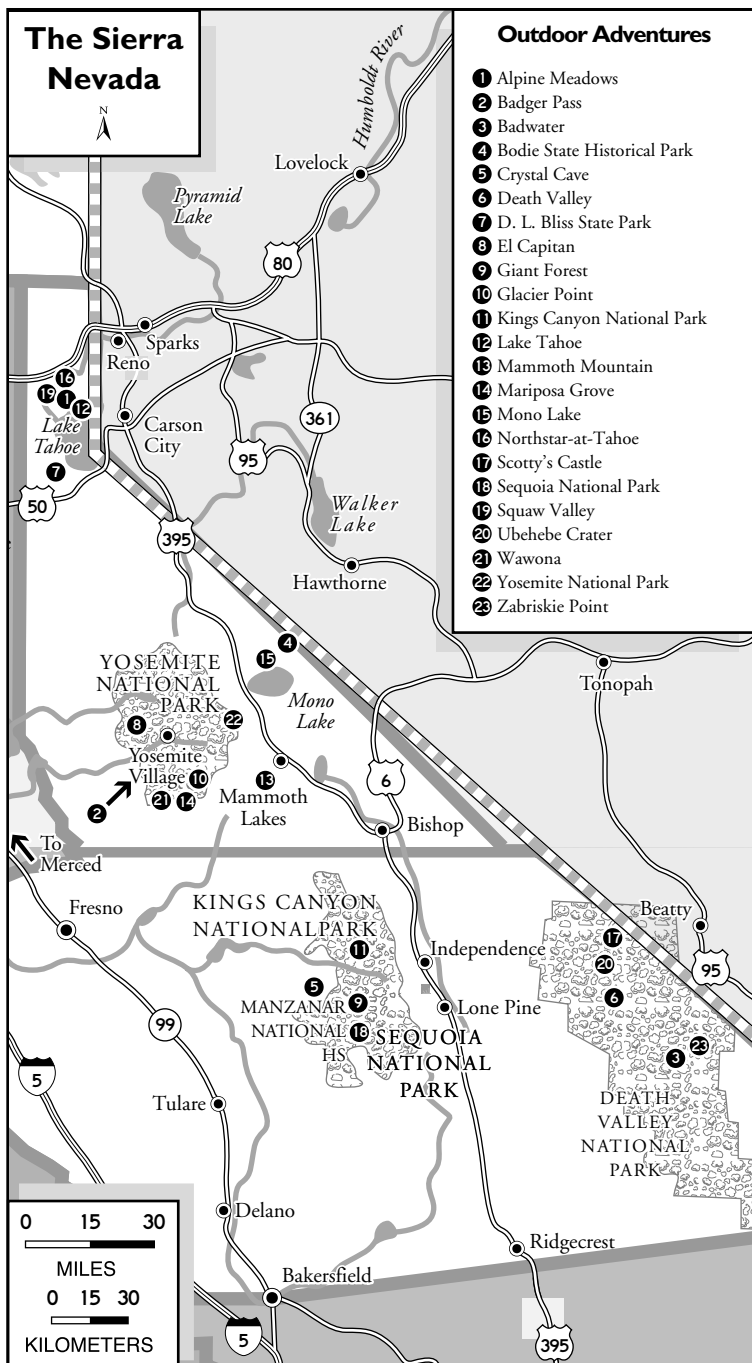


The Sierra Nevada

Literary giants and legendary explorers have put their pens to use in describing the sights found in the regions in and around the **Sierra Nevada** mountain range of eastern California. From **Lake Tahoe's** blue, blue water to **Half Dome's** moonlit granite curve to the awe-inspiring sequoias, the wonders contained in these landscapes are so extraordinary that Americans have enshrined all or parts of them as national parks, forests, and preserves. From south to north, we will consider the following destinations in this Sierra Nevada chapter: Death Valley, **Sequoia-Kings Canyon**, **Mammoth Lakes** (with side trips to **Bodie** and **Mono Lake**), **Yosemite**, and Lake Tahoe (the California section of **South Lake Tahoe** as well as **North Lake Tahoe**). The regions we are discussing are for the most part mountainous, except for Death Valley, which is, of course, the lowest point on the continent, and they stretch in length along more than half the state.

Although our enthusiasm for California's national parks is unbounded, our children have had occasion to groan about driving another four hours "to see some more big rocks," so we caution families about being overly ambitious in planning visits to too many of the state's remarkable landscapes. Unless you are literally going to be traveling for several weeks, don't try to see all the parks or destinations mentioned in this chapter; instead, do as Californians do, and concentrate on one or two at a time. Then make plans to stay in the park you select or its vicinity and consider a few activities or excursions to bring variety to your days: a guided tour, a horseback ride, a rope-climbing session, a river swim, or even an outlet-shopping day.

Let the season be your first guide in planning your visit to this region. Again, from south to north: Death Valley is most pleasant and popular between October and April, with high season being in March (although European visitors often prefer the extreme heat of summer, we don't advise it with kids—they'll be fabulously uncomfortable). Mammoth Mountain and the town of Mammoth Lakes have two peak seasons—



winter for skiing and other snow sports, summer for hiking, fishing, and mountain biking. Sequoia/Kings Canyon has traditionally been a spring-summer-fall destination, but family snow play is burgeoning there, and rangers now lead snowshoe walks and other activities in the winter months. Yosemite is popular year-round, its beauty chronicled by photographers and writers in every season, although summer is its busiest. And Tahoe has distinctly different pleasures in summer (boating, swimming, waterskiing, hiking) and winter (skiing, snowboarding, snowplay).

You don't have to be a camper to enjoy these national parks and Big Wonders, but camping is a wonderful option at all of these sites. It is necessary to plan ahead and make reservations whenever possible. There are also lodges and motels in every area, but a limited number of rooms, so advance planning (several months before summer) is necessary to secure the most desirable accommodations. Camping reservations may (and should) typically be made three months in advance. Mammoth and Lake Tahoe have full-fledged towns, with shopping and movie theaters (and, in the case of the Nevada side of South Lake Tahoe, casinos) in addition to lodging and restaurants.

For Skiers Only

We couldn't possibly do justice to the many, many ski mountains in the Sierra. Instead, we'll give you the short list of our five favorite Sierra family ski resorts. For more comprehensive information on skiing, see *The Unofficial Guide to Snowboarding and Skiing in the West*.

Alpine Meadows This large North Tahoe mountain has excellent snow, less of a scene than glitzier Squaw, and what may be the best children's ski school in the state, staffed by first-rate instructors. There are more snowboarders than there used to be, which may please your 12-year-old (if not you), but skiers have hardly been forced out. 2600 Alpine Meadows Road, Tahoe City; (530) 583-4232 or (800) 441-4423.

