

DISTURBING THE PEACE?

5 hikes to avoid Yosemite National Park crowds

By AMANDA LEE MYERS
Associated Press

YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK, Calif. — Dappled sunlight kisses the valley floor of Yosemite National Park. Granite monoliths, gushing waterfalls and giant sequoias abound. The wilderness is calling.

But instead of hitting the trails in a place John Muir called “by far the grandest of all the special temples of nature,” you’re sitting in a traffic jam, vying for limited parking.

More than 4 million visitors poured into Yosemite in 2018, and because its main attractions are concentrated along a 7-mile loop, it gets congested. Like, 5 p.m. in downtown Los Angeles congested. Parking can take hours.

“In general, national parks everywhere, they become more and more popular every year, and a place like Yosemite, you can’t just show up unprepared,” says James Kaiser, author of “Yosemite: The Complete Guide.” “It feels like a huge disappointment visiting a place to experience natural beauty and spending your time looking for a parking space.”

But there’s no reason anyone’s trip to the majestic park should be so fraught. Going any other time than summer, planning valley activities on any day but Saturday, getting an early morning start and choosing lesser-known trails can all help ensure a peaceful and restorative vacation.

The following hikes aren’t as famous as Half Dome or the Mist Trail, but that’s the point. They offer just as much beauty and a lot more serenity.

1. NORTH DOME

Like most of the recommended hikes on this list, this 8.8-mile round-trip trek is off Tioga Road just north of the valley. Everything outside the actual valley automatically will be less busy, but the views are no less stunning. The last quarter of the hike offers a front-row view of Half Dome and the valley floor below, and without the crowds.

“The view of Half Dome is so unlike any other view in the park,” Kaiser says. “Half Dome is such an iconic site in Yosemite — to be able to enjoy it from North Dome I really think is special.”

To get to the trailhead, take Tioga Road to Porcupine Creek, about 28 miles east of Crane Flat and 21 miles west of Tuolumne Meadows. It’s easy to miss, so keep your eyes peeled for a small building with pit toilets and parking spaces in a row on the south side of the road. After parking, look for a wooden sign that says, “Porcupine Creek Trail Head.” Below that you’ll see it’s 4.4 miles to North Dome.

The first few miles of the trail are easy, quiet and heavily forested. Don’t be surprised if you see deer or even a black bear (don’t worry, they’re more afraid of you than the other way around). The views start opening up after 3 miles, but the highlight of the hike is hoofing it to the top of North Dome, scurrying a bit farther down the other side and drinking in views of Half Dome.

Climbing the actual dome can be challenging but isn’t dangerous unless you like to court peril by walking too close to the edge. Hikers who tackle the dome should be generally fit or highly motivated.

Temperatures can vary wildly from the bottom of the dome to the top, where there’s nothing to block the wind. Bring layers, 2



AP Photos/Amanda Lee Myers, File
Karen Tara, of San Francisco, soaks in the views of El Capitan from the top of Sentinel Dome in Yosemite National Park.

Additional tips

- Tioga and Glacier Point roads close in winter, from around mid-November through late May or early June. The ideal time to take them is fall and summer, though early starts in summer will provide a more serene experience.
- Don’t expect to find food or water at the trailheads. Be grateful that most at least have pit toilets. Stock up on food before entering the park, as the valley has the only food options, and those are minimal and amount to dry sandwiches, sad salads and soulless pizza. Stock several gallons of water in the car.
- Check out the National Park Service’s tips on how to handle potential encounters with black bears.
- As with any serious hiking, have shoes built for that purpose. Traction on the domes is a must. A backpack with a 2- to 3-liter water pouch is recommended.
- Don’t expect to have cell service. Do your research before you arrive, and either bring paper maps or a map app you can access on your phone without internet service.
- The National Park Service runs a page for Yosemite’s current conditions, including road closures, water levels and trails. Check it



A trail marker made by a helpful hiker points the way to Yosemite National Park’s North Dome, which provides jaw-dropping views of the more famous Half Dome.

before you travel.

liters of water and snacks. Even better, bring a lunch and restore your energy on top of the dome. On the way back, check out Indian Rock Arch, the only granite arch in Yosemite and just a 0.6-mile detour.

2. DOG LAKE AND LEMBERT DOME

Another conquerable dome in Yosemite is quicker to get to from its trailhead than North Dome. Lembert Dome looms over Tioga Road, jutting so seemingly straight up, it looks doable only with rock-climbing gear. All it really takes is a smidgen of bravery.

