flow can be very low by late summer.

### Wildflowers:

Yosemite Valley & Wawona: Most blooming occurs in June, with redbud, Sierra onion, lupine, Mariposa lily, pentstemon, and flowering dogwood beginning in May.

Tuolumne Meadows: The season begins in late summer for subalpine flowers. Beginning around July, look for little elephant's heads, gentian, pentstemon, yarrow, and shooting stars.

### **Fall** (October & November)

*See lots of the park, but few people*

Areas to visit: All areas of the park usually remain open through October, and sometimes into November; however, short-term closures may occur due to snow. Along the Tioga Road, services are not available after September and overnight parking is not permitted after October 14th. Yosemite Valley and Wawona remain accessible by car all year, however tire chains may be required, depending on conditions.

Weather: Quite variable, with weather ranging from hot to cold, dry to rainy or snowy.

Yosemite Valley & Wawona (4,000 ft / 1,200 m): 54°F (12°C) / 35°F (2°C)

Rivers & Waterfalls: Water levels tend to be very low, with waterfalls (including Yosemite Falls) containing little or no water. Some waterfalls, including Vernal, Nevada, and Bridalveil, run all year; however, their flow slows to a trickle by fall.

Fall colors: Yosemite is not known for having spectacular fall colors because most of the trees are evergreen. Still, big-leaf maples, black oaks, Pacific dogwoods, and other deciduous trees tend to be showy around mid-October.

### **Winter** (December through March)

*A season of snow & solitude*

Areas to visit: While Yosemite Valley and Wawona remain accessible by car all year, the Tioga Road is closed (usually by sometime in November). Once closed for the season, vehicles are not permitted between Crane Flat and Tioga Pass, including in the Tuolumne Meadows area. The road to Glacier Point is also closed (usually sometime in November). However from mid-December through early April, the Glacier Point/Badger Pass Road is plowed to the Badger Pass Ski Area, where both downhill and cross-country skiing are popular. Tire chains are often required on park roads. When they are, you must carry and know how to use them, regardless of the type of vehicle you are driving.

Weather: Winter in Yosemite is snowy and cold, though sunny and chilly days are not uncommon.

Yosemite Valley & Wawona (4,000 ft / 1,200 m): 53°F (12°C) / 28°F (-2°C)

Rivers & Waterfalls: Water levels tend to be low, but once some snow and rain have fallen, Yosemite Falls begins flowing again (though not at springtime levels).

## **Fees & Reservations**

You don't need reservations to visit or enter Yosemite National Park, but reservations for lodging or camping are essential if you plan to spend the night in the park.

The park entrance fee applies to all visitors. If you arrive in your private car, van, pickup truck, or RV, the entrance fee is \$20 per car. This is valid for unlimited entries to Yosemite for seven days, and includes all occupants of the car.

Otherwise, entrance fees are as follows:

\$10 per person if arriving on foot, horseback, bicycle, motorcycle, or on a non-commercial bus (free for those 15 years old and younger).

Commercial tours pay the following rates (a special permit is required):

Commercial sedan (up to six seats): \$25 (plus \$10 per person)

Commercial van (7-15 seats): \$125

Commercial mini bus (16-25 seats): \$200

Commercial motor coach (more than 26 seats): \$300

(Note that fees are based on capacity, not on occupancy.)

We accept cash, checks, traveler's checks, and credit cards (Visa, MasterCard, American Express, and Discover). In addition to purchasing a pass at park entrance stations, passes are available at the visitor centers in Oakhurst, Mariposa, Groveland, and Lee Vining from about Memorial Day (late May) through Columbus Day (early October).

**In 2013, entrance fees will be waived on:**

January 21 (Martin Luther King, Jr. Day)  
April 22-26 (National Park Week)  
August 25 (National Park Service Founders Day)  
September 28 (National Public Lands Day)  
November 9-11 (Veterans Day weekend)

**Other Passes**

These passes admit the pass owner and any accompanying passengers in a private car. Purchase these passes at any park entrance station.

Yosemite Pass (annual pass): \$40

America the Beautiful--National Parks and Federal Recreational Lands Annual Pass: \$80

This is an annual admission pass covering admission and standard amenity fees. This replaces the National Parks Pass and Golden Eagle Pass.

Annual Pass--Military: Free

This is an annual admission pass covering admission and standard amenity fees for all active military personnel and their dependents. (For active duty military personnel and dependents with proper identification (CAC Card or DD Form 1173).)

Access Pass: Free

This is a lifetime admission and discount pass for US citizens or permanent residents with permanent disabilities. (You can also [get this pass by mail](#) for \$10.)

Senior Pass: \$10

This is a lifetime admission and discount pass for US citizens or permanent residents who are age 62 or older. (You can also [get this pass by mail](#) for an additional \$10.)