Badger Pass The conditions aren't always ideal, and the quality of skiing is on the lower end, but that didn't stop us from falling in love with this place. It's the ski mountain that time forgot, with a small beamed lodge, the cheapest ski-mountain cafeteria in the West, friendly people, good Nordic trails, and a very good learn-to-ski program for children and adults. The beginner-intermediate runs are great for learning and cruising, and the lift tickets and packages are the least expensive we've seen. Good skiers and cool teens, however, might get bored. The mountain is easily reached from accommodations on the valley floor. Yosemite National Park; (209) 372-0200.

Mammoth Mountain We learned to ski at Mammoth as teenagers, and it remains a teen haven to this day—in fact, it's a haven for every sort of

A CALENDAR OF FESTIVALS AND EVENTS

January

Cross-Country Ski Fest Mammoth; (760) 934-2442.

South Lake Tahoe Annual Winter Celebration Includes Celebrity Ski Classic at Heavenly as well as other ski and snowboard races, concerts, and ice-sculpting contest; (530) 544-5050.

February

National Women's Snowboard and Ski Festival Mammoth; (760) 934-0745.

Sierra Sweepstakes Sled Dog Races Truckee. Thousands gather to watch the dogsleds race at the Truckee-Tahoe airport; (530) 587-2757.

March

Snowfest Lake Tahoe. Tahoe's ten-day Snowfest celebration includes more than 100 events, ranging from a penny carnival, parades, and snow-sculpture contests to a polar swim and a "wild thing" costume party; (530) 583-3494.

April

Easter Egg Hunt and Playday Mammoth Lakes; (760) 934-8989.

June

America's Most Beautiful Bike Ride Hundreds of cyclists ride the 72-mile shoreline road around Lake Tahoe; www.bikethewest.com; (800) 565-2704.

High Sierra Shootout Powerboat regatta from Tahoe City to Tahoe Vista; (530) 581-4700.

Lake Tahoe Summer Music Festival Extends throughout June and July at various locations around the lake; (530) 583-3101, www.tahoemusic.org.

Mammoth Lakes Basin Spring Trout Derby (760) 934-7566.

July

Celtic Festival Mammoth Lakes. Music, dancing, pub grub, and more; (760) 924-2360.

Children's Fishing Festival Mammoth, Snowcreek Ponds. For ages 1 to 15; kids learn to fish, free tackle provided; (760) 934-7566.

Fourth of July Celebration Lake Tahoe. Includes fireworks at the beach in Tahoe City, craft fair and music festival at Truckee High School, and parade and party in Truckee; (530) 587-2757.

Fourth of July Celebration Mammoth Lakes. Includes Lions Club pancake breakfast, horseshoe tournament, a very popular parade, Fire Department open house, U.S. Forest Service Fire Department open house, and fireworks at Crowley Lake; (760) 924-2360.

August

Mammoth Concerts in the Pines Free music presentations and a variety of music festivals throughout the month, including folk, chamber, and country-western; (760) 924-5500.

Tahoe Wooden Boat Week Show of antique and vintage wooden boats and other maritime events; (530) 581-4700.

September

Labor Day Arts and Crafts Festival Mammoth. A village arts celebration of the end of summer; (760) 934-2125.

Mono Lake Restoration Days Labor Day weekend. Biking and the symbolic bringing of water to the beleaguered lake; (760) 647-6595.

October

Annual Native American Snow Dance Festival Lake Tahoe. Washo, Paiute, Shoshone, and Miwok tribes dance for plentiful snow (it started during a long drought); arts and crafts fairs, foods; (800) GO-TAHOE.

Kokanee Salmon Festival Lake Tahoe Visitors Center. Two-day festival celebrating the spawning of local salmon. With family activities such as art displays, nature walks, a children's fishing booth, and interpretive talks at the fish windows of the Lake Tahoe Visitors Center; (530) 543-2674.

December

Alpenlight Festival Lake Tahoe. Events at various North Shore locations, including parties, sleigh rides, and window-decorating contests; (800) GO-TAHOE.

Mammoth Lakes Town Christmas Tree Lighting Ceremony (760) 934-8989.

Sleigh Ride and Breakfast with Santa Mammoth; (760) 924-5500.

skier, because its vastness can accommodate everyone. It'd take you a week to ski every run. Very good children's programs and lessons are run out of both the main lodge and Canyon Lodge, and nearby condos are plentiful. The downside is the crowding during holidays, when Southern California locals pour in, but the addition of more high-speed lifts has dramatically improved the situation. For details, see the Mammoth Mountain attraction profile in the Mammoth Lakes section.

Northstar-at-Tahoe This is a large, upscale snow resort with well-designed and -maintained areas for downhill skiers, snowboarders, and Nordic skiers. The children's programs and ski schools are impressive. For details, see the Northstar attraction profile in the Lake Tahoe section.

Squaw Valley Like Mammoth, this mountain (actually mountains) is so huge that it takes days to ski it all. Unlike at Mammoth, lift lines are short, if encountered at all. Lots of beginner runs, lots of expert runs, even more groomed intermediate runs, and a separate children's ski area. For details, see the Squaw Valley attraction profile in the Lake Tahoe section.

Getting There

Because the territory covered is so huge, we will devote a section of each destination's coverage to getting there.

How to Get Information Before You Go

Caltrans Highway Conditions (For winter driving in mountains); (800) 427-7623; www.dot.ca.gov.

Death Valley National Park Death Valley 92328; (760) 786-2331; www.nps.gov/deva.

Lake Tahoe Visitor Information (800) GO-TAHOE; www.gotahoe.com.

Mammoth Lakes Visitors Bureau P.O. Box 48, Mammoth Lakes 93546; (888) 466-2666; www.visitmammoth.com.

Mammoth Visitor Center and Ranger Station (760) 924-5500. Has up-to-date information on opening dates of campgrounds (700 sites at elevations above 7,500 feet) in Inyo National Forest.

National Parks Camping Reservations Sequoia/Kings Canyon and Death Valley, (800) 365-2267; Yosemite, (800) 436-7275; reservations.nps.gov for all National Park camping reservations.

North Lake Tahoe Central Reservations Service (530) 583-3494 or (888) 434-1262; www.mytahoevacation.com.

Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks Three Rivers 93271; (559) 565-3134; www.nps.gov/seki. Guest Services (authorized concessionaire handling lodging except for camping and other services in the two parks), P.O. Box 789, Three Rivers 93271; (559) 565-3341.

The Best Parks

This entire chapter is nothing but the best parks, so they're not listed under this heading—they're described in detail throughout the chapter, as "town" descriptions and sometimes under Attractions. Look for specifics under the particular area that interests you.

Family Outdoor Adventures

Again, this chapter is nothing but. They're not listed separately here, because they're plentiful at every spot in these wilderness areas. Check for details in individual geographic areas.

