



TRAVEL INSPIRATION > OUTDOOR ADVENTURE > NATIONAL PARKS *By Michelle Baran • November 29, 2023*

The 5 Best Yosemite Hotels and Lodges for Families

From s’mores to kid-friendly spas, playgrounds with zip lines to playrooms full of games, at these hotels in and near California’s Yosemite National Park, families will have no shortage of nature-fueled fun.



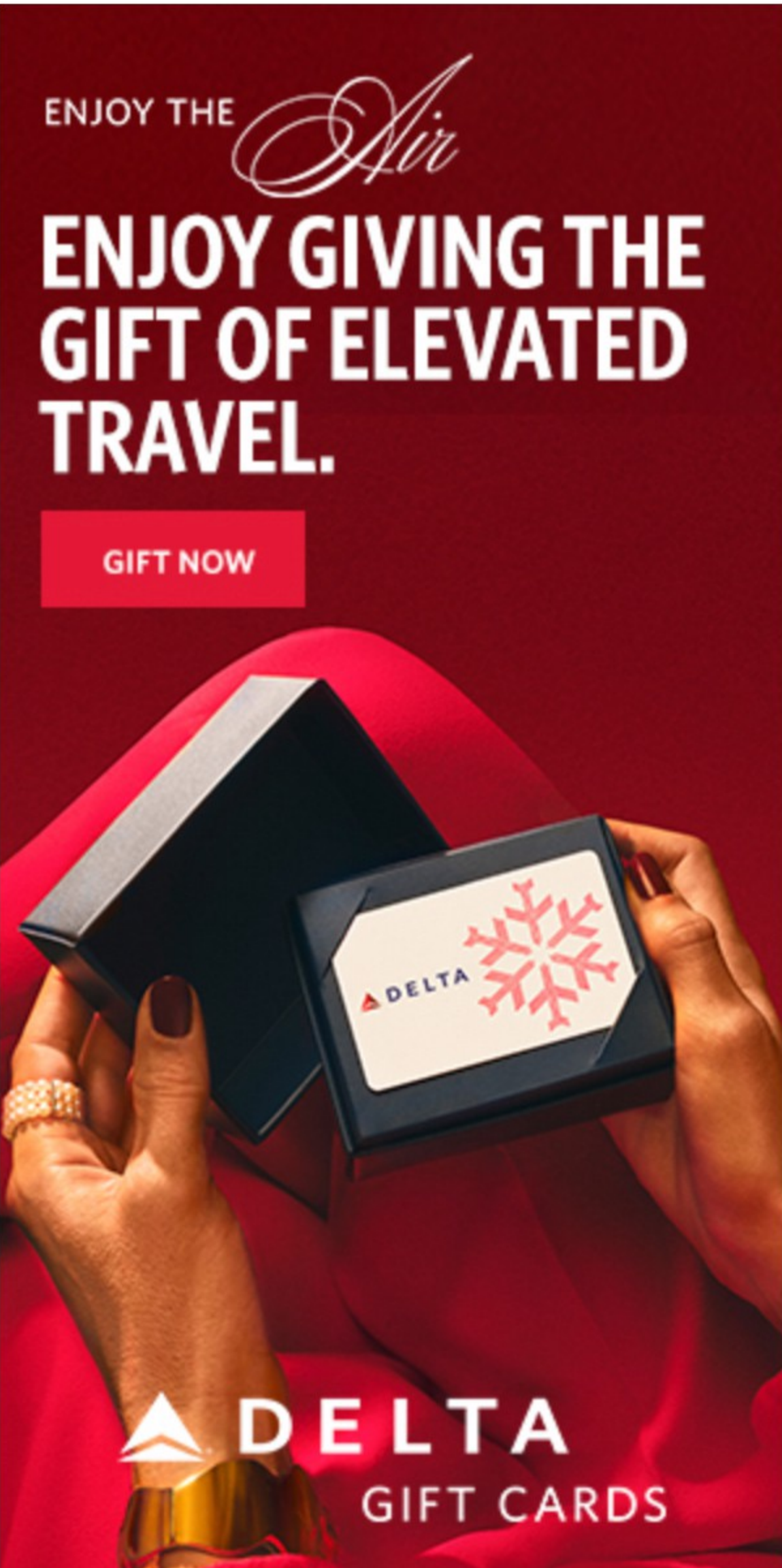
With its pool and playgrounds, Evergreen Lodge, just outside Yosemite’s western entrance, is an oasis for families visiting the national park. Courtesy of Kim Carroll/Evergreen Lodge

