

Trip Essentials

National Parks & the High Sierra Route



Yosemite Valley, Yosemite National Park

Overview

This route highlights the unbelievable experiences to be had traveling through California and Nevada's High Sierra region. The High Sierra is known for their magnificent skyline and spectacular landscapes, making it one of the most beautiful physical features of the United States. Biologically, it is home to the largest trees in the world—the giant sequoias.

This Road Trip Destination takes you through the heart of the High Sierra, starting and ending in Reno, Nevada. The route takes you through two national parks, a multitude of state parks and urban centers, as well as a little Americana History thrown in for good measure. Along this route you will eat at eclectic restaurants, stay in eclectic hotels and visit some of the single most awe-inspiring wilderness the United States has to offer.



Bonsai Rock, Lake Tahoe

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Prepared by: James

States: California & Nevada

Start: Reno, Nevada

End: Reno, Nevada

Total miles: 958

Suggested days: 8

Type: scenic rural/urban road trip including national parks, cities & small towns

Recommended for: road trippers, motorcycles, honeymooners, families

Suggested season:
May - November

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Trip Details

We recommend at least eight days to encompass all of the possible offerings that are suggested in this itinerary. A lot of distance is covered here, so it would be ideal to think of this as a journey, rather than a destination. (Of course, the drives themselves are wonderfully scenic, so it won't feel long at all! The journey is the destination, as they say.) Many of the drives are relatively short – many are only around three road hours between stops – while at least two of the drives will take a good portion of your day, so plan accordingly. (These longer drives could be broken up into segments, too.) The weather in the region is generally predictable: somewhat chilly in the early spring, quite hot in the peak summer months, crisp and cool in the fall. In the High Sierras it can occasionally snow in the later fall months, so pack intelligently. This trip could be done almost any time of year, but possible heavy snow in November through February can make driving in those more mountainous areas rather dangerous.

OUR #1 TRIP RECOMMENDATION:

If you take this trip during the summer months, don't forget your swimsuits! This trip has many opportunities for a dive into a hidden swimming hole or a secret sandy cove. Make sure that swimming is allowed first and your skill is right for conditions.

DAY 1: Arrival in Reno

(1 hour/55 miles)

As your plane touches down at the Reno/Tahoe International Airport, you can start getting excited. Your 8-day adventure through the High Sierra is about to begin. The first thing you need to do is rent a car. You are going to need it. The Reno/Lake Tahoe has a few different options for this. About an hour from the airport is the Lake Tahoe Resort Hotel. A confirmation will have been sent to your email when you booked this.

Once you get unpacked and settled get ready to spend some time on the water. 10 minutes from the hotel is the Zephyr Cove Resort where you can take a scenic sightseeing cruise to Emerald Bay aboard the M.S. Dixie II. You will need to book this cruise in advance. This cruise will take you on a two and half hour cruise across Lake Tahoe to Emerald Bay.

Hitting dry land again, it's time to lose those sea legs. A quick 45 minute trip from Zephyr Cove Resort is Emerald Bay State Park.

Seeing Lake Tahoe and Emerald Bay from above is a great way to finish off your first day in the area. Hiking trails, picnic



Emerald Bay, Lake Tahoe

shelters, wildlife viewing, and museums are only scratching the surface of the number of things to do at Lake Tahoe and Emerald Bay.

Best place to photo shoot art in Lake Tahoe: Emerald Bay

Best place to stock up on gear: The Shops at Heavenly Village

Best one-hour hike in Emerald Bay State Park: Eagle Falls Trail

Best place to catch the sunset: Desolation Wilderness

DAY 2: Calaveras Big Trees State Park

(3.5 hours/145 miles)

Well rested and ready for action, your first stop on Day 2 should be the Tahoe Adventure Company. Pick your poison; mountain biking, kayaking, hiking, rock climbing or specially customized adventures. Any reservations for bikes should be made at least an hour in

advance, as they have a limited supply. Thirst for adventure not yet whetted, a three-hour scenic drive from Tahoe Lake Resort is the Calaveras Big Trees State Park.