Little Moments in Big Places

Sometimes the vastness of these remarkable Western landscapes—big skies, big mountains, big lakes—is just too much for kids to absorb, and they respond with indifference or ennui. We always look for ways to bring the wonders of the region down to their scale; here are some activities and strategies that have worked for us.

1. While a sports-loving middle-schooler and Mom went for a challenging hike in Yosemite (up many, many steps to Vernal Falls), Dad and a younger sister rented bikes and took a leisurely ride along the flat, paved bike path of Yosemite Valley that winds through meadows and campgrounds. Deer, squirrels, and other kids were out in view, and those easy two hours live on in her memory.
2. After panning for gold in Gold Country, we began our time in Yosemite by stopping for a picnic at a spot where the Yosemite River makes a sweeping curve and Half Dome can be seen rising majestically above the treetops. The kids didn't even look up at the mighty landmark, though, because while wading in the icy stream, they realized that the water was flecked with gold. So they began to gather and scrutinize every pebble just in case one was a real nugget.
3. At Family Camp Montecito Sequoia, the youngest children are taken on a "fishing trip," in which they lie on their stomachs on a dock over the little lake and reach down with nets to try to scoop up the tadpoles and guppies they can see below. My daughter now indignantly says the nets had holes big enough to allow every fish to swim through, but at the time she was, at age four, an enthralled sportswoman.
4. Because of the uniquely sudden coolness of the desert night, the Furnace Creek Inn in Death Valley has a huge fireplace in the pool area.

My daughter floated in the 85° F pool water (heated by natural hot springs), gazing at the early-rising “children’s moon” as the sky started to glow pink with a dramatic desert sunset. After getting out, she wrapped herself in a big towel and warmed herself happily by the fireplace. The juxtaposition charmed her.

5. In an inspired moment while enjoying a condo vacation in Mammoth, we agreed to stop (after hiking and before hitting the pool) at the town’s bead shop and let the kids each browse among the bins with a muffin tin. They picked out a variety of beads and something to string them on, and left with little bags and triumphant airs. That night, the usual plea for a movie on video was replaced by the quiet sound of kids creating.
6. At Mono Lake, the adults read interpretive plaques and shook their heads over water-use controversies, but the kids didn’t come alive until we joined a ranger walk at lake’s edge and the story of those teeny tiny brine shrimp (specimens scrutinized) and the funny little fly larvae was revealed.

Death Valley

Often, city or suburb dwellers find that gazing on open vistas refreshes the mind and broadens mental horizons. In contrast to the close-up visual density of our daily lives (from nearby computer screen to a horizon cluttered with buildings), there are places where emptiness is neither a sign of failure nor simply an affront to commercial enterprise. This vast area is one such.

In **Death Valley**, we found the spaces to be affirmingly vast and the views cleansing—barren mountains, untrafficked roads stretching empty for miles in both directions, sky as a presence. The children felt it, too, though they didn't articulate the sensation, but fell silent and gazed about them when we stopped for cold drinks and directions.

As we explored, the vastness was broken up into little sections, each with a history, a personality, and a name. Such places as **Scotty's Castle** and **Badwater** became real to us. Where there had seemed to be a great nothingness, we found a little bit of everything.

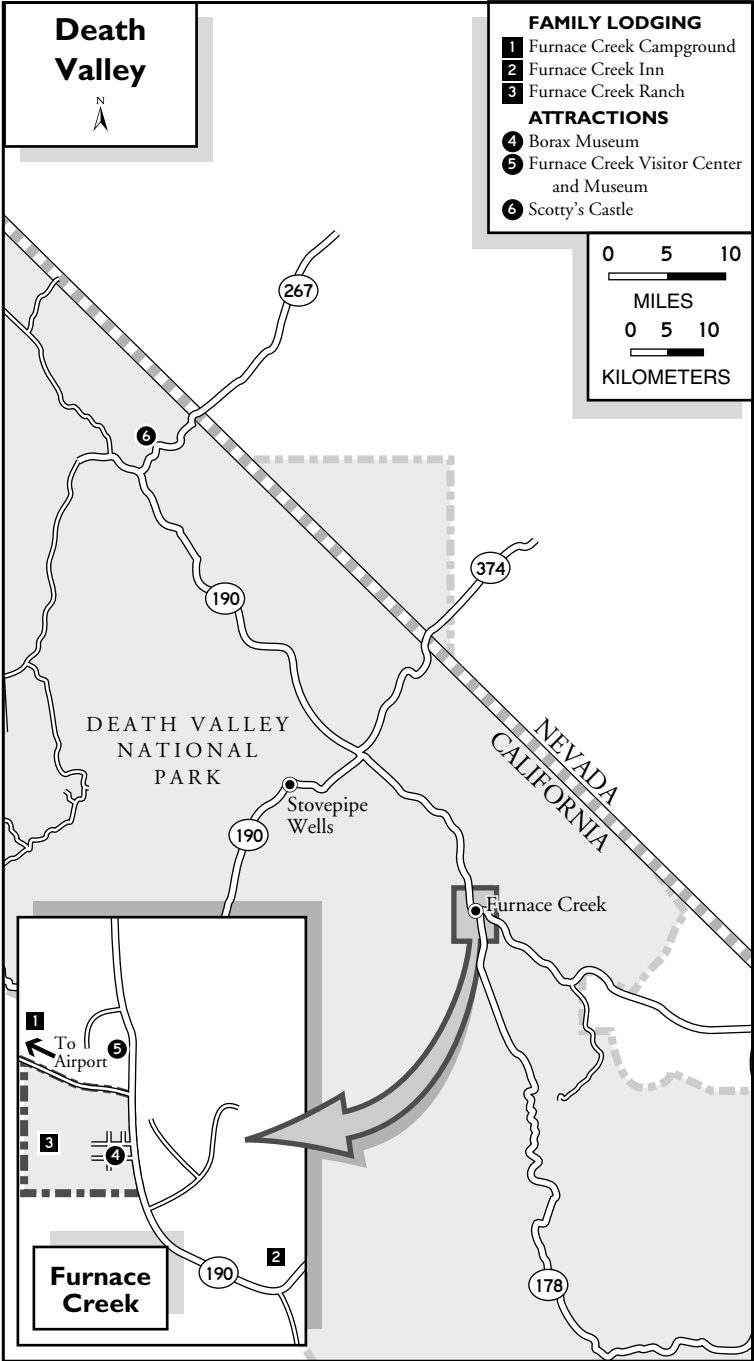
Getting There

By Car Death Valley is about 300 miles northeast of L.A. and 525 miles southeast of San Francisco. It's a long drive no matter which way you come, and you can't cross those mountains just anywhere. From L.A., take CA 14 north to US 395 north to a fork in the road called Olancho, where you pick up Highway 190 (scenic route) east to Death Valley. From San Francisco, your best bet is to pick one or two other parks to include in your trip and to access Death Valley after visiting Yosemite or Sequoia, both directly between San Francisco and your goal.

