

Dear Friends,

Generally, as we travel around the country, we stay in one place for about two weeks and see most of it. Then we send you a travelogue that at least sums up the flavor of the area. We are not able to do that with Yosemite. There is too much to see and do in this world wonder of a National Park. We are overwhelmed. Probably most of our California friends have been here many times. Chuck certainly has and still hasn't seen it all. Not by a long shot. If you have not been to Yosemite, make plans now! This park is a must-see and is visited by people from all over the world.



Half Dome as seen from the Valley floor.

History

In the neighborhood of 6,000 years ago, the Valley was inhabited by an American Indian tribe who called themselves the "Ahwahneechee." They called the Valley "Ahwahnee," which loosely translates to "Place of a Gaping Mouth." The Sierra gold

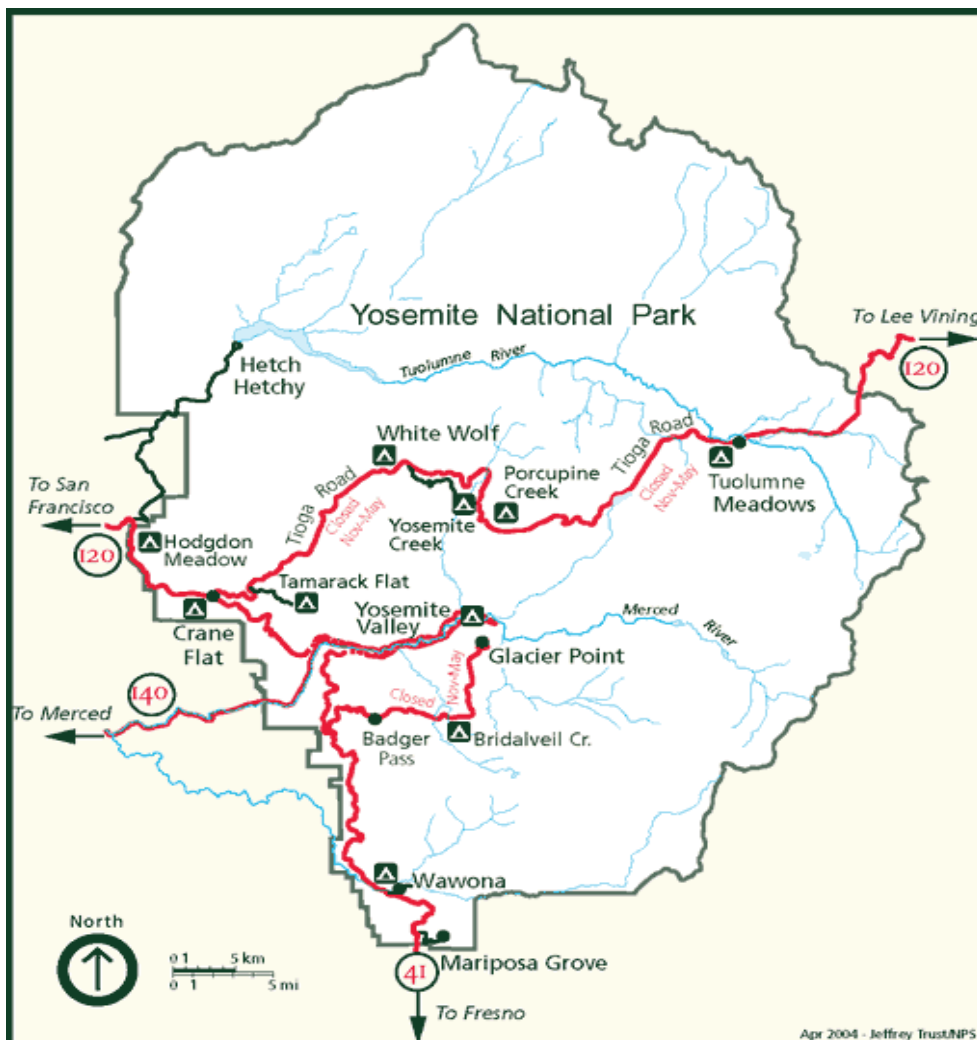
rush in 1848 brought thousands of gold seekers to the area which resulted in much trouble between the gold miners and the Indians.