There’s a reason **Yosemite National Park** is one of the most sought-after parks in California—the mountain views, forest landscapes, cascading waterfalls, and endless nature-rich adventures are enough to fill our souls back up with the awe, gratitude, and adrenaline we could really use from time to time. It’s an exercise that feels particularly powerful when bestowed upon the next generation of travelers.

Instilling an appreciation and respect for the great outdoors is a journey we started early with our kids, toting them on trails in **carrier backpacks** as babies and teaching them to hike on their own through state and national parks as more independent toddlers. Living in Northern California, my husband and I and our two growing kids (ages four and seven) have convenient access to Yosemite National Park, a place we return to again and again as we continue to pursue our nature-filled adventures.

Most recently, we ventured to the park over the Thanksgiving break, a wonderful time to experience the splendor with more moderate temperatures against a backdrop of fall colors. We stayed at Evergreen Lodge, which rolls out the welcome mat for families during Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year’s, with special meals and programming that make the festive season feel even more special—something you can expect from most hotels and lodges in and around the park during the holidays.

While spring (for the lush waterfalls) and summer (for the ample sunshine) get all the attention, Yosemite can be utterly charming in fall (with pretty leaves and fewer crowds) and early winter (hello, gorgeous snowy landscapes and even fewer crowds).



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No matter what time of year you decide to venture to Yosemite, there’s plenty to see and do, including hiking to popular waterfalls, such as Vernal, Nevada, and Lower Yosemite Falls, and visiting the park’s most famous viewpoints, Glacier Point and Tunnel View. There’s the bopping Yosemite Village for food, souvenir shopping, and stocking up on supplies; Mariposa Grove to walk among giant sequoias; and Hetch Hetchy reservoir to experience a controversial but stunning piece of Yosemite history—in the early 20th century a contested dam was built, submerging the beautiful lower portion of the Hetch Hetchy Valley.

Where to stay in Yosemite

Where you stay in or near Yosemite National Park is a key part of planning your trip to the park. There are a very limited number of lodgings within Yosemite Valley itself. They include the nearly 100-year-old **Ahwahnee**, an iconic upscale property currently undergoing a series of renovations that are expected to be completed in 2024; **Yosemite Valley Lodge**, a midcentury outpost with its newly renovated fast-casual dining establishment **Base Camp Eatery**, which day-trippers can duck into for some warm grub; and **Curry Village**, a more rustic tented camp. Given their prime location, reservations can be hard to come by, especially during peak travel periods.

Most other lodgings require a bit of driving to get into the heart of the park, which is Yosemite Valley—anywhere from around 30 minutes if you’ve booked a **vacation rental in Yosemite West** to upwards of an hour for many of the lodges and hotels just outside the park. For those who really want to maximize their time in the park and do longer hikes from sunrise until sunset, aiming for a spot in the valley may be more your speed. After numerous visits to Yosemite National Park, my family and I have found that we are perfectly OK with driving a short distance to get into the park as long as we aren’t going during an extremely busy travel period, such as the height of summer. That’s when the lines to get into and through the park get unbearably long—and if that’s the case, it’s key to get an early start to beat the crowds.

Regardless of which camp you fall into (must be in the valley versus OK with driving in), these are our top picks for Yosemite lodges and accommodations that are great for families and larger groups.