This state park has plenty of activities for everyone, but the spectacular South Grove is well worth a visit.

This five-mile hike takes you through a grove of giant sequoias in their natural setting. The scenery and the chance for re-connecting with nature are second to none. One hour away from Calaveras is the Groveland Hotel. Located in Tuolumne, this historic hotel is based close to Yosemite. Get checked in and get ready for dinner. There are many options in the area but we would recommend the Iron Door Saloon, the oldest continually operated saloon in California.

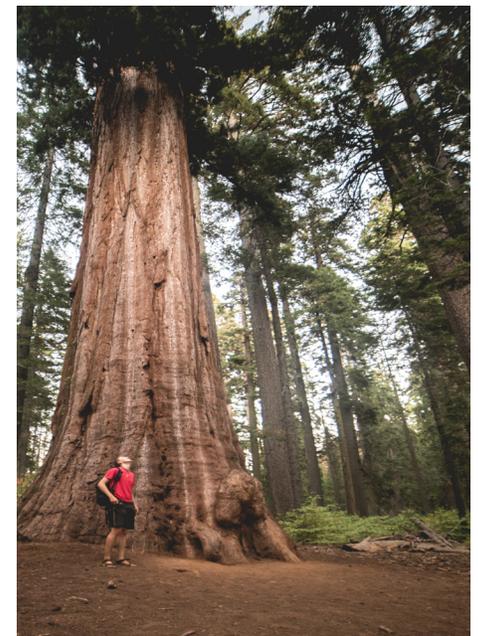
Best place for lunch: Macduff's Pub

Best hike in Calaveras: South Grove

Best place to spend some time in Groveland: Groveland Yosemite Gateway Museum



Lake Tahoe Resort Hotel, Lake Tahoe



Calaveras Big Trees State Park



Glacier Point Road, Yosemite National Park

DAY 3: Sequoia National Park (4.2 hours/201 miles)

Day three is train day, of course! A short two and half hour drive from Tuolumne is the Yosemite Mountain Sugar Pine Railroad. Founded in 1965, the Yosemite Mountain Sugar Pine Railroad takes passengers on an hour-long ride through mountains where lumberjacks felled mighty trees and flumes carried lumber from the mountains to the valley below.

After your ride through history, it's back in the car again for a two and half hour drive to Sequoia National Park.

Before entering the park, though, we recommend a quick bite to eat. Try the Pita Kabob in Visalia.

Exploring Sequoia National Park is one of those lifetime experiences you won't forget. Walking beneath those cathedral-like trees will install within you a sense of child-like wonder. Of course, there is so much to do in Sequoia, but no trip would be complete without a visit to General Sherman, the

world's largest tree. After Sequoia National Park, it's back to Visalia for dinner and a well-deserved sleep. There are plenty of quality hotels for you to choose from. A great place to eat is Cafe 225.

Best place to photo shoot art in SNP: Moro Rock

Best place to stock up on gear: Dick's Sporting Goods

Best one-hour hike in Sequoia National Park: Congress Trail

Best place for a morning coffee: Le Boulevard

DAY 4: Yosemite National Park (3.2 hours/139 miles)

Today you head to that iconic American park, Yosemite. With its lofty granite summits and the fairy-tale like Yosemite Valley, this scenic drive will render you speechless for its grandeur. Stop at the historic town of Wawona and the Big Trees Lodge for lunch. Located near the Mariposa Grove of Giant Sequoias it is an excellent chance to stretch your legs. After lunch and a bit of a walkabout, it's an hour drive to Yosemite Valley before heading on to Bishop. Just before entering the Valley you'll come to Tunnel View one of the most photographed vistas in the world. Once you enter Yosemite Valley, stop and take the free shuttle to the many Valley iconic spot such as Yosemite Falls, Half Dome Village and El Capitan. One and a half hours from the Valley is the unsurpassed Tioga Pass. With views to infinity along the backbone of

Pro Tip:
Don't get caught speeding! A speeding ticket could be expensive and a spoiler to your vacation. Make sure you drive the limit.