Family Lodging

Furnace Creek Campground

Highway 190, Death Valley; (800) 365-CAMP; www.nps.gov/deva; winter, \$16; summer, \$10



Part of Death Valley National Park, this campground is a good bet for families. There are 20 tent spaces and 180 tent or RV spaces with fireplaces, tables, water, and flush toilets. Not all campsites have shade.

Furnace Creek Inn

Highway 190, Death Valley; (760) 786-2345 or (888) 29-PARKS;
www.furnacecreekresort.com; \$240–\$370

Designed by noted early-20th-century architect Albert C. Martin, this 66-room luxury hotel is truly something special, offering real comfort in an incredibly isolated location. You might be hot and dusty from a hike, but after a shower and a swim in the warm spring-fed pool and a cool drink on your room's balcony, you'll feel lucky indeed. The rooms, remodeled in the late 1990s, are true to their 1920s roots in a decor that fits nicely with the desert setting. The dining room was too formal for us to enjoy with the kids except at breakfast (although there is a kids' menu). We went down the hill to the Ranch part of the resort (see separate listing below). The hotel is on a hill above the valley, so views are spectacular, especially at sunrise.

Furnace Creek Ranch

Highway 190, Death Valley; (760) 786-2345 or (888) 29-PARKS;
www.furnacecreekresort.com; \$85–\$174; kids under age 18 stay free

At the bottom of the hill is the other part of the Furnace Creek Resort, the more boisterous, motel- and camping-focused area, where restaurants, laundry services, tennis courts, and spring-fed swimming pools serve visitors in a grassy, shady oasis. The 255 units range in quality from okay to very good, depending on whether they've been upgraded. There are three restaurants on the grounds, and plenty of kids running around playing basketball, tennis, Nintendo, and (desert) sand volleyball.

Attractions

Borax Museum

Furnace Creek Ranch, Death Valley; (760) 786-2345

Hours Daily, 8:30 a.m.–4 p.m.; closed noon–1 p.m. for lunch

Admission Free

Appeal by Age Groups

Preschool ★★	Teens ★★	Over 30 ★★★
Grade School ★★	Young Adults ★★★	Seniors ★★★

Touring Time Average 40 minutes; minimum 20 minutes

Rainy-day Touring Yes (it doesn't rain anyway) **Restaurants** At resort **Alcoholic Beverages** At restaurants **Disabled Access** Yes **Wheelchair Rental** At registration **Baby Stroller Rental** No **Lockers** No **Pet Kennels** No **Rain Check** No **Private Tours** No

Description and Comments Whether or not you stay at Furnace Creek Inn or Furnace Creek Ranch, you'll end up spending some time at the ranch because of the amenities, including horseback riding. (Don't bother with the horseback trail ride, though—it's a dull walk.) You can while away some time by strolling through the old mining equipment graveyard behind this museum, or if the hour is right, through the museum itself. Twenty-mule-team Borax doesn't mean much to those too young to have seen the Ronald Reagan commercials in the early 1960s, but if you think about it and talk about it a bit, the idea of actually handling a team of 20 mules will begin to sink in.

Furnace Creek Visitor Center and Museum

Death Valley National Park, Death Valley; (760) 786-2331

Hours Daily, 8 a.m.–6 p.m.

Admission \$10

Appeal by Age Groups

Preschool ★★	Teens ★★	Over 30 ★★★
Grade School ★★	Young Adults ★★	Seniors ★★

Touring Time Average 1 hour for exhibits, slide show, and questions; minimum 30 minutes

Rainy-day Touring Yes **Restaurants** At ranch **Alcoholic Beverages** At restaurants **Disabled Access** Yes **Wheelchair Rental** No **Baby Stroller Rental** No **Lockers** No **Pet Kennels** No **Rain Check** No **Private Tours** No

Description and Comments The central source for visitor information while in Death Valley, the center has an hourly slide show orientation, a small museum, and schedules of programs offered at campsites around the valley. The bookstore operated by Death Valley History Association has a number of children's publications.

Scotty's Castle

Death Valley Ranch, Death Valley National Park, Death Valley; (760) 786-2392 or (760) 786-2331; www.nps.gov/deva/scottys

Hours Tours daily, 9 a.m.–5 p.m.

Admission \$9 adults, \$7 disabled adults, \$7 seniors, \$4 children ages 6–15, free for children age 5 and under; admission includes both tours

Appeal by Age Groups

Preschool ★★	Teens ★★★★★	Over 30 ★★★★★
Grade School ★★★★★	Young Adults ★★★★★	Seniors ★★★★★

Touring Time Average 50 minutes; minimum 50 minutes

Rainy-day Touring Yes, for inside **Restaurants** Snack bar **Alcoholic Beverages** No **Disabled Access** Good **Wheelchair Rental** Yes, free **Baby Stroller Rental** No **Lockers** No **Pet Kennels** No **Rain Check** No **Private Tours** No

Description and Comments Together with Hearst Castle and the Will Rogers House, Scotty's Castle forms a picture of a grand period in California in the late 1920s and early 1930s, when personalities and the houses they occupied were larger than life. This remarkable mansion museum is shown today by docents who offer living-history tours, pretending as if you are arriving guests of the owner, Chicago millionaire Albert Johnson, and they're showing you around. In its way, it rivals the stately homes and castles of Europe, with its carpets from Majorca, ceramics from Italy, custom wrought-iron fixtures in fantasy shapes, and huge redwood beams. The kids listened intently to the story of the trickster Scotty the caretaker, who persuaded many that this was his house. At the end, it was extraordinary in a goofy way to stand in the resonating vibration of the player organ as it played "Pomp and Circumstance" and we wended our way down the circular steps of a turret.

Sequoia and Kings Canyon

These twin parks are administered jointly but were established separately, **Sequoia** in 1890 and **Kings Canyon** in 1940. Today's visitors might not know, as they drive from place to place in the pine forests, whether they are entering Kings Canyon or leaving Sequoia. Overall, most of the park acreage is given over to wilderness areas, but 90 miles of paved roads allow for access to the groves of sequoias and some other natural wonders. A special experience is a stay at **Montecito-Sequoia Family Vacation Camp**, a family camp open year-round (see listing under "Family Lodging"). Sequoia is home to the world's largest tree, the **General Sherman**, found in the **Giant Forest**.

Getting There

By Car Highway 198 leads into Sequoia National Park from the southwest; Route 180, the General's Highway, connects the parks. The Foothill Visitors Center (phone (559) 565-3134) is at the entrance to the park. It's the park headquarters, and rangers here will collect an entrance fee.