Word of Yosemite's incredible beauty slowly began to spread and the first tourists arrived in 1855. Influential Californians began lobbying for the protection of this magnificent area and right in the middle of the civil war, Abraham Lincoln took time out to sign the Yosemite Grant on June 30, 1864. This grant gave Yosemite Valley and Mariposa Grove of Big Trees to the State of California

In 1889, John Muir and Robert Underwood Johnson found the high country overrun with domestic sheep. These two men set out to designate Yosemite Valley, Mariposa Grove, and surrounding land into a National Park. They were successful! On October 1, 1890, Congress set aside more than 1500 square miles which became known as Yosemite National Park.

Routes to Yosemite

There are four entrances to the park. You can enter from the south from Fresno on Highway 41. You can enter from the west from Merced on Highway 140. You can also enter from the west through Oakdale on Highway 120. Part of the year, you can enter from the east through Lee Vining on Highway 120. Caution: Highway 120 takes you through the Tuolumne Meadows high country at over 8,000 feet and hence, this route is often closed by snow. This road just opened a couple of days ago.



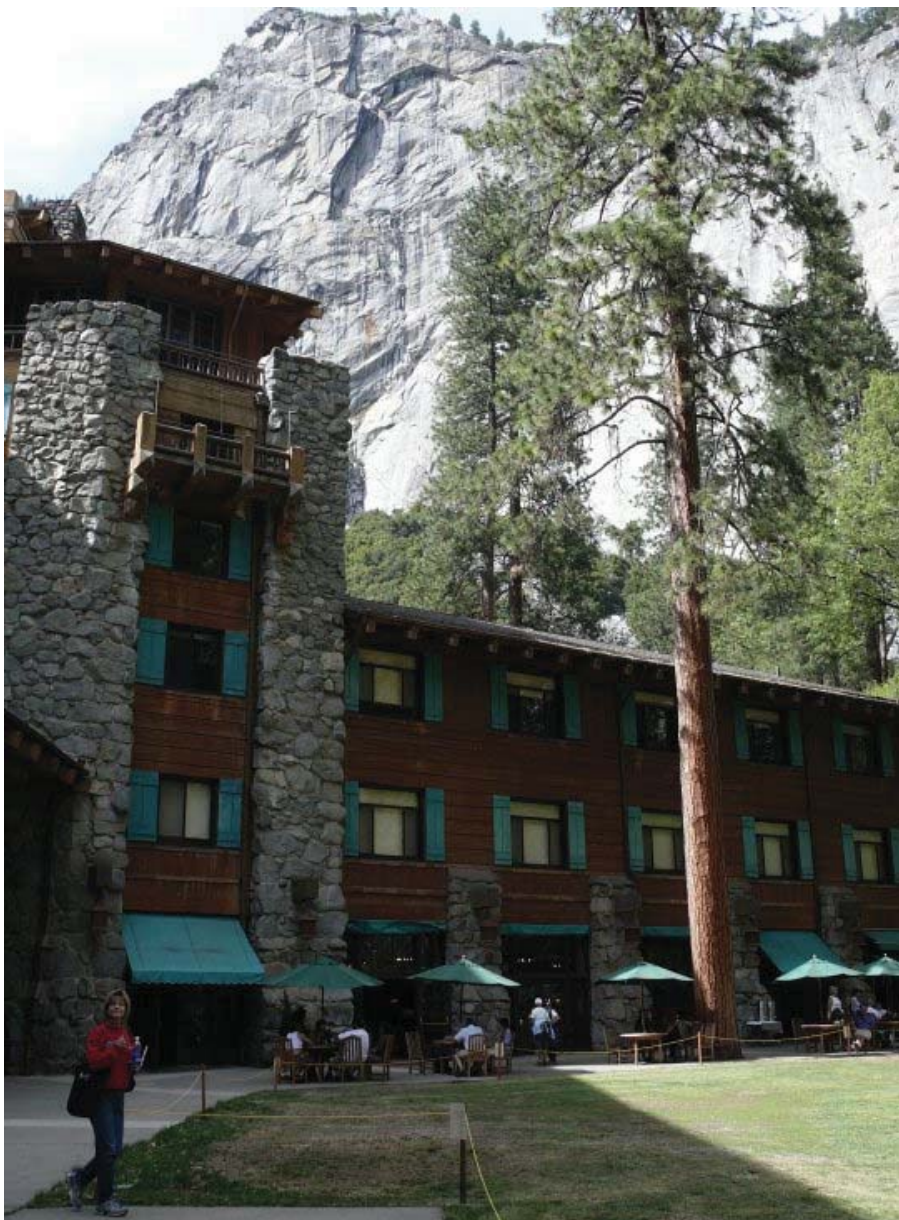
Seasons

Yosemite is open all year and you can't really experience the grandeur and beauty of this park without

at least four visits. The beauty is quite different in spring, summer, winter and fall. Right now is the time to come to see the world famous waterfalls at their best. Tuolumne Meadows and the high country is best in summer. Fall on the Valley floor is a palette of glorious colors. Winter is a wonderland on the Valley floor.

Where to Stay

There are accommodations inside the park and near the park for every taste and budget. You can bring a tent and sleeping bag, stay in tent cabins, rent cabins, enjoy the novelty of a round yurt, economical hostels, moderately priced hotels, or go for broke and stay at the five diamond elegant Ahwahnee Hotel on the Valley floor. Yosemite is extremely popular and you will need reservations anywhere in or near the park. Groveland is a charming little town on Highway 120 about 25 miles from a park entrance. Yosemite Lakes RV and Camping Resort has all kinds of accommodations only 5 miles from the park entrance. This is where we have been staying and found it quite acceptable.



Rear lawn of the Ahwahnee Hotel.

Easy Touring

Yosemite has free touring buses and free open-air shuttles all over the park. It is a delightful way to

see the park without driving and, in addition, you get the advantages of a live narration that is interesting and informative.

