



Photographing Yosemite National Park in 48 Hours

A Shoulder and Off-Season Photography Guide

By Mark Haeussler | Inspired by Nature Photography

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Tunnel View after the light breaks through

How to Use This Guide

For years, I viewed Yosemite with amazement through photographs: Ansel Adams's luminous black-and-white landscapes, Galen Rowell's immersive climbing images, and Jimmy Chin's contemporary adventure storytelling. Then I watched with astonishment as Alex Honnold climbed the 3,000-foot face of El Capitan without ropes in Free Solo. Yosemite grew from a place I admired to a place I had to experience: from the sheer granite walls, to a 2,425-foot waterfall and 3,000-year-old trees.

Its preservation story is just as remarkable. In 1864, President Abraham Lincoln signed the Yosemite Grant, protecting Yosemite Valley and the Mariposa Grove for public use. Yosemite became a national park in 1890. After Theodore Roosevelt camped with John Muir in 1903, the president helped build support for returning Yosemite Valley and the Mariposa Grove to federal protection in 1906, uniting them with the national park.

Early last December, our time finally came. With a little more than two days, we concentrated on Yosemite Valley and the Mariposa Grove: iconic viewpoints, short hikes, changing weather, and enough flexibility to follow the light. What we learned is that Yosemite does not become less photogenic in the off-season. It becomes a different park.

This guide is built around that quieter season. It offers a realistic 48-hour plan, detailed advice for photographing Yosemite's signature locations, and the practical information needed to make quick decisions when weather, precipitation, access, or crowds change the plan.

A living guide. Access rules, operating dates, fees, road conditions, trail closures, and shuttle schedules change. Planning information in this edition was checked in September 2026; use the linked National Park Service pages to confirm conditions before every trip.

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Why Photograph Yosemite Outside Summer

From October through May, Yosemite trades summer certainty for atmosphere. Waterfalls can be stronger, the Merced River can become a mirror, storms can reveal and conceal granite walls within minutes, and fresh snow can simplify the Valley into shape and tone. The price of that atmosphere is uncertainty: shorter days, freezing nights, potential tire-chain requirements, seasonal road closures, and waterfalls that vary dramatically with recent precipitation.

Season	Photographic strengths	Trade-offs	Best fit
October to November	Fall color, lower crowds, occasional storms, access often still broad in October	Waterfalls may be low or dry; Tioga and Glacier Point roads can close with the first major snow	Color, reflections, and flexible hiking
December to March	Snow, fog, clearing storms, quiet trails, low sun angles	Short days, ice, chain controls, winter trail routes, limited services	Atmosphere and classic winter Yosemite
April to May	Peak waterfalls, green meadows, rainbows, dogwood, longer days	Crowds build quickly; spray and high water; high-country roads often remain closed	Waterfalls and spring renewal