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1. Evergreen Lodge

These Are the International Cities Where Expats Are Happiest

Visit Some of the Most Beautiful U.S. National Parks on These New Cruise Itineraries



Your kids may never want to leave the play areas at Evergreen Lodge. Photo by Michelle Baran

- **Location:** Groveland, one mile from Yosemite National Park's western entrance
- **Why we love it:** This historic and eco-friendly collection of cabins is paradise for families visiting Yosemite thanks to play areas and kid-focused activities aplenty.
- **Book now**

My family and I recently spent Thanksgiving at the 100-year-old Evergreen Lodge and it was downright magical. The property has an old-school summer camp vibe complete with 88 individual cabins dispersed across 20 acres of lush, forest scenery—with the added allure of vibrant fall colors this time of year. There's a heated pool for relaxing under the Yosemite sun (or stars), a hot tub, two outdoor playgrounds (with zip lines that kids of all ages cannot get enough of), and ample hands-on crafts and activities such as cracking geodes (which my kids loved), creating wooden critters, and bracelet making. Oh, and nightly s'mores, of course.

The **on-site restaurant and tavern** offer a wonderful breakfast, lunch, and dinner menu as well as a separate kids' menu. We were all particularly impressed with breakfast, featuring showstoppers such as lemon curd-stuffed french toast, wild mushroom and kale Benedict, a breakfast sandwich with truffle cream cheese, and the kids' favorite, massive pancakes. During the holidays, there are festive prix fixe menus (children can still order off the kids' menu) that include traditional offerings such as turkey and stuffing for Thanksgiving, alongside seasonal appetizers and entrées such as butternut squash soup, beet salad, salmon, and pork tenderloin. Desserts this time of year include pumpkin and pecan pie as well as ice cream sundaes (always a hit).



Tucked into a beautiful forest backdrop at Evergreen are spacious, family-friendly accommodations like this two-bedroom cabin. Photo by Michelle Baran

With a wide range of cabin sizes and styles, including one- and two-bedroom accommodations, Evergreen is perfect for groups of any size. The layout and gorgeous grassy knolls and wooded sanctuaries also make it

an ideal location for gatherings such as weddings and reunions.

Another thing we love about Evergreen, as well as its sister property Rush Creek Lodge, is its commitment to the environment. Both lodges are reusing 100 percent of their gray water through innovations such as irrigation systems supplied by guests’ shower water. Imagine taking a shower and seeing that water go directly into the landscaping around your accommodations. They also use solar power, provide eco-friendly packaging such as compostable cutlery and to-go containers, and encourage guests to conserve water use.



2. Rush Creek Lodge & Spa



The heated pool and hot tub at Rush Creek Lodge are a big draw for guests of all ages. Courtesy of Rush Creek Lodge

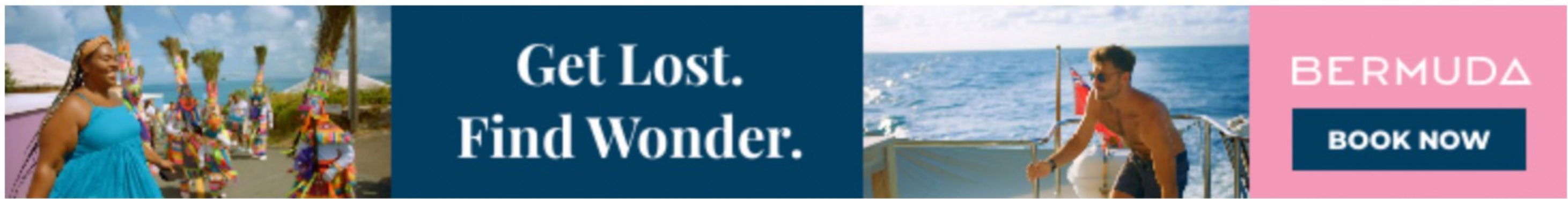
- **Location:** Groveland, half a mile from Yosemite National Park’s western Highway 120 entrance
- **Why we love it:** Between the sprawling spa and plentiful play spaces, there is something for everyone in the family to enjoy.
- **Book now**

Located just up the road from Evergreen, the newer Rush Creek Lodge, a 143-room hotel situated on 20 acres that opened in 2016, is about a 45-minute drive to the heart of the valley. Whether you choose to spend your days heading into the park or simply opt to relax and stay on property, Rush Creek offers a wealth of fun experiences for all guests.

In addition to a heated pool and spacious Jacuzzi, there is a large outdoor playground with three zip lines and a huge hillside slide. An indoor play area features an oversized Connect Four, foosball, pool table, shuffleboard, and a climbing feature. There are also ample hikes for all abilities around the property, bikes you can borrow, and numerous classes and activities available each day, including lessons about local wildlife, trivia games, and bingo. In the evenings, the firepits are lit for cooking s’mores. You won’t get bored.

The on-site restaurant and more casual tavern offer a menu featuring soups, salads, cheese and charcuterie boards, burgers, steaks, and fish. For younger diners, there is a reliable kids’ menu with chicken nuggets, mac and cheese, and cheeseburgers.

The property’s two-bedroom hillside villas are ideal for families—one bedroom has either a queen bed or two twin beds, and the other serves as both a main bedroom and common room/sitting area with a patio or balcony. Other accommodations include lodge rooms and suites in the main buildings, as well as one-bedroom villas.



Another unique family-friendly feature is family use of the spa facilities, available from 8 to 11 a.m. daily (free for kids under 5, \$40 for kids 5–12, and spa day use is \$60 for adults). We recently tested this out with our four-year-old daughter and seven-year-old son, and they absolutely loved soaking in the waterfall hot tub (with warm water below, and cold water flowing down the fall) and experiencing a relaxing environment typically reserved for adults.

Rush Creek puts a strong focus on wellness. Adults looking for more ways to shed their stress can also sign up for yoga classes led on a hillside platform among the trees and what the property calls “boga” classes, a combination of yoga, Pilates, and strength training that take place on standup paddleboards in the pool.

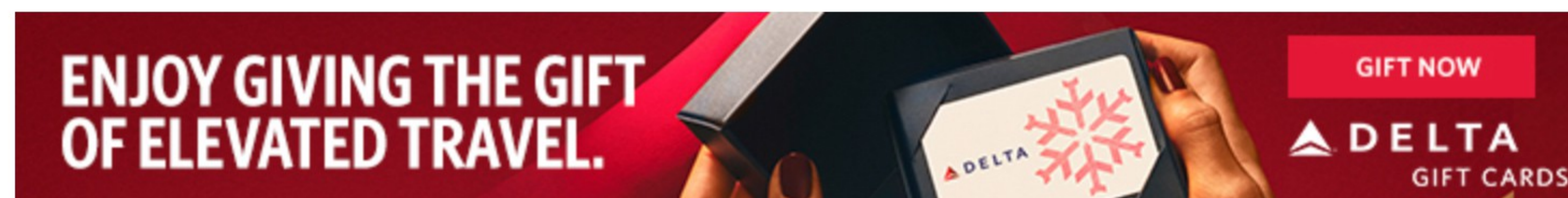
3. AutoCamp Yosemite



Just outside its namesake park, AutoCamp Yosemite offers easy access to the great outdoors. Photo by Aaron Leitz

- **Location:** Midpines, 25 miles from Yosemite National Park's Arch Rock entrance on Highway 140
- **Why we love it:** Come for the irresistibly cute and comfortable renovated Airstream trailers, stay for the dreamy, woodsy setting.
- [Book now](#)

If you're looking for something that straddles the line between a campground and a full-service hotel, the 35-acre AutoCamp Yosemite is just the accommodation for you and your crew. There are few things kids like more than something a little quirky and fun, which is why they are likely to enjoy staying at the playful and design-forward collection of Airstreams, cabins, and glamping tents. The property has a central clubhouse where guests can get some grub or stock up on supplies for cooking at their own elevated campsite (complete with firepit), and there is also a heated pool and hot tub. AutoCamp is about a one-hour drive to Yosemite Valley; an on-site shuttle stop operated by [Yosemite Area Regional Transportation System](#) (YARTS) will bring families directly to the park if they'd rather leave the car behind. There are also nearby hiking trails for days when you want to skip the bigger crowds in Yosemite.



4. Tenaya Lodge



Book into Tenaya Lodge and you won't be lacking in fun family-friendly activities. Courtesy of Delaware North

- **Location:** Fish Camp, two miles from Yosemite's South Gate entrance
- **Why we love it:** The property's laundry list of services and activities elevates the standard Yosemite getaway into a full-blown vacation.
- [Book now](#)

In 2019, Tenaya Lodge became a particularly attractive option for families when it unveiled the Explorer Cabins, 50 two-bedroom cabins for groups of up to six people traveling together. The cabins include a living room with sleeper sofa and fireplace, a partial kitchen (with a fridge, microwave, and sink), and a private

deck. Some have bunk beds, and some are pet-friendly as well. The Explorer Clubhouse is a common space for these cabins with grab-and-go breakfast and evening wine and charcuterie.

The cabins are about a half-mile from the main Tenaya Lodge at Yosemite, a 353-room property near Yosemite’s South Gate. Families can also stay in the property’s collection of cottages, with the cottage suites featuring a bedroom with a queen-size bed and a separate living room with a sleeper sofa. Or they can opt for a room or suite in the main Tenaya Lodge.

Wherever they’re resting their heads, they will have access to the main lodge and its restaurant, and outdoor and indoor pools, the latter being key for colder weather. There’s also a family game room with air hockey, foosball, and Skee-Ball, plus a pool table, Pac-Man arcade game, and ball pit. On-site family-friendly activities include guided nature walks, ice skating (an outdoor ice rink opens on the property in late November for the winter season), and seasonal offerings like an Elf on the Shelf scavenger hunt, gingerbread-making workshop, and breakfast with Santa for the holidays. Tired parents can book a treatment at the on-site [Ascent Spa](#) for a bit of calm and stress relief.



5. The Ahwahnee

The family can experience a piece of living history when staying at the Ahwahnee, which was built in 1927 and declared a National Historic Landmark in 1987. *Courtesy of Yosemite National Park*

- **Location:** Yosemite Valley
- **Why we love it:** The clutch location of this lodging icon gives families easy access to and views of famous Yosemite sites such as Half Dome and Yosemite Falls.
- **[Book now](#)**

For families determined to stay in the valley, the nearly 100-year-old Ahwahnee is the place to be. Currently undergoing a major transformation thanks to a \$31.6 million grant through the Great American Outdoors Act to upgrade this national park grande dame, the Ahwahnee is in the midst of a series of renovations. Once completed in early 2024, guests will benefit from a new kitchen and dining room—with its soaring 34-foot ceilings, dramatic chandeliers, wooden beams, and gargantuan windows, the legendary dining room has been a huge draw for guests and nonguests alike over the years and is closed during the renovations—as well as updated heating and air conditioning, and other infrastructure improvements. Currently, meals are being served in other public areas such as the Great Lounge.

While the Ahwahnee is certainly quite ritzy, families willing to splurge for a stay here (rooms go for \$500 per night and up) will benefit from a wide range of room configurations as well as cottages that can accommodate multiple guests—there are 97 guest rooms and 24 cottages. And they will also be in the heart of the action, with little to no driving needed once parked at the hotel, which is within walking distance of Yosemite Village and several coveted hiking trails, including Yosemite Falls and Cook’s Meadows Loop. It’s not easy to score a reservation, especially during high season, but if you and your crew do, the kids will also love taking a dip in the heated pool (temporarily closed until early 2024 during renovations), biking around the valley, and bopping around between various nearby river beaches and watering holes for a dip and rock skipping. Be advised that the famed dining room is a more formal affair, so if you have smaller kids who are still pretty antsy, you may want to save that experience for when the kids are a bit older.

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Michelle Baran is the senior travel news editor at AFAR where she oversees breaking news, travel intel, pandemic coverage, airline, cruise, and consumer travel news. Baran joined AFAR in August 2018 after an 11-year run as a senior editor and reporter at leading travel industry newspaper *Travel Weekly*.

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