Bishop Creek Canyon, California

Yosemite, this is a great place for photos. Just ten minutes further on is a not-to-be-missed dinner at the Whoa Nellie Deli. From here it is another one and a half hours to Bishop.

Again, for a place to stay for the night, there are many quality hotels to choose from, but the Vagabond Inn is low-key with many great amenities.

Best place to photo shoot art in YNP: Tioga Pass

Best place For BBQ in Bishop: Holy Smoke

Best after-hours fun: Rusty's Bar

Best place to catch the sunset: Owens River

DAY 5: Mammoth Lakes

(1.4 hour/64 miles)

Start your day a little slower today with an easy breakfast in town. Try Jack's Waffle Shop, a local breakfast icon.

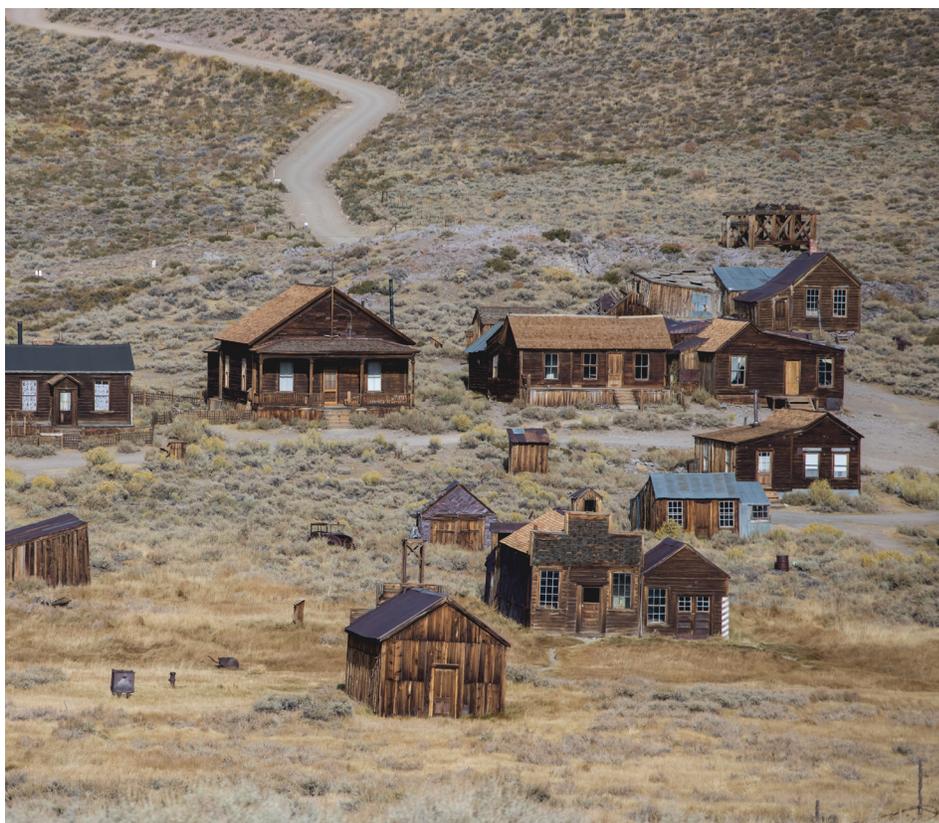
After your morning fuel, explore Bishop Creek Canyon. A short 20-minute drive from downtown Bishop. Fresh air, granite peaks, pristine lakes, and summer wildflowers, this is a great area to have a quick sabbatical after all your time on the road.

