

BARGAIN HUNTER

What: A free shuttle around Yosemite National Park

Why: Avoid traffic and save some gas with the free Yosemite Valley shuttle system, which provides access around eastern Yosemite Valley all year and between eastern Yosemite Valley and El Capitan during summer. The bus stops at or near all overnight accommodations, stores and major vistas in eastern Yosemite Valley. For more information, visit www.nps.gov/yose/trip/shuttle.htm. — *Kathleen Jay*



IF MONEY IS NO OBJECT

What: A therapeutic massage after a long day of hiking

How much: \$120 for 90 minutes

Why: Treat yourself to an indulgent, therapeutic massage from one of Evergreen Lodge's certified massage therapists. Full-body massages are offered in a private massage tent tucked away among the towering pines or in your cabin. Chair massages (\$1 per minute) are also available on a drop-in basis most evenings. For more information, call (209) 379-2606 x140 or visit www.evergreenlodge.com. — *Kathleen Jay*

TODAY'S ESCAPE » CALIFORNIA » YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK

Camping for the non-camper

Enjoying the great outdoors at Yosemite National Park

By **Kathleen Jay**
Special to The Examiner



For first-timers or camping-phobes, the custom camping at the Evergreen Lodge is a great way to ease into the experience. — *Kathleen Jay/Special to the Examiner*

It's OK that I don't like camping. I know there are lots of other credit-card campers like me out there — people who like indoor plumbing, air-conditioning and four walls with a roof overhead. For me, roughing it usually means that fast-food is the only option at a rest stop or that there isn't any fresh dairy for my morning java.

This time — in the campground of all campgrounds, Yosemite! — I decided to take a chance. Having heard about the Evergreen Lodge's new cushy "custom camping" program, which is geared toward first-timers or those who may have had one too many negative camping experiences (read: mosquito bites, rain, a bit of a hangover), I felt it was time to be risky. And what a great experience it was.

My husband and I drove three-and-a-half hours from San Francisco to the northeast corner of Yosemite National Park — not far from the Hetch Hetchy Reservoir — where we found the Evergreen Lodge, a spiffy yet rustic 85-year-old resort that recently completed a \$10 million renovation that includes new cabins, a new recreation center and general store, a completely renovated restaurant and a new meeting center for weekend weddings and nightly movies. Other modernized amenities include a new bath house (think health-club standards), Internet and free long-distance (don't even try to

get cellular service here).

The lodge's rec center also organizes several programs — from guided hikes to fly-fishing to sunset tours — and it is a great resource for maps and directions to the local swimming hole. And lastly, the staff was very professional and helpful ... in getting us ready for camping.

CUSHY CAMPING 101

After checking in at 3 p.m., the front desk gave us each a mesh bag that had a fleece sleeping-bag liner, a white, fluffy towel, eco-friendly shampoo and soap and a pillow case. They also gave us a brand-new, battery-powered Coleman lantern, as well as a map to find our camp site.

The camp site was about a five-minute walk from the general store and restaurant, and about a one-minute walk from the new bath house. Our tent was all set up — a new Wenger two-person tent with a mesh top for sleeping under the stars. Inside the tent was a fully-blown up air mattress, two brand-new sleeping bags, two firm pillows and a small dust broom. Outside the tent, there were two

foldable outdoor chairs — for hanging out. Ta-dah, all done.

Oops, I forgot to bring Off! (Well, I live in San Francisco, which is usually too cold for mosquitoes, so I couldn't find any at the local Walgreens). I ran up to the general store and they had it — along with just about anything you could have left behind, from bottled water, juice and beer to Pepto, Nyquil and Tums. You could even get a latte at the store's espresso bar.

The tents were roughly 10 to 15 feet apart from each other, and on the two nights we were there — midweek — only about half of the camp sites were full. Normally, there are about 12 tents in the lodge's camping area.

CAMP FOOD? TABLE FOR TWO

Food. On both nights, we had a great, hearty meal at the lodge's restaurant — and not just burgers. The menu changes daily and I had grilled tuna steak on night No. 1, and Tuscan-style lasagna on night No. 2. The tavern also features about a dozen beers on draft and an impressive wine list, with the likes of Selby, J and St. Supery. The restaurant also serves breakfast and lunch, and the general store has coffee and pastries in the morning — if you're in a rush to get to the valley floor before the crowds.

Day No. 3. Before heading back, we stopped at Camp Mather. The camp features a large lagoon where families can spend the day swimming.

So despite a few mosquito bites, some blisters and sunburned shoulders, camping for this non-camper was quite a success.

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The uphill hike to the top of Vernal Fall via the Mist Trail may be tough, but the view up top is one of Yosemite's best.

— *Kathleen Jay/Special to the Examiner*

IF YOU GO » YOSEMITE

WHERE TO STAY

Evergreen Lodge at Yosemite
33160 Evergreen Road
Groveland, California 95321
(209) 379-2606
www.evergreenlodge.com

Camping rates range from \$45-\$75 per night for 1 to 4 people. Reservations required.

WHERE TO HIKE

Yosemite National Park
Yosemite is filled with rivers, glacial carved valleys, alpine meadows and several of the



world's highest and most spectacular waterfalls. There are three main parts of the park:

» Yosemite Valley, which features Half Dome, El Capitan and several towering waterfalls, receives a majority of the visitors and traffic.

» Tuolumne Meadows is the largest alpine meadow in the Sierra Nevada, with stunning alpine lakes, meadows, glaciated granite peaks and domes.

» Hetch Hetchy is a smaller version of Yosemite Valley and was formed by erosion from glaciers and the Tuolumne River. This stunning area receives a small percentage of all Yosemite traffic, so it remains a peaceful.

» The park is open 365 days a year, 24 hours a day. The 7-day entrance fee for a car is \$20. For more information, visit www.nps.gov/yose.