Family Lodging

Buckeye Tree Lodge

46000 Sierra Drive, Three Rivers; (559) 561-5900; www.buckeyetree.com; \$55–\$205

There are several motels in Three Rivers, which is a short distance from the entrance to Kings Canyon National Park, and this is one of the more comfortable. It has 12 rooms, and it's in a woodsy setting next to a river; some rooms have balconies overlooking the river. One room has a kitchenette; our favorite is the two-bedroom cottage with a fireplace and a kitchen. Pool and a playground, refrigerators in the rooms, and a restaurant nearby.

Sequoia and Kings Canyon

FAMILY LODGING

- 1 Buckeye Tree Lodge
- 2 Dorst Creek Campground
- 3 Grant Grove Lodge
- 4 Lazy J Ranch Motel
- 5 Montecito-Sequoia

Family Vacation Camp

ATTRACTIONS

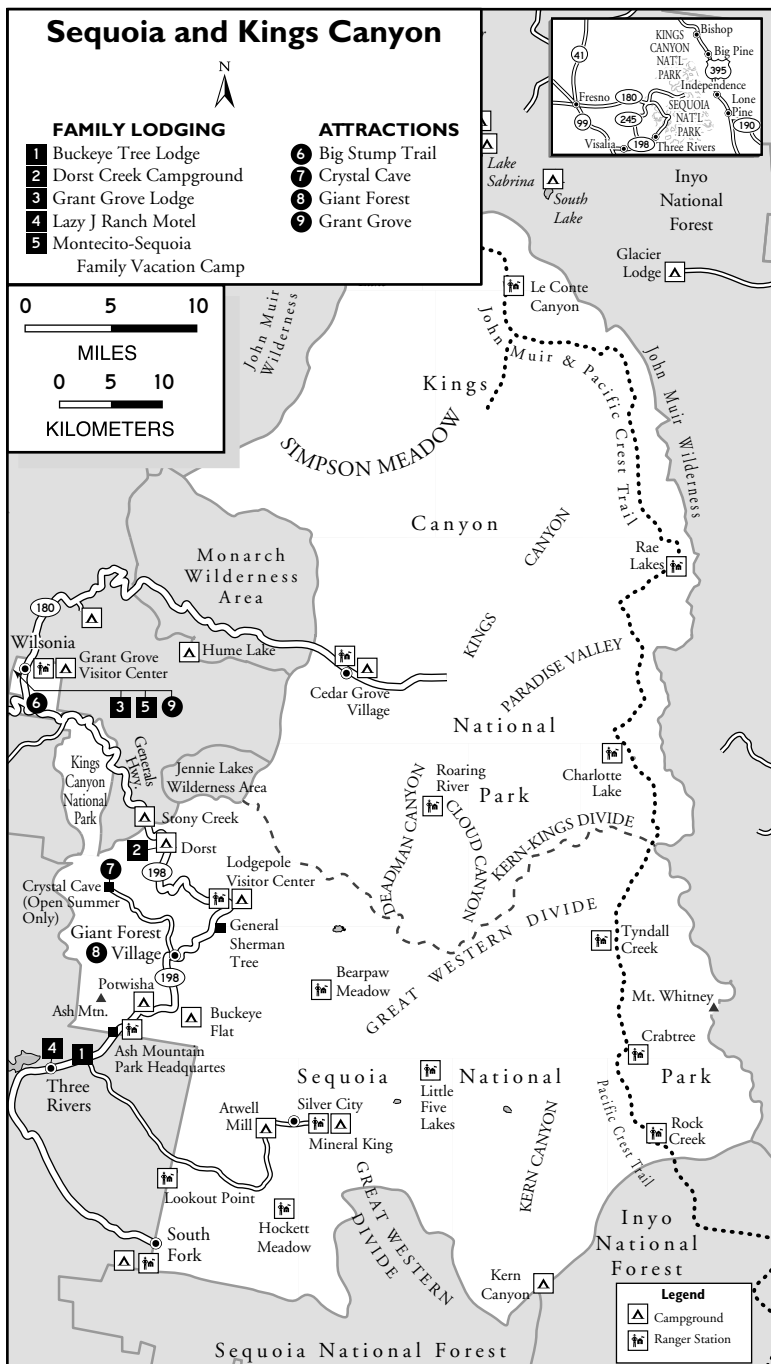
- 6 Big Stump Trail
- 7 Crystal Cave
- 8 Giant Forest
- 9 Grant Grove

0 5 10

MILES

0 5 10

KILOMETERS



Dorst Creek Campground

Off General's Highway, a few miles north of the Lodgepole Visitors Center; (559) 565-3341; reservations, (800) 365-2267; reservations.nps.gov; campsites \$16

The best family campground in Sequoia/Kings Canyon is Dorst, which also happens to be one of the many national-park campgrounds that accepts reservations—so make them very, very early. Kids run wild here, making friends at other tent sites, jumping in gentle Dorst Creek, and running in the meadowy areas. This is a great base for exploring the redwood forests and hiking to little peaks and creeks. Hume Lake, a great swimming and fishing destination, is close by, and you can pick up supplies easily at Lodgepole. Flush toilets, fireplaces, picnic tables, food lockers.

Grant Grove Lodge

Grant Grove, Three Rivers; (559) 335-5500; www.rescentre.com/grant; \$45 and up

The 52 small cabins look far more picturesque on the outside than they feel on the inside—we'd advise taking a picture here rather than staying, but if you must, you'll find that only nine have electricity and indoor plumbing. The others have kerosene lanterns, outdoor wood stoves, and shared bathhouses. But the good news is the new John Muir Lodge, a motel within Grant Grove (and also run by the National Park Service), which does much better in the creature-comfort department.

Lazy J Ranch Motel

39625 Sierra Drive, Three Rivers; (559) 561-4449 or (800) 341-8000; www.rescentre.com/lazyj; \$60–\$190

An 18-room motel with a real ranch feel—cottages are scattered around meadows, and there's a path down to the river. Several units have one or two bedrooms, and five cottages have kitchens. There's a pool, a playground, and laundry facilities.

Montecito-Sequoia Family Vacation Camp

8000 General's Highway, Grant Grove, Kings Canyon National Park; (559) 565-3388 or (800) 227-9900; www.montecitosequoia.com; weekly, 7-day, 6-night stay in cabin; \$798 per person, mini-week of 3–4 days, \$457 per person; meals included

When we stayed here it was like a California version of Lake Wobegon: All the men were good-looking, and all the women were above average. Something about the mountain-air atmosphere and the choice to be with your kids at summer camp made for a lot of conviviality among the adults. Parents never had to cook a meal, but plenty gathered at the camp "bar" for a glass of wine in the early evening hours. And plenty gathered early in the morning at the daily songfest before activities.