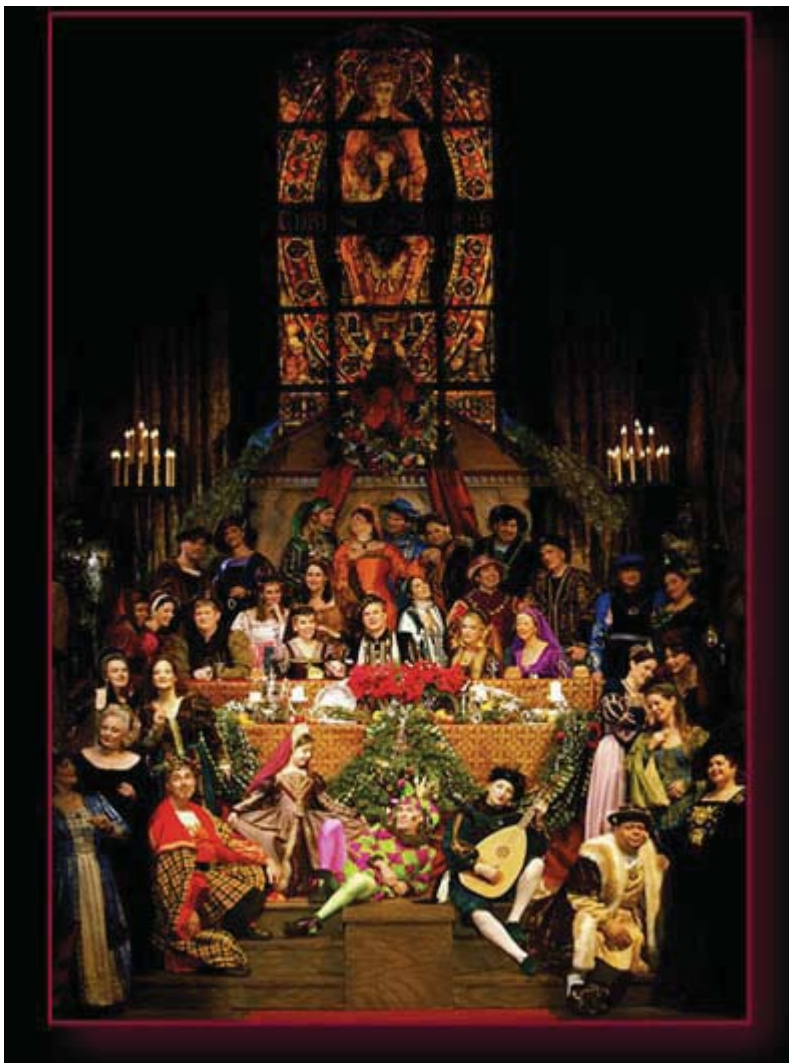
Special Events

There are some incredible special opportunities in Yosemite. Would you like to hike some of the high country without a heavy backpack? There are 5 high sierra camps, each one day apart. Hike a day, have a bath and a place to sleep with meals. Real hiking without the hardship.

Are you a fan of gourmet cooking? If so, consider a winter event held in the Ahwahnee Hotel called Chefs' Holidays. During January and February, Chefs from all over the world come to the Ahwahnee Hotel to put on cooking demonstrations. You also get the opportunity to tour the 6,000 square foot kitchen and the evening is topped off with a very elegant five course dinner.

Perhaps fine wine is your passion, then consider Vintners' Holidays held at the Ahwahnee. These events are held in November and early December and include wine lectures, wine tasting, and several wines served during and elegant five course dinner.

Do you enjoy learning about the Renaissance period in history? Perhaps you've been to a Renaissance Faire. Well, if you're ready to put some serious charges on your credit card, you might wish to come to the Ahwahnee around Christmas to attend a "Bracebridge Dinner." This may be the dinner of a lifetime. It lasts for four hours and consists of 8 to 10 courses. Between courses there is a huge cast of entertainers in period costume. You could just make dinner reservations and have this experience at the lowest possible cost of only \$375 per person. Of course, a more elegant approach would be to buy a one night package for two at the Ahwahnee. Those accommodations and dinner will set you back \$1,297. A two night package for two at the bargain price of \$1,711. Perhaps a compromise is more to your taste. Then, you could stay at the wonderful and historic Wawona Hotel for one night and the Wawona will provide transportation and tickets for two to the dinner for \$998. A couple hundred more would give you a two night stay. Well, as you might guess, there are many other possibilities and packages, but this gives you an idea of the cost. If you want to know more, www.bracebridgedinners.com.



Christmas entertainment at the Bracebridge Dinner.

Done It All?

There just might be a few of you who have been coming to Yosemite for many years and think you have done it all. Let's check and see. Have you hiked the Valley and the high country? Have you visited Hetch Hetchy? Visited the Mariposa Grove of Big Trees? Skied at Badger Pass? Stayed at the Ahwahnee, the Wawona, and the Tuolumne Meadows Lodge? Been to a Bracebridge dinner? Did you see the firefalls before they were abolished in 1968? Damn, you really do know the area! Well here is our final challenge. Have you ridden the Sugar Pine Steam Engine Railroad? Gotcha!

Still Much More

There is so much more to talk about in this wonderful park that it would require a book, nay, many books. We've run out of time, but perhaps we have tickled your fancy and motivated you to visit this most spectacular and fascinating National Park. You can learn more at www.nps.gov/yose.

Until next time, home is where we park it.

Chuck & Donna