## Getting to Yosemite

Bus service is available to Yosemite Valley (and, during summer, to some other areas of the park) from cities throughout California and the rest of the United States.

[Amtrak](#) provides a combination of train and bus service to Yosemite Valley. Amtrak also provides limited service to White Wolf and Tuolumne Meadows daily during July and August (weekends only during June and September).

[Greyhound](#) provides bus service to Merced, where you can transfer to [YARTS](#) to continue to Yosemite Valley. YARTS also provides limited service to Crane Flat, White Wolf, and Tuolumne Meadows daily during July and August (weekends only during June and September).

Specific directions are available showing [how to access public transportation](#) [600 kb PDF] from some of the major airports in the area.

[Yosemite Area Regional Transportation System](#) (YARTS) buses also provide service from communities along Highway 140 between Merced and Yosemite (including Mariposa, Midpines, and El Portal). During summer, service is also available from east of Yosemite, via Highway 120 (including Lee Vining, June Lake, and Mammoth Lakes) and west of Yosemite along Highway 120 (Sonora and Groveland).

## Getting Around Yosemite

Free shuttle service (described below) is available within some (but not all) areas of the park.

If you arrive in Yosemite Valley by public transportation, access to other areas of the park is possible, as follows:

Yosemite Valley (free shuttle service around eastern Yosemite Valley)

Glacier Point (late May/June through October via [fee-based tour](#))

Badger Pass (mid December through March via free shuttle)

Wawona (summer only; *very limited* free shuttle available from Wawona to Yosemite Valley in the morning and from Yosemite Valley to Wawona in the afternoon)

Tioga Road/Tuolumne Meadows (July and August, along with weekends in June and September, via fee-based tour and YARTS Highway 120 East bus)

Tuolumne Meadows (summer only; free shuttle service in the Tuolumne Meadows area)

Hetch Hetchy Valley (no public transportation)

Hodgdon Meadow (summer only; *very limited* fee-based public transportation via YARTS Highway 120 North bus)

## **Yosemite Valley Shuttle System**

The free Yosemite Valley shuttle system provides convenient access around Yosemite Valley.

### Yosemite Valley shuttle

This bus provides service around eastern Yosemite Valley, including stops at or near all overnight accommodations, stores, and major vistas. This shuttle operates all year from 7 am to 10 pm.

### El Capitan shuttle

This bus stops at El Capitan, Four Mile trailhead, and the Valley Visitor Center. This shuttle operates from mid June through early October from 9 am to 6 pm.

Download a map [347 kb PDF]

### Wawona-Mariposa Grove Shuttle

The free Wawona-Mariposa Grove shuttle bus transports passengers between Wawona and the Mariposa Grove of Giant Sequoias spring through fall. The bus picks up and drops off passengers at the Wawona Store, South Entrance, and at the Mariposa Grove Gift Shop. The Mariposa Grove Road closes several times each day from spring through fall when the parking lot becomes full. Visitors arriving on the shuttle bus are guaranteed access into the Mariposa Grove even when the parking lot is full.

### Wawona to Yosemite Valley Shuttle

This free bus operates from approximately Memorial Day through Labor Day, departing daily from the Wawona Hotel at 8:30 am and from the Wawona Store at 8:35 am. The return trip departs from Yosemite Lodge at 3:30 pm.

## **Badger Pass**

The free Badger Pass shuttle provides service twice daily between Yosemite Valley and Badger Pass ski area whenever the facilities at Badger Pass are open (typically mid December through March).

## **Glacier Point Tour**

Many people purchase a one-way ticket on the Glacier Point Tour and take it from Yosemite Lodge to Glacier Point, then hike back down to Yosemite Valley. This bus does *not* make stops at other trailheads. Service is available when the Glacier Point Road is open (typically late May through October).

## **Tuolumne Meadows Shuttle**

The free Tuolumne Meadows shuttle bus provides convenient access throughout the Tuolumne Meadows area between the Tioga Pass and Olmsted Point (including Tenaya Lake) during the summer (typically mid June through early September). See the complete schedule.

## **Tuolumne Meadows Tour and Hikers' Bus**

The Tuolumne Meadows Tour and Hikers' bus (for a fee) provides service from Yosemite Lodge to Tuolumne Meadows and stops at various trailheads on the Tioga Road. Service is available July through early September.

## **YARTS Highway 120 East Bus**

YARTS (for a fee) provides service between Yosemite Village and Mammoth Lakes, with stops at Crane Flat, White Wolf, and Tuolumne Meadows. This service operates daily in July and August and weekends only in June and September (conditions permitting).

## **YARTS Highway 120 North Bus**

YARTS (for a fee) provides service between Yosemite Village and Sonora, with stops at Crane Flat, Big Oak Flat (Hodgdon Meadow), Buck Meadows area, Groveland, and Sonora/Jamestown. This service operates daily from mid May through September. Service to Sonora/Jamestown is not available on weekends and holidays.

