

EXPERIENCES / YOSEMITE IN WINTER

Yosemite in Winter

Visit during the park's quietest season for unforgettable snowy beauty



From rushing waterfalls to snow-dusted redwoods and dramatic granite domes etched in white, **Yosemite National Park's** winter landscape differs wildly from its summertime style. But the snowscapes only enhance this natural wonder's majestic beauty and make Yosemite a magical—and surprisingly accessible—winter getaway without the summer crowds.

Whether you love snowshoeing and ice skating or downhill skiing and snowboarding, snow season in Yosemite offers plenty of options. Use this guide to plan a winter getaway and see Yosemite's mighty monoliths and iconic valley in a new light.

Winter Outdoor Activities in Yosemite

Yosemite is rife with fun-filled cold-weather activities fit for every adventurer. Bundle up, strap on snowshoes, and see redwoods draped in white. Or don cross-country skis and take in panoramic valley views from snowy Glacier Point. With over 90 miles of marked **cross-country skiing** trails in the park and 25 miles of groomed track beginning at **Badger Pass Ski Area**, there's a lot to explore.

Hit the hiking trails on a winter amble through snow-covered **Cook's Meadow** to see icy **Yosemite Falls**. Or take a more intense trek up the Mist Trail to view **Vernal Falls** without the bustling summer scene. Prefer to have someone else lead the way? Yosemite offers **ranger-led snowshoe tours**, **cross-country ski lessons**, **winter photography workshops**, and night-sky events.

When adventuring with your family, grab a sled and head for play areas near the park's entrance, or harken back to yesteryear skating around **Curry Village's** historic rink. Ice skating here dates back to 1928, so lacing up is taking part in a nearly century-old Yosemite tradition.

Badger Pass Ski Area

Find California's most affordable, family-friendly skiing at **Badger Pass Ski Area**, near the historic **Wawona Hotel** on the park's south side. Open from mid-December through March, the resort offers downhill skiing, snowboarding, and snow tubing.

As one of only three lift-serviced ski areas operating in a U.S. national park, skiing Badger Pass is a uniquely exhilarating experience. Its small size—just 10 named runs—caters well to families and beginner skiers. Skilled instructors and on-mountain equipment rentals make planning a Badger ski day easy.

Not ready to ski? **Rent a tube** and slide down Yosemite's famed slopes. It doesn't have a conveyor belt like most resorts, so renters may get in some cardio toting their tubes to the top.

Educational Experiences

If it gets too chilly for outdoor exploration, venture into the valley's **interpretive center** to learn about the area's natural and human history. There's even a theater screening the short film **Spirit of Yosemite** daily—a welcome break for tired feet.

Learn about the region's native people in the **Yosemite Museum**, or take a walk through the **Indian Village of the Ahwahnee**. Stop by the **Ansel Adams Gallery** to see works by the legendary California photographer.

Firefall Season

Mid- to late February brings **Firefall** to the park: a natural phenomenon where Horsetail Falls turns a brilliant orange in the evening light. While this ephemeral experience isn't guaranteed, crowds gather in the valley for a chance to take in this breathtaking, lava-like water vista. Reservations are required on February weekends, but if you can't snag one, book a guided excursion with **Evergreen** or **Rush Creek** lodges.

Winter Lodging in Yosemite

Most lodging options in and around the park stay open year-round. The historic Yosemite Valley hotel, **The Ahwahnee**, also hosts winter events such as the beloved **Bracebridge Dinners**. Reserve tickets in advance for these formal feasts held in the grand dame of Yosemite lodging.

For easy access to the park's Mariposa Grove of Giant Sequoias and Badger Pass Ski Area, stay at the south side's Victorian-era **Wawona Hotel**. If you're feeling adventurous, book a glamping tent in **Curry Village** in Yosemite Valley where real beds and a heater keep you cozy. **Yosemite Valley Lodge** is located close to Yosemite Falls and offers family-friendly rooms with bunk beds.

Winter Lodging Beyond the Park

When staying outside the park, you can find lodging options near every entrance, ranging from simple cabins to luxurious hotel suites. Stay just beyond the Big Oak Flat entrance at family-favorite **Rush Creek Lodge** in **Tuolumne County**, which features indoor playgrounds, outdoor ziplines, and a massive swimming pool and spa. Twenty-five miles from Big Oak Flat in the city of Groveland, rest and rejuvenate at **The Groveland**, an 18-room boutique hotel with an on-site bar and restaurant serving elevated comfort food.

If accessing the park from **Mariposa County**, book a stay under the oak trees at **Yosemite Bug Mountain Resort**, a Boy Scout camp-turned-hotel offering a range of cabins and hostel-style dorms with an on-site spa (\$20 day passes are available).

Just two miles from Yosemite's south gate, find luxury lodging at **Tenaya Lodge**. From new private cabins to hotel suites, Tenaya offers an unrivaled winter experience thanks to its hotel ice rink and private winter park tours.

Getting to the Park in the Winter

Drive year-round from four of Yosemite's **five entrances**: Big Oak Flat, Arch Rock, South Entrance, and Hetch Hetchy. If visiting from the Bay Area, use Big Oak Flat. When coming from Los Angeles, enter from the **south**.

Some high-country routes, such as **Tioga Pass** and **Glacier Point Road**, close **seasonally** from about November–June, though this time frame varies based on snow totals. Other roads are subject to closure due to avalanche dangers, so check **current road conditions**. (4WD or tire chains may be required; plan accordingly.)

Another option: Ditch the winter driving and catch the **Yosemite Area Regional Transportation System** (YARTS) bus from Merced. Once you get to the park, conditions may vary from sunny, 80° F days to blustery winter storms.

For more must-sees while visiting, check out **Things to Do in Yosemite National Park** and **5 Amazing Things to Do in Yosemite's Gateways**.



Official Resources

Road conditions
<http://www.nps.gov/yose/planya...>

YARTS routes and trips
<http://www.yarts.com/>

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