Kids are divided into age groups with counselors, and they can spend specified hours in the counselors' care while you pursue your own camp activities (archery, anyone?) or leave the premises to hike or sight-see. Meals are taken together, and evening activities like games and costume parties are designed for the whole family. This is truly the best of both worlds for those who'd rather join their kids at camp than send them (especially the too-young ones). This former girls' camp is within the national park itself, within easy distance of Crystal Cave and some of the most famous big trees. Open all year, it offers cross-country skiing and ice skating on the lake in the winter, and water skiing, horseback riding, pool swimming, and many other activities in the summer. There are 29 rustic motel-type rooms with private baths, and 13 family camping cabins (beds, but bring your own linens; they have electricity and wood-burning stoves, but no running water—bathhouses are nearby). You can sign up for the whole camp, or stay for a day or two between camp sessions in the summer.

Attractions

Big Stump Trail

Near the entrance to Kings Canyon National Park; (559) 335-2856

Hours Daily, 24 hours, weather permitting

Admission Free

Appeal by Age Groups

Preschool ★★	Teens ★★	Over 30 ★★★
Grade School ★★	Young Adults ★★★	Seniors ★★★

Touring Time Average 3 hours; minimum 30 minutes

Rainy-day Touring No, and hard to tour in snow **Restaurants** In Grant Grove **Alcoholic Beverages** Yes **Disabled Access** No **Wheelchair Rental** No **Baby Stroller Rental** No **Lockers** No **Pet Kennels** No **Rain Check** No **Private Tours** No

Description and Comments This one-and-a-half mile nature loop has a wonderful disaster theme that appeals to school-aged kids. It shows, in its short distance, all sorts of natural and human-caused damage that the sequoias have endured. There's one tree that was hit by lightning, another that was shattered by loggers, and a huge stump that was created when one of the largest sequoias was felled for display in New York.

Crystal Cave

9 miles from Lodgepole Visitor Center; (559) 565-3341; www.sequoiahistory.org

Hours Mid-May–October: daily 1-hour tours, 11 a.m.–4 p.m.; early spring and fall: tours Friday–Sunday, 11 a.m.–4 p.m. on the hour

Admission \$10 adults, \$8 seniors, \$5 children ages 6–12, free for children age 5 and under (tickets at Lodgepole or Foothill Visitors Centers only)

Appeal by Age Groups

Preschool ★★★	Teens ★★★	Over 30 ★★★
Grade School ★★★★★	Young Adults ★★★	Seniors ★★

Touring Time Average 2 hours; minimum 1-hour tour plus time to hike steep half-mile trail from parking area to cave entrance

Rainy-day Touring Okay **Restaurants** No **Alcoholic Beverages** No **Disabled Access** No **Wheelchair Rental** No **Baby Stroller Rental** No **Lockers** No **Pet Kennels** No **Rain Check** No **Private Tours** Group tours only

Description and Comments Not far from the Giant Forest (see profile below) is the Crystal Cave. We like cave tours when there are plenty of people and the caves aren't too dark and spooky but, rather, full of stalactites and stalagmites. So we like the one-hour tour of Crystal Cave with the Organ Room and the Marble Room. And it's nice in the summer to spend some time in the cool underground. Note that this tour is neither stroller- nor wheelchair-accessible, and backpacks are not allowed.

Giant Forest

Highway 198, Sequoia National Forest; (559) 565-3782; www.nps.gov/sekil/pvc

Hours Vary by season and conditions; call

Admission Free (park has \$12 vehicle-entrance fee)

Appeal by Age Groups

Preschool ★★★★★	Teens ★★★★★	Over 30 ★★★★★
Grade School ★★★★★	Young Adults ★★★★★	Seniors ★★★★★

Touring Time Average 2–3 hours; minimum 30 minutes without the walk

Rainy-day Touring Come prepared and you won't be miserable **Restaurants** Yes **Alcoholic Beverages** No **Disabled Access** Limited **Wheelchair Rental** No **Baby Stroller Rental** No **Lockers** No **Pet Kennels** No **Rain Check** No **Private Tours** No

Description and Comments In the Giant Forest, you'll find the General Sherman Tree and the Congress Trail. The 2,500-year-old tree is one of those superlatives every visitor to the region must pay homage to. It's the biggest measured tree in the world, as tall as a 27-story building. Near this giant specimen in Sequoia National Park is the Congress Trail, a two-mile, self-guided loop that makes a nice outing for walking families, because it winds through several magnificent groves of sequoias. Stop at Lodgepole Visitor Center for trail and other information.

Grant Grove*Kings Canyon; (559) 335-2856; www.nps.gov/seki/ggvc***Hours** Daily, 8 a.m.–5 p.m.**Admission** Free (park has \$12 vehicle-entrance fee)**Appeal by Age Groups**

Preschool ★★★★★	Teens ★★★★★	Over 30 ★★★★★
Grade School ★★★★★	Young Adults ★★★★★	Seniors ★★★★★

Touring Time Average 2 hours with visitors center, refreshments, and self-guided nature walk; minimum 1 hour**Rainy-day Touring** No, and hard to tour in the snows **Restaurants** Yes**Alcoholic Beverages** Yes **Disabled Access** Yes **Wheelchair Rental** No**Baby Stroller Rental** No **Lockers** No **Pet Kennels** No **Rain Check** No**Private Tours** No; interpretive hikes available

Description and Comments This mountain village is a kind of headquarters for Kings Canyon. It's a few miles from the park entrance and adjacent to the General Grant Grove stand of giant sequoias. In the village are a lodge, a little market, and a visitors center. The grove itself is an impressive stand of sequoias that was not too much for us to enjoy in an hour's part-drive, part-stroll from tree to tree. There's a twin sisters tree, with two trees growing from a single trunk; a fallen 120-foot-diameter tree that forms a tunnel; and the General Grant, the third-largest known tree in the world, at 267 feet high, with a circumference of almost 108 feet.

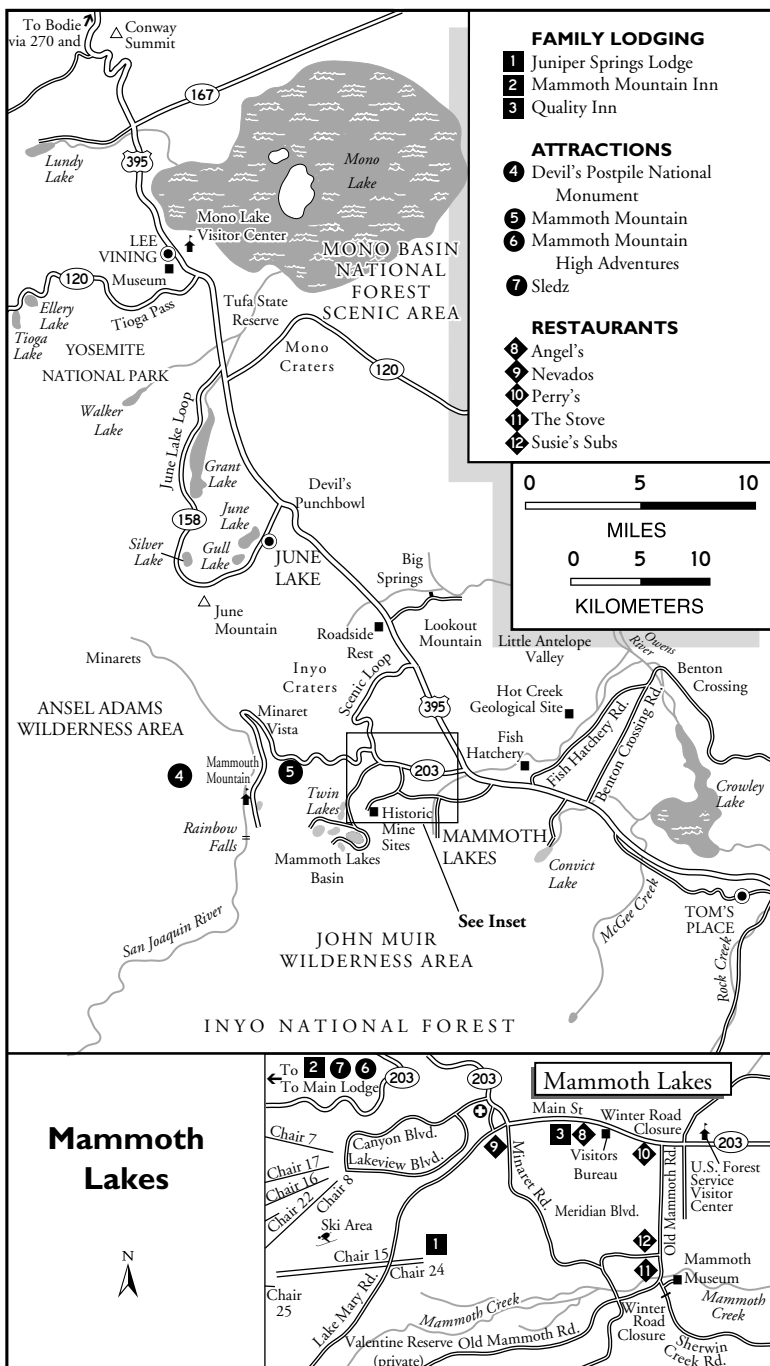
Mammoth Lakes

This is the easiest mountain resort in California to recommend to visitors, because you don't have to be a certain kind of traveler to enjoy it. It has such a wide range of options that two very different families could spend time here and never cross paths. Some visit only during ski season, but we had one of the most fun summer family vacations ever by staying for a week in a condo, which is the housing of choice for most visitors. Family friendly and plentiful, **Mammoth's** condos range from the swank and expensive to the dated and cheap; now that resort developer Intrawest is pumping zillions into this once-funky resort town, prices are edging up. Summer or winter, **Mammoth Mountain** is the scene of many sports competitions, from mountain biking to snowboarding, and there are marathons weekly throughout the non-snow season. If you happen upon one of these events, let the kids hang out for awhile and watch—they may see a young sports hero followed around by a TV crew.

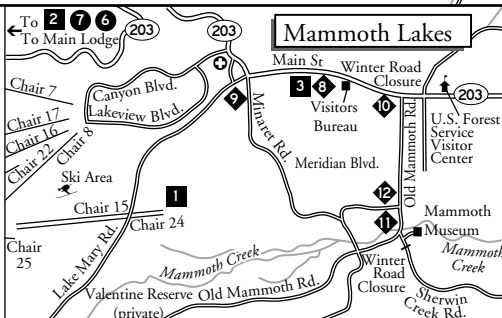
Getting There

By Plane At this writing, there is no air service to little Mammoth Airport. An airport expansion is planned, but it is currently tied up in environmental battles.

By Car This is one of the easiest mountain communities to take kids to in the world—the approaches via US 395 from Bishop in the south and Yosemite out of Lee Vining in the northeast are on a mostly multi-lane, modern highway, whose broad pavement curves slowly and gradually up into the higher elevations. There's none of the hours of switchbacks that so often unnerve (and make ill) the little ones. From L.A., plan on a five-hour drive; it's about 100 miles from Yosemite Valley, but you can't take the direct route in winter, when snow closes the roads.



Mammoth Lakes



Family Lodging

Condo Rentals

Most Mammoth visitors rent a condo for a few nights or a week, and there are hundreds of choices. Unfortunately, there's no one central reservations service, so you'll have to surf some Web sites or call around to find a place right for you. The ones close to Canyon or Little Eagle (a.k.a. Juniper Springs) Lodges are best suited to skiers and mountain bikers who want mountain/lift access. Snow Creek is great for golfers, tennis players, and hikers. The developments near town are best for those who want to eat, shop, and be central to everything. Three of our favorite developments and/or rental agencies include: **Mammoth Mountain Reservations**, representing two developments near Canyon Lodge (phone (800) 468-6225; www.mammothres.com); **Mammoth Properties**, representing many different developments all over the area (phone (888) MAMMOTH; www.mammoth-lodging.com); and **Mammoth Estates**, a good value near the new Intrawest village not far from Canyon Lodge (phone (800) 228-2884; www.mammothestates.com).

Convict Lake Resort

2000 Convict Lake Road (off Highway 395), just south of Mammoth Lakes;
(760) 934-3800 or (800) 992-2260; www.convictlake.com;
\$114–\$750 in winter, \$124–\$790 in summer

Families return to this friendly community of cabins summer after summer, often for generations. About ten minutes south of the town of Mammoth and two miles off the highway, it's as peaceful and quiet as you can get. A five-minute walk takes you to Convict Lake, bordered on three sides by majestic Sierras peaks. The fishing, swimming, and boating is lots of fun here, and you can also horseback ride, bike, or hike around the lake. Kids also love fooling around Convict Creek. The kitchen-equipped cabins range from the tiny and quite rustic to the large and home-like; you can also camp at the Forest Service campground (no reservations accepted) alongside the creek. The general store is stocked with everything you might need, and the surprisingly upscale restaurant is famous for what might be the best cooking in the Eastern Sierra.

Juniper Springs Lodge

4000 Meridian Way, Mammoth Lakes; (760) 924-1102 or (888) 311-1102;
www.mammoth-mtn.com; \$210–\$725 for studio to 3-bedroom condo

This woodsy lodge/condo was built as phase one of Intrawest's ambitious plan to turn Mammoth into a ski resort with the swank of, say, Whistler

(another Intrawest resort). Located at the base of the new Eagle Express six-person chairlift, Juniper Springs combines the services of a hotel—daily maid service, bellmen, coffee shop, concierge, ski check—with the convenience of condo living—each of the 174 units, even the studios, has a full kitchen. It's more expensive than renting a condo in one of the many nearby complexes, but because of the ski-in/ski-out location and the full-service aspect, many families consider it money well spent. Extras include a pool, spa, and laundry room. Be forewarned that in spring, the snow melts first on this side of the mountain, so you may have to take a shuttle or drive over to Canyon Lodge or Main Lodge.