The well-marked trail to Lembert Dome is next to Tuolumne Meadows, just 10 minutes from the eastern exit of the park. It’s a haul if you’re staying in the valley or the towns south of the park, so consider combining the hike with other smaller jaunts to May

Lake (2.8 miles round trip off Tioga Road) and Tuolumne Grove (see below).

Start the loop trail by going clockwise and head first to Dog Lake. You’ll pass the junction for Lembert Dome at the 0.8-mile mark. Stay straight and go another 0.3 miles to the lake. Take a few photos before moving on, or walk around the entire lake and explore more.

To get to the base of Lembert Dome, retrace your steps back 0.3 miles from the lake to the Lembert Dome junction and take a left. The trail will lead you gradually up for about a mile and a half. From there, go as far as you feel comfortable.

Some parts of the dome are too steep for some people’s comfort levels and may have you scooting back down on your bottom.

The reward for continuing on up: 360-degree views of Tuolumne Meadows and mountains, and, of course, a sense of accomplishment.

3. GAYLOR LAKES

Unless you’re a regular hiker accustomed to elevation, this 3-miler will make you huff and puff. The trailhead, just a stone’s throw from Yosemite’s eastern entrance, starts at an elevation of nearly 10,000 feet. Plus the beginning of the hike is up, up and more up, a steeper climb than say, Lembert Dome.

But the pain is relatively short-lived and the payoff big: two beautiful alpine lakes. After climbing 600 feet for just over half a mile, the trail evens out before dropping down to Middle Gaylor Lake. Explore the area before heading northeast a short hop to Upper Gaylor Lake. Follow the trail to the north side of the lake, turn around, and drink in the views of both sparkling bodies of water before continuing up to the Great Sierra Mine historic site and trail’s end.

Given its eastern location, this could be a great last hike before exiting the park, and is easily combined with a visit to Mono Lake and its otherworldly tufa formations. In the fall, nearby June Lake in the Eastern Sierra has deciduous trees awash in golds, oranges and reds.

4. TUOLUMNE GROVE

Sure, Mariposa Grove gets all the love. It’s a quick and easy stop just inside the park’s south entrance. But that means more crowds. For a little more peace with your giant sequoia gazing, head to Tuolumne Grove. This westernmost destination off Tioga Road is simple to get to from the valley, and there’s a decent-size parking lot.

The 2.5-mile round-trip hike is a riot of color in the fall. The trip down is a breeze and includes a couple dozen giant sequoias, including one you can walk through. The way back up can be a workout, 400 feet of elevation gain.

5. TAFT POINT AND SENTINEL DOME

These hikes are off Glacier Point Road, and again are only doable from roughly June to October because of snow. But because Glacier Point is so popular (the views are spectacular and require no hiking), Taft Point and Sentinel Dome get more traffic than the hikes along Tioga Road. Still, except at peak times, they offer plenty of serenity, particularly Taft.

To get to the trailhead, drive up Glacier Point Road for about 13 miles until you see a parking lot and pit toilets on the left. At the trailhead, take a right and head toward Sentinel Dome, where a relatively easy climb will reward you with 360-degree views of the valley, including El Capitan and Half Dome.

Then head back down to the trailhead and continue straight for roughly a mile of easy trail to reach Taft Point. It offers jaw-dropping views of El Capitan and may prove challenging for anyone afraid of heights. Unlike the other hikes on this list, Taft Point ends at a sheer drop-off, a 3,500-foot straight shot to the bottom. People have fallen to their deaths here, but as long as you maintain a comfortable distance between yourself and the edge, there’s nothing to fear.

Look out for couples getting married; adventurous sorts jumping off the side and swinging from what has to be the longest tire swing in the world; or “highlining,” which is basically extreme tight-rope walking.

For similar views with even fewer people, Kaiser recommends hiking to nearby Dewey Point, a 7.5-mile loop trail also off Glacier Point Road. With a permit, you can stay overnight and take in the stars and sunrise.

From modest beginnings, Washington now a force in wine world

More than 1,000 wineries call Pacific Northwest state home

By NICHOLAS K. GERANIOS
Associated Press

SPOKANE, Wash. — When Craig and Vicki Leuthold opened the Maryhill Winery in 2001, there were about 100 wineries in the state of Washington.

That number has since exploded to more than 1,000 wineries this year, and the remarkable growth is likely to continue.

