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Yosemite's Evergreen Lodge a destination by itself.

By Tony Hicks
Contra Costa Times
Posted: 06/05/2009 12:00:00 PM PDT

With the grandeur of Yosemite down one road, and the underrated beauty of Hetch Hetchy just down the other, one would think children couldn't get to either fast enough.

Unless, of course, they're playing in a sandbox.

Throw in game rooms, Indian teepees, guided activities, a theater and an outdoor fireplace for evening s'more-making, and the Evergreen Lodge becomes a man-made family destination that exists because of the incredible natural scenery around it.

Just minutes outside Yosemite's western border, Evergreen offers the feel of getting away from it all without having to wrench one's back sleeping in a tent (although Evergreen does have tent camping available, where everything is provided except the actual campers). The lodge, which sits on 22 acres, was built in the 1920s to accommodate workers constructing nearby O'Shaughnessy Dam at Hetch Hetchy. Evergreen just opened 24 new family cabins, pouring \$5 million into upgrades, including furnishings for older cabins and renovations in the main lodge and historic tavern.



The exterior of a family cabin at Evergreen Lodge just outside of Yosemite's western border...

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"There used to be fights in the bar," says Lee Zimmerman of Oakland, one of three owners. "It was quite a rough and tumble place."

The closest thing to fighting now is the occasional bickering of 7-year-olds in the outdoor sandbox, ringed by bark teepees. Evergreen also renovated the kitchen of its first-rate (for the forest, anyway) restaurant, with a menu ranging from buffalo burgers to ahi sushi. There's

also a new sun deck, beer garden and more outdoor restaurant seating, all of which can be used for events such as weddings.

The new family cabins feature a master bedroom, a two-bed room and a living area in between with a foldout sofa. The furnishings are comfortable, with rustic décor and replication of old fruit labels bearing images of Yosemite. Decks overlook the surrounding forest and, best of all, there's no phone or television in sight.

Evergreen offers guided activities and easy access to Hetch Hetchy Reservoir, with its two spectacular waterfalls spiraling off granite outcroppings. The dam itself is incredible, where visitors can stand atop the thundering spillways launching Tuolumne River water to the Bay Area. And it's not overrun by tourists. They're too busy speeding onward to Yosemite.

— Tony Hicks, staff

Take a Peek

- **What:** Evergreen Lodge, 33160 Evergreen Road (just outside Yosemite's western border), 209-379-2606, www.evergreenlodge.com.
- **Quick Take:** Getting away from it all in some of the world's most beautiful country, without waking up with a mouthful of dirt.
- **Good Location For:** Anyone wanting the Yosemite experience without being knee-deep in tourists. The lodge has become especially family-friendly and is a perfect excuse for seeing nearby Hetch Hetchy.
- **Rates:** Custom camping, where the lodge provides everything for tent camping, ranges from \$50-\$90 a night, depending on how many people per tent. Cabins, from studio and one-bed cottages to two-bedroom family cabins, range from \$90-\$299 per night, depending on the season.

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