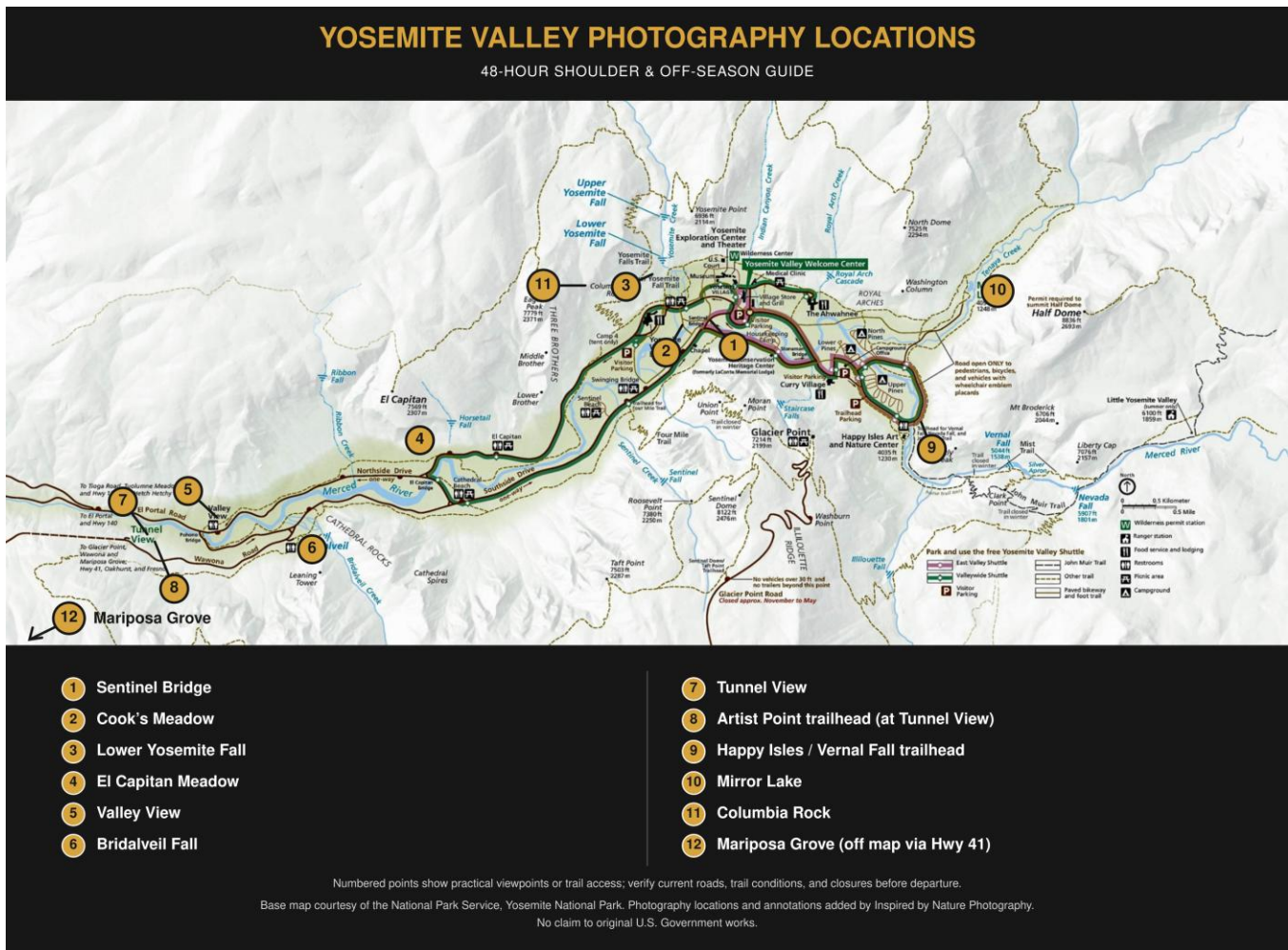
The 48-Hour Strategy

Consider this itinerary as a sequence of potential opportunities, not a checklist. Sunrise and sunset locations are close together, but parking, one-way roads, shuttle timing, trail conditions, and changing weather can consume more time than the map suggests. If a clearing storm develops, abandon the schedule and go to a broad Valley viewpoint such as Tunnel View, Valley View or Sentinel Bridge (detailed National Park Service maps are in the Appendix).

What we learned. The strongest photographs did not come from trying to cover the most ground. They came from staying flexible, watching the weather, and returning to a few strong Valley viewpoints as the light and clouds changed.

Yosemite Valley Photography Map

The numbered locations correspond to the itinerary and the field reference later in this guide. Numbers identify practical viewpoints or trail access points rather than exact photographic positions.



Base map courtesy of the National Park Service, Yosemite National Park. Photography locations and annotations added by Inspired by Nature Photography. No claim to original U.S. Government works.

Day 1 Western Valley Waterfalls and Tunnel View

Time	Location	Why it works	Walk or hike	Working note
First light	1 — Sentinel Bridge	Half Dome above the Merced River; potential color and reflection	Roadside to a few hundred yards	Arrive 30-40 minutes before sunrise; try both a wide frame and a tighter reflection.
Sunrise + 90 min	5 — Valley View	El Capitan, Cathedral Rocks, Bridalveil Fall, and the Merced in one frame	Very short walk from turnout (limited parking available)	Use a polarizer carefully; too much polarization can remove the reflection.
Morning	4 — El Capitan Meadow	Scale, climbers, oak silhouettes, and changing light on the wall	Short meadow-edge walk	Stay on established paths and use a telephoto to isolate climbers and patterns.
Late morning to 3 pm	9 — Vernal Fall Footbridge	Spray, side light, and spring rainbow potential	1.8 mi RT; 492 ft; 1-1.5 hr	Best in high spring flow; winter ice can change the safe route.
Mid to late afternoon	6 — Bridalveil Fall	Backlit spray, rainbow potential, and intimate forest compositions	0.7 mi RT; 85 ft; 30-60 min	Protect the lens from spray; late-day rainbow depends on sun angle and flow.
Sunset to blue hour	7/8 — Tunnel View or Artist Point	Classic Valley panorama or a quieter, slightly elevated variation	Tunnel View roadside; Artist Point 2.3 mi RT; 761 ft; 1.5-2 hr	Arrive 60-90 minutes early and stay through blue hour after a storm.