Maryhill Winery, just south of the remote town of Goldendale, is part of that growth. It has recently opened tasting rooms in Spokane and Vancouver, Washington, and is in the process of opening a tasting room in the Seattle suburb of Woodinville.

“Our timing was great,” said Craig Leuthold, whose winery produces 60 varieties. “Washington wine has really increased in popularity.”

Washington has become a force in the wine industry. The state has the nation’s second-highest number of wineries, after California. But California, which



AP Photo/Elaine Thompson

Barrels of wine are moved into storage at Chateau Ste. Michelle winery in Woodinville, Wash. From less than 20 wineries in 1981, the Washington wine industry has grown to more than 1,000 this year. And the growth is likely to continue.

has around 3,700 wineries, remains much bigger than anyone else in the United States, selling more than \$40 billion worth of wine in this country.

Within the U.S., wines from California are the top sellers, followed by wines from Australia and Italy. Washington ranks fourth in the sources of wine sold in the U.S., said Steve Warner, president of Washington State Wine, the industry’s trade group.

“More Washington wine is sold in the United States than French wine,” he said.

The state’s wine industry generates about \$2.4 billion a year in revenues and contributes more than \$7 billion a year to the state’s

economy, Warner said.

Washington’s wines are consistently top-ranked, he said.

“Washington has a higher percentage of 90-rated wines than other top wine-producing regions in the world,” Warner said, referring to the 100-point scale for rating wines. “We are competing against wine regions with 28 generations of winemakers, who were doing it before America was a country.”

Most of the industry’s success stems from the state’s climate and soils, Warner said. Wine grapes like long sunny days and cool nights, which the vineyards in the central and eastern part of the state enjoy.

The area also gets little rainfall compared to other grape-growing regions, which is a plus, he said.

Washington still has plenty of available land at reasonable prices in wine country, said Thomas Henick-Kling, director of the enology and viticulture program at Washington State University in Pullman.

The acreage dedicated to grapes for wine is rapidly expanding. Twenty years ago, there were 24,000 acres of grapes. Today, there are 59,000 acres of vineyards.

Washington also has skilled farmers and winemakers, graduates of winemaking programs at numerous local colleges, Henick-Kling said.

There were about 20 wineries in 1981. That grew to 100 wineries by 2001, just over 500 by 2012 and just over 1,000 now, Warner said. Growth has been averaging more than 70 new wineries per year for the past seven years.

Washington’s growth is no surprise, as the number of wineries and wine consumption continue to grow in the United States.

“The growth in wineries around the country is very exciting as wine sales continue to grow, particularly at the premium end,”

said Gladys Horiuchi of the Wine Institute, which represents California wineries.

Wine shipments to the United States from all foreign and domestic sources grew 1% in 2018. The Wine Institute said people are drinking more premium wine, which starts at \$8 per bottle.

The 1,000th active license was issued to Jens Hansen, owner of Uva Furem winery in Maple Valley. Hansen retired from the Air Force, moved to the Seattle area and decided to become a winemaker.

“I feel like the Washington wine community is a lot like the Air Force in that everyone looks out for each other,” Hansen said.

About 70 grape varieties are grown in Washington, with the most popular reds being Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot. Chardonnay and White Riesling are the most common whites.

Most of Washington’s wineries are fairly small. The owners “are passionate about wine and work full time and crush grapes on weekends,” Warner said.

There are a smaller number of midsize wineries that enjoy national distribution, plus a handful of industry giants like Chateau Ste. Michelle, he said.

More investors from out-

side the state are joining the industry, Warner said. It also helps that Washington has long had a lot of wealthy people who work for companies like Boeing, Microsoft and Amazon and have money to invest in the industry, he said.

Many of the state’s best wineries are clustered around the old town of Walla Walla, which used to be known primarily for sweet onions and as home of the state penitentiary. Now, it is home to world-class winemakers.

Warner expected the strong growth rate to continue.

“The line is not flattening,” he said. “I wouldn’t be surprised if we get to 2,000.”

One factor that could limit growth is climate change, but Washington also seems fortunate there.

The mighty Columbia River, which irrigates much of wine country, is predicted to be a stable water supply for many years to come, Henick-Smith said.

Heat spikes in the summer might damage grapes, he said. But farmers are moving vineyards to higher elevations looking for cooler ripening weather.

“Here in Washington we’re pretty stable,” Henick-Smith said.