## Driving Directions

Please note that GPS units do not always provide accurate directions to or within Yosemite. Yosemite covers 1,200 square miles and does not have a single address. We do not recommend using GPS units for directions in and around Yosemite. If you do use a GPS unit, just keep in mind that if there's a conflict between what the road sign says and what your GPS unit says, the road sign is correct (and your GPS unit isn't).

Gas is available at Wawona, Crane Flat, and El Portal 24 hours per day with a credit card. Gas is available in summer at Tuolumne Meadows. Gas is *not* available in Yosemite Valley.

You may find [maps of Yosemite and California](#) useful, as well as [mileages and driving times from Yosemite Valley to various points in California and Nevada](#) [143 kb PDF].

Also, keep in mind that, [some roads are closed from around November through May/June](#) and that [tire chains may be required](#) on open roads from around October through April (depending on conditions). You can use [public transportation](#) to get to Yosemite all year.

### Getting to Yosemite From the West and North

#### San Francisco/Bay area

Distance: 195 mi / 314 km

Time: 4-5 hours

Take I-580 east to I-205 east to Highway 120 east (Manteca) or Highway 140 east (Merced) into Yosemite National Park.

#### Sacramento

Distance: 176 mi / 283 km

Time: 4 hours

Take Highway 99 south to Highway 120 east (Manteca) or Highway 140 east (Merced) into Yosemite National Park.

#### Reno & Lake Tahoe

*Approximately June through October, conditions permitting*

Distance: 218 mi / 351 km (Reno)

Time: 5 hours

Take US 395 south to Lee Vining; take Highway 120 west into Yosemite National Park (open late May/June through October, depending on conditions).

*All year*

Distance: 315 mi / 507 km (Reno)

Time: 8 hours

Take I-80 or I-50 west to Sacramento; take Highway 99 south to Highway 120 east (Manteca) or Highway 140 east (Merced) into Yosemite National Park.

### Getting to Yosemite From the South

#### Los Angeles area

Distance: 313 mi / 504 km

Time: 6 hours

Take I-5 north (or I-405 north to I-5) to Highway 99 north to Highway 41 north (Fresno) into Yosemite National Park.

#### San Diego area

Distance: 441 mi / 710 km

Time: 8 hours

Take I-5 north to Highway 99 to Highway 41 north (Fresno) into Yosemite National Park.

## Las Vegas

*June through October, conditions permitting*

Distance: 400 mi / 642 km

Time: 8 hours

Take US-95 North to Tonopah, then US-95/US-6 west to Highway 120. Go west on Highway 120 into Yosemite National Park (open late May/early June through October, depending on conditions).

*November through May*

Distance: 495 mi / 797 km

Time: 8-10 hours

Take I-15 south to Barstow; Highway 58 west to Bakersfield; take Highway 99 north to Fresno. In Fresno, take Highway 41 north into Yosemite National Park.

Death Valley National Park

*June through October*

Distance: 270 mi / 435 km

Time: 5 hours Take Highway 190 west to US 395. Take US 395 north to Lee Vining; take Highway 120 east into Yosemite National Park (open late May/early June through October, depending on conditions).

*November through May*

Distance: 450 mi / 720 km

Time: 9 hours

Take Highway 190 west to US 395; take US 395 south to its junction with Highway 14. Take Highway 14 south to Mojave. In Mojave, take Highway 58 to Bakersfield. From Bakersfield, head north on Highway 99 to Fresno. In Fresno, take Highway 41 north into Yosemite National Park.

## Driving Times Within and Near Yosemite

You can find out which roads are open for the season by visiting the [conditions page](#). For up-to-the minute road conditions, call 209/372-0200 (press 1 then 1). Times are approximate, assume good conditions, and no stops.

*From Yosemite Valley to:*

Wawona Road (Highway 41):

Glacier Point: a little less than an hour

South Entrance/Mariposa Grove: a little more than an hour

Wawona: a little less than an hour

El Portal Road (Highway 140):

Arch Rock Entrance: about 25 minutes

El Portal: about 30 minutes

Big Oak Flat & Tioga Roads (Highway 120)

Crane Flat: about 30 minutes

Big Oak Flat Entrance/Hodgdon Meadow: about 45 minutes

Hetch Hetchy (via Evergreen and Hetch Hetchy Roads): about one hour and 30 minutes

White Wolf: about an hour

Tuolumne Meadows: about one hour and 30 minutes

Tioga Pass: about one hour and 45 minutes

Lee Vining: about two hours

[For more information: click here](#)

[San Francisco to Yosemite Tours](#)

[San Francisco to Yosemite Tour](#)

Yosemite Map: