

Yosemite Adventure Trips

By Robert Earle Howells

High Sierra Camp Hikes

Game Plan

Here's a novel concept for backpackers: Leave the 50-pound bag at home. Guests at the High Sierra Camps can hike some of Yosemite's best high-country trails with little more than a daypack. The five camps are strategically located around a 53-mile loop, and each boasts tent cabins, cots with blankets, and the all-important chuck wagon, which doles out breakfasts, dinners, and boxed trail lunches daily. Most hikers start from the Tuolumne Meadows Lodge and proceed counterclockwise along the circuit. The first day traces the Tuolumne River six miles through wildflower-strewn meadows to Glen Aulin camp. From there head eight miles south to May Lake. Then, it's up to you. Sunrise Camp is known for its morning views and its proximity to Matthes Crest, a favorite of technical climbers. Vogelsang Camp sits at the base of the granite hulk of Vogelsang Peak, a challenging but nontechnical hike. Reservations can fill a year in advance. If you get skunked, the camps welcome backpackers with their own tents and will prepare meals if you call several weeks ahead.

Vitals

Reservations at the High Sierra Camps are handled by DNC Parks and Resorts (doubles from \$153, including breakfast and dinner; lunch is an extra \$14 a day; yosemitepark.com).

The Must-Do

Hit Vernal Fall, 1.5 miles up the Mist Trail. The 317-foot plume refracts concentric rainbows, and if you hike above it you'll reach Emerald Pool then Silver Apron, where the Merced River flows off a granite dome.

Base Camp

Set at the foot of the Royal Arches cliffs, the Ahwahnee Hotel is the iconic national park lodge. The views of Glacier Point and Yosemite Falls from its great room are jaw-dropping. Tip: Book a cottage instead of a lodge room. Same price, more privacy (doubles from \$449; yosemitepark.com).

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Yosemite's Northwest Corner

Game Plan

No single hike can stand in for all the glories of Yosemite's backcountry, but a 27-mile loop in the lightly traveled northwest corner of the park comes close. The trek begins at Hetch Hetchy, a valley once dear to Muir but now partially submerged by a reservoir. To start, take the Wapama Trail east along the north shore. All

that's visible of the valley today is soaring granite to either side, punctuated by two waterfalls, Tueeulala and 1,300-foot Wapama (each will spritz you as you pass). Pitch camp 6.5 miles in at the edge of rushing Rancheria Creek. The next day, proceed through Tiltill Valley's open meadows and switchback up into the high country to Lake Vernon, tucked in a tight-walled cirque. Plan on staying a day or two to scramble up nearby Mount Gibson (8,412 feet) and hike through Jack Main Canyon for views of shimmering backcountry tarns and streams. Finally, head southeast through lodgepole pines to a wildflower show at Beehive Meadow before zigzagging back down to Hetch Hetchy.

Base Camp

Those in the know bed down just outside the park at Evergreen Lodge near the quiet, and often overlooked, Hetch Hetchy area. The retreat has freestanding cedar cabins, a friendly vibe, good food, and offers guided hikes, biking, and fishing in the park (lodge closed in January; \$99; evergreenlodge.com).

Vitals

Backcountry permits, \$5 in advance or free in person one day before departure. Permits and bear canisters (required) are available year-round at Hetch Hetchy Entrance Station and seasonally at staffed wilderness and visitor centers. Seven-day entry permit, \$20. Campsites, from \$5 per person per night (nps.gov/yose).

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