Day 2 Yosemite Falls Mirror Lake and a Second Sunset

Time	Location	Why it works	Walk or hike	Working note
First light	2 — Cook's Meadow	A clean full-height view of Yosemite Falls with meadow foreground	1.1 mi loop; 29 ft; 30-60 min	Begin on the boardwalk and move slowly as light reaches the upper wall.
Morning	3 — Lower Yosemite Fall	Water, spray, forest, and a close perspective on the lower fall	1.2 mi loop; 59 ft; 30-60 min	In spring, watch for rainbow in the spray from midmorning toward midday.
Late morning	11 — Columbia Rock	Elevated Valley view and a stronger sense of scale	2.2 mi RT; 1,013 ft; 1.5-2 hr	Continue about 0.5 mile beyond Columbia Rock for a strong view of Upper Yosemite Fall if conditions allow.
Midday option	10/9 — Mirror Lake or Happy Isles	Reflections in spring; shaded river and forest details	Mirror Lake 2 mi RT; 4.4 mi linked route; Happy Isles short walk	Mirror Lake is strongest in late spring and early summer; it may shrink to a meadow later.
Half-day swap	12 — Mariposa Grove	Giant sequoias reward soft light and overcast weather	Grizzly Giant Loop 2.1 mi; 403 ft; 1-1.5 hr, plus approach when no shuttle	Allow roughly two hours of driving round trip from the Valley plus the hike.
Sunset	5/7 — Valley View or Tunnel View	Return to the strongest forecast, water, and cloud setup	Roadside	Repeating a location is deliberate: Yosemite rarely gives the same conditions twice.

Adjusting the Itinerary by Season

Keep the same sequence of broad viewpoints, waterfalls, short hikes, and a flexible sunset, but change the emphasis as water, daylight, access, and trail conditions change.

Season	Prioritize	Modify or skip	Best backup
October to November	Fall color, Valley View, Cook's Meadow, changing storms	Waterfalls may be slight; high-country roads can close after early snow	Forest detail, river reflections, and repeat sunset viewpoints
December to March	Snow, fog, ice, low sun, Sentinel Bridge, Tunnel View	Use winter trail routes; allow extra driving time and carry chains	Roadside Valley viewpoints and short walks near lodging
April to May	Waterfalls, rainbows, green meadows, Mirror Lake	Expect spray, high water, building crowds, and closed high-country roads	Vernal Fall corridor, Lower Yosemite Fall, and meadow viewpoints

Photographing the Highlights



Valley View and the Merced River

Valley View Reflections

Valley View works best when wind, river level, and light cooperate. Arrive before sunrise for the calmest water or return late in the day when warm light reaches El Capitan and the sky begins to soften. Key composition elements are El Capitan on the left and Cathedral Rocks and Bridalveil Fall on the right.

- Spring provides water and Bridalveil flow, while autumn and winter can provide calmer pools, color, frost, or ice.
- In winter, including snow or ice-covered grasses, the riverbank or a single boulder may be strong additions to the image.

What we learned. At Valley View, the reflection can matter more than the sky. Check the water first, work both wide and tighter compositions, and return later if wind disrupts the surface.



Tunnel View at Sunset

Tunnel View and Artist Point

Tunnel View is most dramatic at sunset, during a clearing storm, or when low clouds move through the Valley. Because the view faces east, sunrise can also work when clouds catch color, but the foreground often remains dark. Arrive 60 to 90 minutes before sunset, photograph the changing light, and remain through blue hour.

- Artist Point follows the old Wawona Road from near Tunnel View. It removes the parking-lot foreground and usually the crowd, but it requires a short forest hike and careful navigation back after dark.



Vernal Fall from the Mist Trail corridor

Vernal Fall and Rainbows

The Vernal Fall Footbridge gives the first unobstructed full view after a steady uphill walk from Happy Isles. In spring and early summer, late morning through midafternoon is best since sunlight reaches the mist. The rainbow can move as the sun angle changes, so the best position is not fixed. Continue carefully above the bridge only when the route is open and footing is safe.

- Best season: late April through June, with May and early June the most dependable combination of flow and sun.
- Best rainbow window: approximately noon to 3 pm, adjusted for cloud, date, water volume, and your position.
- Winter caution: the lower Mist Trail above the footbridge commonly closes because of ice and rockfall; follow the signed winter route.



Yosemite Falls in late season flow

Yosemite Falls and Moonbows

For the full waterfall, Cook's Meadow is strongest near sunrise, before direct light creates a bright upper fall and a dark lower wall. For spray, texture, and potential rainbow, walk the Lower Yosemite Fall loop later in the morning. Peak flow is typically in May, though the waterfall can return after autumn storms and may freeze into dramatic ice cones in winter.

- Wide view: Cook's Meadow boardwalk at dawn, with meadow, trees, and the complete fall.
- Close view: the lower fall and footbridge from midmorning toward noon when sun reaches the spray.
- Moonbow possibility: clear nights around a full moon, usually in April through June when water volume is high. Use a tripod, manual focus, and exposures long enough to reveal color not obvious to the eye.

Bridalveil Fall

Bridalveil is a good afternoon subject because the fall can catch side or backlight while much of the Valley remains bright. A rainbow is most likely when the sun is behind you and low enough to illuminate the spray. High spring flow is the best bet; in autumn the fall may be slight, but wind can turn it into a graceful veil against dark granite.

- Try the signed viewing area for the close experience, then search from legal roadside pullouts along Southside Drive for longer-lens compositions.



Late light in the Mariposa Grove

Mariposa Grove

The grove is less about a single grand vista and more about scale, repetition, texture, and light. Early morning, overcast conditions, mist, or fresh snow reduce harsh contrast between bright patches and deep forest. The Grizzly Giant Loop is the best short photographic circuit, passing the Fallen Monarch, Bachelor and Three Graces, Grizzly Giant, and California Tunnel Tree.

- In winter, the grove shuttle does not operate. Reaching the grove requires a two-mile approach each way, with roughly 500 feet of gain, before walking the grove trails.



Half Dome from an elevated Valley viewpoint

Mirror Lake and Midday Photography

Mirror Lake is best viewed by mid-morning from April into June, when Tenaya Creek is high enough to create a reflective pool. It is not the classic face-on Half Dome reflection some visitors expect: the strongest subjects are Mount Watkins, Tenaya Canyon, surrounding cliffs, and abstract tree-and-granite reflections. If you visit later in the morning, roughly 9:30 to 11:30 may still work before the light becomes completely overhead. Wind matters more than the clock.

From late morning through midafternoon, favorite subjects that benefit from direct light, shade, or close detail include: waterfall spray and rainbows, El Capitan climbers with a telephoto, forest and river details at Happy Isles, the shaded western Valley Loop, Mariposa Grove in overcast weather, or the elevated Columbia Rock viewpoint.

Bad Weather Is Often the Best Weather

Condition	Go first	What to photograph	Practical adjustment
Clearing storm	Tunnel View or Valley View	Cloud layers, light shafts, newly revealed granite, reflections	Arrive before the forecast clearing and keep shooting through blue hour.
Steady overcast	Mariposa Grove, Happy Isles, Bridalveil	Bark, forest layers, saturated color, flowing water	Use a polarizer for wet foliage and watch for long exposures blurred by wind.
Rain or wet snow	Cook's Meadow, Sentinel Bridge, Lower Yosemite Fall	Atmosphere, soft backgrounds, fresh snow, mist	Carry a rain sleeve, microfiber cloths, and a dry bag for batteries and cards.
Hard midday sun	Vernal Fall, El Capitan Meadow, shaded Valley Loop	Rainbow spray, climbers, graphic rock details, river abstracts	Switch from the grand landscape to details and compressed compositions.
Smoke or haze	Forest interiors and close subjects	Sequoias, bark, water, intimate landscapes	Check air quality; do not trade health for a photograph.

What we learned. A forecast of cloud, rain, or snow is not necessarily lost photography time. Stay close to broad Valley viewpoints, protect the equipment, and watch for short openings when granite walls and fresh snow emerge through moving cloud.

Short Hikes With Strong Photographic Returns

Distances and elevation gains below follow the linked AllTrails routes. NPS descriptions may differ slightly because trailheads and route endpoints vary. Always consult current NPS alerts and posted trail signs before hiking.

Trail	Distance	Gain	Time	Photographic return	Details
Cook’s Meadow Loop	1.1 mi loop	29 ft	30-60 min	Yosemite Falls, Half Dome, meadow foreground	AllTrails
Lower Yosemite Fall	1.2 mi loop	59 ft	30-60 min	Lower fall, spray, forest, rainbow potential	AllTrails
Bridalveil Fall	0.7 mi RT	85 ft	30-60 min	Waterfall and windblown spray	AllTrails
Mirror Lake	2.0 mi RT to lake; 4.4 mi linked route	305 ft on linked route	40 min-2 hr	Spring reflections and Tenaya Canyon	AllTrails
Vernal Fall Footbridge	1.8 mi RT	492 ft	1-1.5 hr	Full waterfall view and spring spray	AllTrails
Columbia Rock	2.2 mi RT	1,013 ft	1.5-2 hr	Elevated Valley; Upper Fall beyond the rock	AllTrails
Artist Point	2.3 mi RT	761 ft	1.5-2 hr	A quieter Tunnel View alternative	AllTrails
Grizzly Giant Loop	2.1 mi RT	403 ft	1-1.5 hr	Signature giant sequoias	AllTrails
Western Valley Loop	Flexible segment (choose a starting point and take a shuttle back)	Mostly flat	1-3 hr	Merced River, El Capitan, quiet forest	AllTrails

Official trail information: [Yosemite Valley day hikes](#)

Know Before You Go

Airport Distances and Driving Time

Mileage and time depend on the exact Valley destination, weather, traffic, construction, and entrance delays. Winter travel can take much longer than the estimates below.

Airport	Approximate distance	Normal driving estimate	Likely route
Fresno Yosemite International FAT	About 95 miles	2¼-2¾ hours	Highway 41 through Oakhurst and Wawona
Sacramento International SMF	About 180 miles	3¾-4½ hours	Usually Highway 99 to 120 or 140
San Francisco International SFO	About 190 miles	4-5 hours	Highway 120 through Manteca or Highway 140

Entrance Fees, Permits, and Photography

Question	Current answer	What it means for a 48-hour visit
Timed entry in 2026	No season-wide timed-entry reservation is required.	Weekend parking can still fill early in the off-season. Arrive before sunrise and favor weekdays.
Entrance pass	\$35 for a private vehicle, valid for seven consecutive days; the park is cashless.	Buy or carry the appropriate pass and photo identification.
Ordinary photography	No separate permit is normally required for personal landscape photography.	A tripod and normal camera kit do not create a permit requirement by themselves.
Special activities	Separate permits or reservations may apply to Half Dome, wilderness overnights, camping, commercial operations, organized events, and some productions.	Confirm the exact activity with NPS before the trip; do not assume an entrance pass covers it.

Planning information checked September 2026. Verify current NPS fees, reservation requirements, road conditions, shuttle schedules, trail closures, and lodging rates before traveling.

Parking, Shuttle, and Seasonal Access

- Park once when possible. The free Valleywide shuttle generally serves lodges, trailheads, and visitor areas from 7 am to 10 pm, with buses every 12 to 22 minutes. The East Valley shuttle operates on a shorter loop with more frequent service.
- Arrive before sunrise for Sentinel Bridge, Cook’s Meadow, or trailhead parking. Midday parking can be difficult even outside peak summer, especially on pleasant weekends and during the February Horsetail Fall period.
- Tioga Road and Glacier Point Road close seasonally after snow and do not have fixed opening dates. Build the itinerary around Yosemite Valley and the Mariposa Grove rather than assuming high-country access.
- From roughly November through March, tire chains may be required in your vehicle regardless of drivetrain or rental-car policy. Check road and chain-control conditions before entering the park.
- The Mariposa Grove shuttle is seasonal. When it is not operating, the grove begins with a two-mile walk each way from the welcome plaza.

Where to Stay for Dawn Access

For a 48-hour photography trip, location is more valuable than room size. Staying in Yosemite Valley makes a pre-dawn start easy and removes an hour or more of daily mountain driving. Sample weekday rates were checked in September 2026 for selected stays in January and March 2027; taxes, fees, weekends, holidays, availability, and dynamic pricing can change them.

Property or room	Sample weekday rate (Jan./Mar. 2027)	Drive to central Valley	Best reason to choose it
Curry Village unheated tent cabin	\$133	In the Valley	Lowest-cost in-park base when temperatures and shared facilities are acceptable
Curry Village heated tent cabin	\$163	In the Valley	Rustic but more practical in cold shoulder-season weather
Curry Village cabin or room	\$180-\$287	In the Valley	Hard-sided option close to Happy Isles and eastern Valley trailheads
Yosemite Valley Lodge traditional room	\$229-\$273	In the Valley	Central access to Yosemite Falls, shuttles, and west-Valley roads
The Ahwahnee standard to prime room	\$462-\$596+	In the Valley	Historic full-service stay with excellent location
Yosemite West vacation rentals	Varies widely	About 25-40 min	Kitchen and group space near the Wawona Road junction
El Portal lodging	Often \$140-\$300+	About 30-45 min	Closest substantial lodging outside the Arch Rock Entrance
Wawona area lodging or rentals	Varies widely	About 50-70 min	Best for Mariposa Grove, less convenient for repeated Valley sunrise

Wawona Hotel was listed as closed when this guide was prepared. Curry Village and Housekeeping Camp have seasonal room types and dates. Reserve official in-park lodging through the authorized concessioner; third-party sites can create confusion about availability and cancellation rules.

Official in-park lodging: [NPS lodging overview](#) | [official reservations](#)

There are less expensive accommodations available in nearby communities such as Mariposa and Oakhurst; however, the drive can be 60-90 minutes to the central Yosemite Valley.

Campgrounds for a 48 Hour Photography Trip

Camping can provide the earliest access at the lowest in-park cost, but reservations are highly competitive. For a Valley-centered 48-hour trip, Upper Pines is the strongest overall choice. Camp 4 is inexpensive but walk-in and tent-only; Hodgdon Meadow and Wawona add substantial pre-dawn driving.

Valley and Year Round Options

Campground	2026 operation	Nightly fee	Reservation approach	Photography use
Upper Pines	All year	\$36 per site	Five months ahead on the 15th; reservations all year	Best camping base for a Valley-focused itinerary
Lower Pines	Apr 21-Oct 19	\$36 per site	Five months ahead on the 15th	Excellent eastern Valley access; seasonal only
North Pines	Apr 21-Oct 26	\$36 per site	Early-access lottery; remaining sites five months ahead	Excellent eastern Valley access; seasonal only
Camp 4	All year	\$10 per person	One week ahead Apr 15-Nov 29; generally first-come, first-served in winter	Central Valley location; walk-in, tent-only, no pets

Campground	2026 operation	Nightly fee	Reservation approach	Photography use
Hodgdon Meadow	All year	\$36 per site	Five months ahead Apr 15-Oct 26; generally first-come, first-served in winter	About 45-60 minutes to central Valley
Wawona	All year	\$36 per site	Five months ahead for spring-fall; generally first-come, first-served in winter	About 50-70 minutes to central Valley; convenient for Mariposa Grove

Valley campground reservations: [NPS Yosemite campground reservations and release windows](#)

Photographing Horsetail Fall in February

The natural “Firefall” occurs at Horsetail Fall, a small seasonal waterfall on the eastern edge of El Capitan. For roughly two weeks in mid- to late February, the setting sun can make Horsetail glow orange, but only when the waterfall is flowing and the western sky remains clear. Haze or a thin cloud can end the effect.

You cannot know with certainty far in advance. Monitor snowmelt and recent precipitation, the sunset cloud forecast, and current NPS restrictions. In 2026, no February entrance reservation was required, but parking and access restrictions were in effect. Future-year details are normally posted closer to the event.

Yosemite Valley Field Reference

Use this as a quick decision sheet in the field. Lens ranges are starting points rather than rules; weather and access should always override the schedule.

No.	Location	Best light and season	Starting lens	Access and backup
1	Sentinel Bridge	Dawn or sunset; spring through winter	24-70mm	Roadside/short walk; Cook's Meadow
2	Cook's Meadow	Dawn; spring flow or winter atmosphere	24-70mm	Easy boardwalk/loop; Lower Yosemite Fall
3	Lower Yosemite Fall	Midmorning; spring or after storms	24-70mm	1.2-mi loop; Cook's Meadow wide view
4	El Capitan Meadow	Morning or late afternoon; all year	70-400mm	Roadside/meadow edge; Valley View
5	Valley View	Pre-dawn or late day; spring, fall, winter	16-70mm	Roadside, limited parking; El Capitan Meadow
6	Bridalveil Fall	Afternoon; strongest in spring	24-200mm	0.7 mi RT; Tunnel View for wider context
7	Tunnel View	Sunset or clearing storm; all year	24-200mm	Roadside; Valley View
8	Artist Point	Late afternoon; shoulder season when trail is safe	24-70mm	2.3 mi RT, 761 ft; Tunnel View
9	Vernal Fall corridor	Late morning to midafternoon; late Apr-Jun	24-70mm	1.8 mi RT to footbridge; Happy Isles details
10	Mirror Lake	Dawn to midmorning; Apr-Jun	16-70mm	2 mi RT; Happy Isles or shaded river detail
11	Columbia Rock	Morning to late morning; spring through fall	24-200mm	2.2 mi RT, 1,013 ft; Lower Yosemite Fall
12	Mariposa Grove	Early morning or overcast; access varies by season	24-70mm	Off map via Hwy 41; allow driving and seasonal approach

Before leaving the vehicle: check current NPS alerts, cloud movement, wind, water flow, trail surface, parking restrictions, and the time required to return before dark.

A Simple Gear List

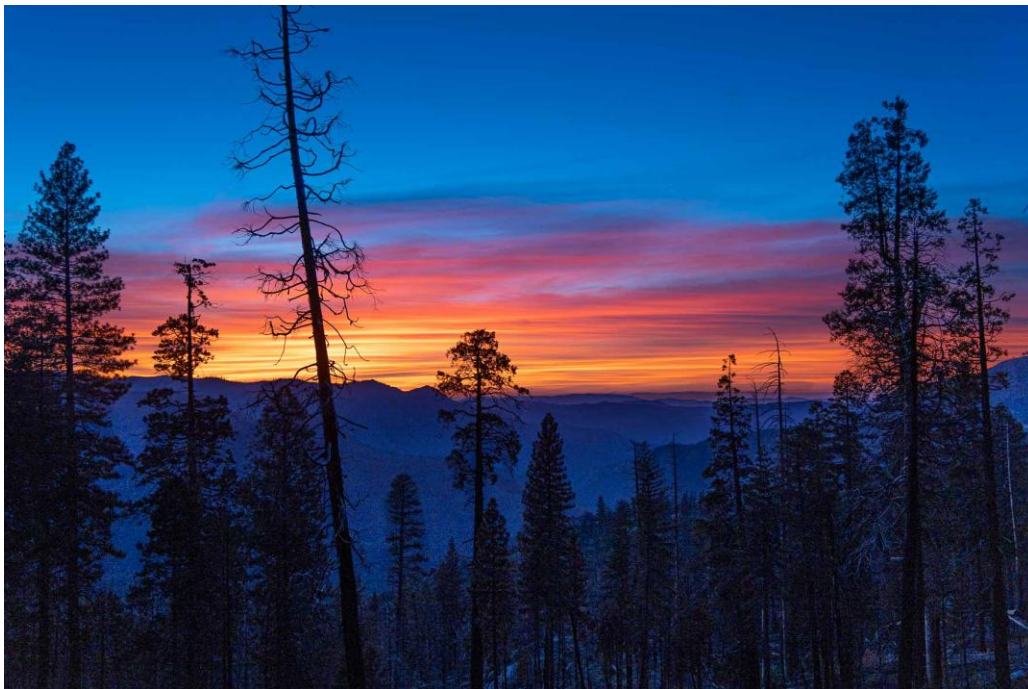
- An iPhone or a DSLR ideally with a wide-angle and zoom capabilities; the telephoto is especially useful for climbers, waterfall details, and layered granite.
- For those with a DSLR: a Tripod, remote release or self-timer, circular polarizer, and optional neutral-density filters provide the ultimate flexibility for handling a variety of conditions.
- Rain cover, microfiber cloths, dry bag, headlamp, traction devices, warm layers, and spare batteries kept close to the body in cold weather.
- Offline NPS map, trail map, and current conditions saved before entering areas with limited service.

Photographing Yosemite Responsibly

The photograph is never more important than the place, another visitor's experience, or personal safety. Yosemite's rules also apply when a location appears quiet or when others have already stepped off trail.

- Remain on established paths, boardwalks, paved areas, or already-disturbed surfaces; do not enter meadows for a cleaner composition.
- Keep tripods and camera bags out of traffic lanes and narrow viewpoints, and make room for others after completing a composition.
- Never feed, call, bait, surround, or approach wildlife for a photograph. Store food and scented items according to Yosemite requirements.
- Drones are prohibited in Yosemite National Park. Follow posted seasonal closures, climbing closures, and special-use restrictions.
- Pack out everything, keep natural objects where they are, and avoid geotagging sensitive or easily damaged locations.

Official guidance: [NPS still photography information](#) | [Yosemite Leave No Trace guidance](#) | [Yosemite safety and drone rules](#)



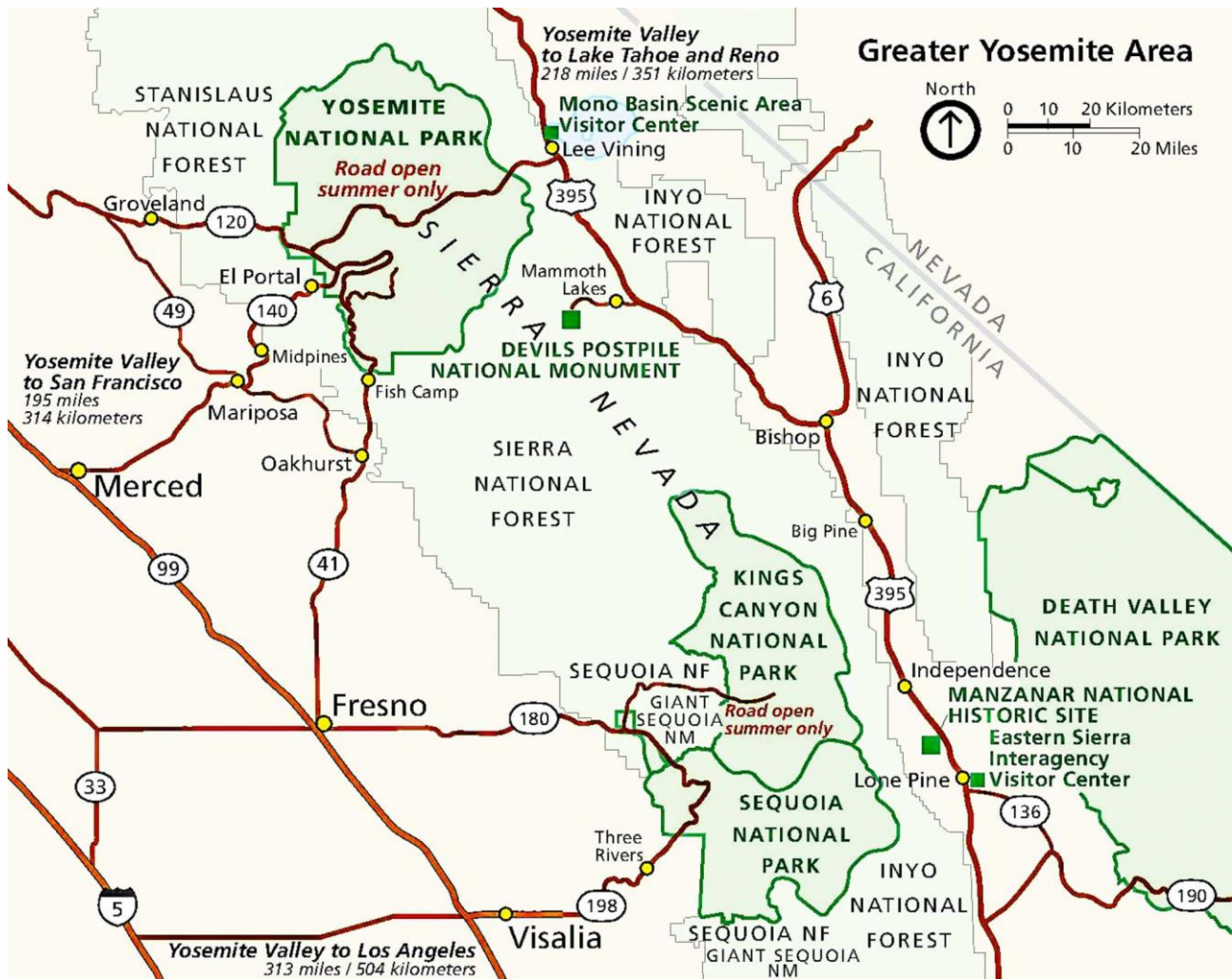
Blue Hour on the Drive Out of Yosemite

Final Thoughts

Forty-eight hours is not enough to intimately know this treasured national park, but it is enough to understand why photographers keep returning. The most productive approach is to choose a few locations, monitor the weather, repeat the strongest viewpoints at various times of day or in various conditions, and leave space for the park to surprise you. In the shoulder and off-season, uncertainty and variability are often the source of the most inspiring photographs.

Appendix A Maps

The maps in this guide answer three different planning questions: how to reach the park, how the park is organized, and how to move among the principal photography locations in Yosemite Valley. The numbered Valley map appears immediately before the itinerary; the regional and park maps follow here.



Regional approach map. Map courtesy of the National Park Service, Yosemite National Park. No claim to original U.S. Government works. [Source](#)



Yosemite National Park map. Map courtesy of the National Park Service, Yosemite National Park. No claim to original U.S. Government works. [Source](#)

Appendix B Yosemite Valley Climate by Month

The Valley floor is about 4,000 feet above sea level. The 1991-2020 NPS data below describe average conditions, not a forecast. Yosemite receives about 95 percent of its precipitation from October through May. Monthly snowfall is too variable to be a reliable trip-planning average, so the table uses a practical snow-potential indicator instead.

Month	Avg high	Avg low	Precipitation	Valley snow potential	Photographic character
January	48°F	29°F	7.0 in	High	Snow, ice, fog, and clearing storms
February	51°F	30°F	6.5 in	High	Winter scenes; Horsetail Fall window
March	57°F	34°F	5.5 in	Moderate to high	Water begins building; mixed rain and snow
April	63°F	38°F	3.2 in	Moderate	Waterfalls strengthen; dogwood may begin
May	71°F	45°F	1.9 in	Low in Valley	Peak waterfall flow and rainbow potential
June	81°F	51°F	0.5 in	Rare in Valley	Strong water early; long days
July	89°F	57°F	0.3 in	Very rare	Dry, crowded, harsh midday light
August	89°F	57°F	0.2 in	Very rare	Dry conditions and possible smoke
September	83°F	51°F	0.4 in	Very rare	Lower water, warmer color, fewer visitors late month
October	71°F	41°F	1.6 in	Possible late month	Fall color and first storms
November	56°F	33°F	4.1 in	Moderate	Low sun, rain or early snow, quieter Valley
December	46°F	28°F	5.6 in	High	Snow potential, frost, shortest days

Source: [National Park Service weather normals](#)

Appendix C Visitation by Month

Yosemite visitation varies by weather, road access, holidays, reservation policy, and unusual events. The ranges below summarize recent park-wide patterns rather than promising a specific crowd level. A quiet month can still produce a crowded Valley on a sunny holiday weekend or during Horsetail Fall.

Month	Typical recent park-wide visits	Practical crowd level
January	100,000-130,000	Lowest
February	110,000-160,000	Low except Firefall period
March	140,000-225,000	Low to moderate
April	250,000-325,000	Moderate
May	350,000-450,000	High
June	500,000-635,000	Very high
July	575,000-700,000	Peak
August	550,000-650,000	Peak
September	425,000-525,000	High
October	325,000-425,000	Moderate to high
November	175,000-250,000	Low
December	110,000-175,000	Low

The practical conclusion is stronger than any single-year percentage: November through March is consistently much quieter than June through August, while April and October usually provide a useful compromise between access, weather, and crowds.

Source and year-by-year reports: [National Park Service visitor-use statistics](#)

Appendix D Planning Links

- [2026 entrance reservations](#)
- [Entrance fees and passes](#)
- [Current road trail fire and waterfall conditions](#)
- [Yosemite weather and climate normals](#)
- [Official park maps](#)
- [Valley and regional transportation](#)
- [Yosemite Valley day hikes](#)
- [Vernal Fall and Nevada Fall trails](#)
- [Mariposa Grove access and shuttle](#)
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