From Bishop, plan for a 45-minute drive to Mammoth Lakes. The first thing you will want to do is grab a bite at the Eatery, inside Mammoth Brewing Company. After lunch, head to the Wave Rave, a local snowboard and outdoor shop and rent an electric bike to ride the bike path network in Mammoth Lake Basin. This 5.3-mile paved multi-use path connects the North Village to Horseshoe Lake and passes many popular Mammoth Lakes attractions.

Time your bike riding just right so that you can drive 30 minutes to Mono Lake to catch the sunset. Mono Lake is an oasis in



South Tufa, Mono Lake, California



Bodie State Historical Park, Bodie, California

the dry Great Basin and a vital habitat for millions of migratory and nesting birds. Plan to stay the night in Lee Vining. Again, Lee Vining has many places to choose from but the Yosemite Gateway is a fun place with views of the lake. Try dinner at The Mono Inn.

Best place to see wildflowers in Mammoth Lakes: Sky Meadows Trail

Best one-hour hike in Mammoth Lakes: Rainbow Falls Trail

Best swimming beach at Mono Lake: Navy Beach

DAY 6: Bodie State Historical Park

(3 hours/143 miles)

After breakfast, a great way to truly appreciate the unique geology of Mono Lake is to take the quick drive from Lee Vining to the South Tufa area. The South

Tufa area is rich with tufa, which is formed when fresh water springs containing calcium bubble up through the carbonate-rich lake water. The South Tufa area has a trail that allows you to walk among these giant spires, some reaching 30-feet tall. After your hike through the eons, we recommend heading back to the Whoa Nellie Deli for lunch. (Yes, it's just that good) Ready for your ghost walk? Though the likelihood of you seeing a real-life ghost along this walk is not guaranteed, the likelihood of you getting to visit a real-life ghost town is.

Just 45 minutes from Lee Vining, Bodie State Historic Park is a genuine California gold-mining ghost town. Visitors can walk down the deserted streets of a town that once had a population of nearly 10,000 people. This is a fascinating site and offers a great look into the history of the gold rush days, and what happens when the gold runs out.

From Bodie head to Truckee for the night. Again, plenty of options for your stay, but



Looking at the Yosemite Valley from along the Merced River at Valley View, Yosemite National Park

we recommend the exquisitely funky and historic Redlight Historic Bunk Hotel and Speakeasy. For dinner, try the Bar of America. The place is as fun as the name suggests.

Spookiest Bodie Secret: The tombstone of “The Angel of Bodie”

Best Eclectic Shop in Truckee: Tahoe Oil and Spice

Best Beverage at the Redlight: Redlight Rita

DAY 7: Donner Pass (34 minutes/32.2 miles)

Get ready to experience one of the most famous and tragic incidents in American History. Located just 9 miles west of Truckee is

Donner Pass, named after the ill-fated Donner Party. The Donner Party was a group of American pioneers that set out for California in a wagon train in May 1846. Departing from Independence, Missouri, they were delayed by a series of mishaps and mistakes and spent the winter of 1846–7 snowbound in the Sierra Nevada. Some of the pioneers resorted to cannibalism to survive. Directly before the pass is the Donner Memorial State Park, which is located on the site where the snowbound emigrants spent that winter. The park contains the Emigrant Trail Museum and the Pioneer Monument dedicated to the travelers of the Emigrant Trail.

From Donner Pass, head back through Truckee towards Reno. This is your last day, so it’s time to relax a bit and the Reno Riverwalk District is just the place to do it. Located in the heart of Reno along the

Truckee River, this area has plenty of things to keep you entertained. Want to put some money on Lady Luck instead? Reno has you covered. There is any number of sublime casinos in the area, most of which have free shuttles. Since you are flying out tomorrow, we would recommend finding a hotel near the airport, which won’t be hard to do.

Best Place to photo shoot art in Donner Pass: Rainbow Bridge

Best place for souvenir shopping: Reno eNVy

Best place to get a steak: Atlantis Steakhouse

DAY 8: Back Home

Wave goodbye to the beautiful High Sierra from your plane as you fly back home!