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Vacation Inspiration: Rush Creek Lodge, the Most Family-Friendly Hotel in Yosemite

December 13, 2023 by Clara Hogan One Comment

As a travel writer, I go on a lot of trips with my four-year-old and one-year-old daughters. Traveling with them is wonderful and special in many ways, but of course, the trips aren't exactly relaxing. That being said, the closest I've come to being relaxed on a family trip to date was a recent visit to [Rush Creek Lodge in Yosemite](#).



Rush Creek Lodge | Photo: Kim Carroll

Rush Creek, located just minutes outside of Yosemite National Park, nails the perfect balance of being kid-friendly without being too kid-centric. Couples, friends, or anyone traveling without children would have a lovely time here. But parents in particular will be uber-impressed with how welcoming the hotel is to families.



Play equipment outside the lodge | Photo: Whitney Moss

With a large playroom (featuring toys for all ages, games, and a climbing structure), an outdoor play area, a year-round heated pool, kids programming, an on-site restaurant and market, plenty of trails—and even family use of the spa (the first time I've ever seen this!)—my kids were well-entertained for days.



events calendar

December 2023



S	M	T	W	T	F	S
26	27	28	29	30	1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30
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Indoor game room at Rush Creek Lodge | Photo courtesy Rush Creek Lodge

There's so much to do at the property, no one would blame you if you didn't even make it into Yosemite. But if you do want to head into the park, the hotel's proximity to the entrance makes it super easy to make the most out of your time.

Getting to Rush Creek Lodge

Rush Creek Lodge is located about three hours from the East Bay, making it a relatively easy drive (of course, traffic can up the time if you leave at peak hours.) The hotel is situated just half a mile from Yosemite National Park's Highway 120 west entrance, 45 minutes from the Valley Floor and 40 minutes from Hetch Hetchy.

Room types at Rush Creek Lodge

Rush Creek has a variety of family-friendly hotel accommodations, including lodge rooms starting at \$305/night and lodge suites starting at \$360.

My recommendation for families, however, is to book one of the hillside villas, which are spread across the property's 20 forested acres. The villas start at \$400 — slightly more expensive than rooms in the lodge, but you get quite a bit for your money: two separate bedrooms, a large deck with great views, and plenty of space. They are perfect if you want your family to be able to spread out and have privacy, and they could also work for two families to share. My kids loved hanging on the deck and looking at the surrounding forest and stream flowing below.

All rooms come with plenty of storage space (crucial with kids), coffee brewers, games, and books.

Kid-friendly amenities

Our daughters were well-entertained in every corner of Rush Creek Lodge.



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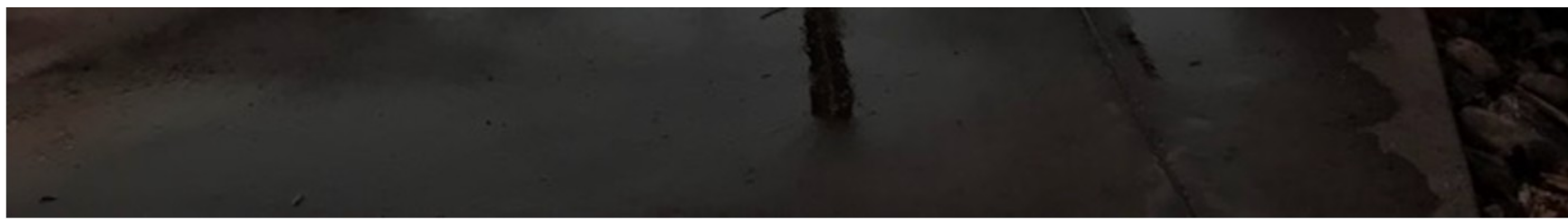
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Sunset hot tubbing at Rush Creek Lodge | Photo: Whitney Moss

A few of the kid-friendly features include:

- **Outdoor play areas:** Giant checkers, horseshoes, a 60-foot embankment slide, and kids’ zip lines will keep kids busy. I also had fun braving the zip line a time or two.
 - **Indoor play areas:** In the main lodge, you’ll find a giant indoor playroom with a pretty impressive climbing structure. It’s best for kids over five, but my four-year-old enjoyed it. I think kids as young as three could manage with parent supervision. My one-year-old kept busy with the LEGO table and toy corner. This room came in handy when it rained in particular – my husband and I actually got to sit on the couch with a coffee or cocktail many times while they played. Older kids (and adults) will have fun with the games, from pool to foosball to shuffleboard.
 - **Kids programming:** Rush Creek offers kids programming every day. When we were there, my older daughter had a blast cracking a geode and doing nature crafts in the main lodge. Other activities include scavenger hunts, terrarium-making, painting and more.
 - **Pool and hot tubs:** The heated pool is a draw year-round. The hot tub was a popular spot when we stayed.
 - **Trails:** You don’t have to leave the property to get a hike in — Rush Creek offers several hiking and biking trails on site.
 - **Family use of the spa:** Rush Creek unveiled a beautiful indoor/outdoor spa in 2020 inspired by Yosemite’s natural wonders. The hotel lets kids of all ages enter the spa from 8am-11am, which is super unique and thoughtful. I brought both of my daughters in one day, and they loved splashing in the waterfall features and swimming in the hot tub. Adults and kids 6 and up, \$45 per person; five and under are free.
 - **Guided recreation:** If you’re looking to get out and explore Yosemite and want someone to guide you along the way, Rush Creek offers partial and full-day excursions ranging from stargazing to naturalist hikes. They can also help you plan your day if you want to head on your own.
- Nightly s’mores: A favorite of all ages!

Onsite dining options at Rush Creek

Rush Creek offers several ways to grab a meal, from a sit-down restaurant to a grab-and-go market.

The Restaurant at Rush Creek — the main dining option, choose from the more upscale side or more relaxed “tavern” side. I’ll let you guess which side we chose with two rowdy toddlers. Both sides offer the same menu and offer breakfast, lunch, and dinner. We ate several meals here and enjoyed all of our food and cocktails. If the weather is nice, opt for a table outside.

Summer BBQ — an awesome, and more affordable choice, for families in the warmer months, Rush Creek offers a poolside barbecue from May through September. The event rotates from the California barbeque to a taco truck nightly.

The pool bar — year-round, you can order drinks directly from the pool bar.

General store — This is a great choice for grabbing something quick and easy to bring into the park with you, or if you’re just looking for a faster and more affordable option than the restaurant. The store has a full coffee shop, breakfast sandwiches and pastries, and lunch and picnic items. The market also offers beer, wine, snacks and other essentials.

Bring your own food – Rooms offer mini fridges. While they don’t have microwaves, the hotel offers a toaster and microwave in the general store that you can use.

More Rush Creek Lodge tips from a mom who has been there

Make reservations at the restaurant: The restaurant can book up and the hotel recommends you make reservations. We typically were 5-6pm diners with little kids and never had a problem, but I’d suggest making a reservation to be safe.

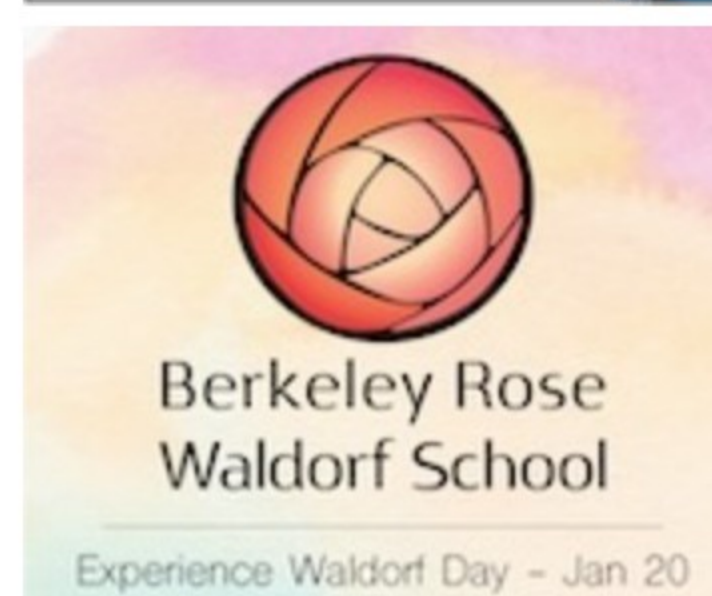
Take advantage of spa day use: Upgrade from family use to day use pass of the spa for \$20 more (\$65 total), and you can go to the spa all day long. My husband and I went with the kids before 11 am and then took turns going by ourselves later in the day. My alone time in the spa post-bedtime was magic — you can grab a cocktail or glass of wine, lounge on the swinging beds and enjoy all of the spa’s amenities, from the hot tub to the aromatherapy steam room to the Himalayan salt block sauna.

Leave the gear at home: Pack lighter and take advantage of the gear rental at Rush Creek, including strollers, baby carriers, trekking poles, backpacks, binoculars, bicycles, and more.

Check out Evergreen Lodge: Rush Creek’s sister property is about 15 minutes away. If you’re looking for **a more affordable option**, it’s another great choice to book and offers many of the same family-friendly amenities.

The bottom line on Rush Creek Lodge

It’s clear Rush Creek was designed by parents with fellow parents in mind. In fact, I learned that owners Lee Zimmerman and Brian Anderluh aren’t just dads, but they have made it a big part of the hotel mission to help young people via an impactful youth program. Many of the staff members at Rush Creek and Evergreen are young adults from urban San Francisco and Oakland who work for about four months as full-time paid interns, gaining experience in the wilderness and on-the-job training in hospitality.



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My husband and I are already on the same page about trying to make a trip to Rush Creek an annual trip. The hotel makes for a memorable family vacation any season, whether you’re looking to explore Yosemite National Park extensively or just looking to enjoy the resort and relax as much as possible.

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