Mammoth Mountain Inn

Highway 203 next to ski area, Mammoth; (760) 934-2581; www.mammoth-mtn.com; \$155–\$625

This skier's hotel is frumpier than the various resorts in Lake Tahoe, but it's not as pricey either, and it is terribly convenient, located right in front of the Main Lodge, gondola, and Woollywood children's ski school (though it's several miles from town). Many families are pleasantly surprised to find that they can afford one of the 213 rooms, 43 two-bedroom units, or 14 three-bedroom units, and since skiing families tend to arrive with an SUV stuffed with gear and tired children, they practically weep with joy to discover that there's bell service and a free ski-check right by the door. There's also a child-care center (sometimes with storytellers and magicians), a game room, and kids' menus.

Quality Inn

3537 Main Street, Mammoth Lakes; (760) 934-5114 or (877) 424-6423; \$109–\$209; kids under age 12 stay free

The second-floor lounge of this otherwise routine motel makes for a less claustrophobic feel for guests in the winter. There are 61 rooms (with coffeemakers, microwaves, refrigerators, and free movies), an indoor Jacuzzi, and the best free continental breakfast in town.

Attractions

Devil's Postpile National Monument

Mammoth Visitor Center and Ranger Station; board shuttle in front of Mammoth Mountain Inn at the ski area; (760) 934-2289; www.nps.gov/depo

Hours Last bus leaves Mammoth Mountain at 5:25 p.m. and Red's Meadow at 6:15 p.m.

Admission Shuttle \$7 adults, \$4 children

Appeal by Age Groups

Preschool ★★★★★	Teens ★★★★★	Over 30 ★★★★★
Grade School ★★★★★	Young Adults ★★★★★	Seniors ★★★★★

Touring Time Average half to full day; minimum 2 hours

Rainy-day Touring Not recommended **Restaurants** Cafe at Red's Meadow **Alcoholic Beverages** At cafe and resort store **Disabled Access** No; private cars admitted **Wheelchair Rental** No **Baby Stroller Rental** No **Lockers** No **Pet Kennels** No **Rain Check** No **Private Tours** No

Description and Comments Don't miss the Devil's Postpile National Monument. We set aside about two-thirds of a day and boarded the shuttle (the only way to enter the park), getting off at the Devil's Postpile trailhead. Before we'd walked five minutes we found a lovely picnic spot next to a roaring river. We continued to the Postpile (half-mile easy walk from the bus stop), and then on to Rainbow Falls, where scores of people, including families with grandmothers whose shoes were not made for walking, either looked at the 100-foot falls from a viewpoint or continued down stairs and a steep path to the bottom of the falls to fully enjoy the thundering waters of the San Joaquin River. Rainbow Falls is a one-and-a-half-mile walk from the bus stop through mostly dusty flatlands. Other shuttle bus stops include lakes, falls, and Red's Meadow Resort, a pack station for trail rides with a cafe and store for campers.

Mammoth Mountain

Mammoth Lakes; (760) 934-0745 or (800) MAMMOTH; bike park, (760) 934-0706; gondola, (760) 934-2571; www.mammoth-mtn.com

Hours Vary by activity

Admission Varies by activity

Appeal by Age Groups

Preschool ★★★★★	Teens ★★★★★	Over 30 ★★★★★
Grade School ★★★★★	Young Adults ★★★★★	Seniors ★★★★★

Touring Time Average depends on your sign-up choices; minimum at least 1 hour to get the lay of the land

Rainy-day Touring Yes, depends **Restaurants** Yes, several **Alcoholic Beverages** Yes **Disabled Access** Limited **Wheelchair Rental** No **Baby Stroller Rental** No **Lockers** Yes **Pet Kennels** No **Rain Check** No **Private Tours** Ski, snowboard, and mountain bike

Description and Comments The official ski area and the hotels and restaurants adjacent to it are known as Mammoth Mountain. To visitors, it simply feels like a few little complexes at the base of the mountain above the town of Mammoth Lakes.

In winter, this is one of the best ski mountains in the West, serviced by seemingly endless high-speed lifts; in the summer, the gondola continues

to run as a scenic ride to the top of the mountain. Winter skiing and snowboarding options for families include group and individual lessons as well as a good children's half-day and all-day ski and snowboard school (all-day includes lunch and supervision), as well as a three-day snowboard camp for groups of five or more compatible kids.

In the summer, a mountain-bike trail area, the Mammoth Mountain Bike Park, is created in the trails accessed via the Main Lodge, and it includes a "little riders fun zone" for four-and-up riders just learning. Some lifts carry bikes and riders up the mountain, but you should start on the most modest hills—it can be scarier than you might think to point a bike down these steep trails; try the Little Eagle chair over by Juniper Springs for easier runs (mountain bikes are rented here). The fantastic ropes-course outfitters (see next profile) have their sign-up area here, and they also set up one of those big climbing walls, so everyone can try rock climbing, complete with ropes and harnesses. Main Lodge is also the place to catch the shuttle to Devil's Postpile (see previous profile). In the summer, an outdoor barbecue cafe is set up in the middle of the whole scene.

Mammoth Mountain High Adventures: Rock Climbing, Ropes Courses, and Orienteering Courses

*1 Minaret Road, Mammoth Mountain Ski Area; (760) 924-5683;
www.mammothmountain.com*

Hours Late June–late August: daily, 10 a.m.–6 p.m.

Admission Single-zip junior ropes course, \$7; overall junior course with 2 zips, \$13; climbing wall: \$7 single climb, \$14 1 hour, \$24 all day; ropes course, \$42 per person for family package

Appeal by Age Groups

Preschool ★	Teens ★★★★★	Over 30 ★★★★★
Grade School ★★★★★	Young Adults ★★★★★	Seniors ★★★

Touring Time Average up to 5 hours; minimum 15–20 minutes

Rainy-day Touring No problem **Restaurants** Cafe at rock-climbing area

Alcoholic Beverages Yes **Disabled Access** Limited, but programs available **Wheelchair Rental** No **Baby Stroller Rental** No **Lockers** No **Pet Kennels** No; pets may be tied up **Rain Check** Yes **Private Tours** Yes, and classes

Description and Comments We signed up our older child for the ropes course (open to age ten and up), but the whole family followed the group into the forest where the course is laid out, and we had a great afternoon watching several age groups master climbing and other challenges on platforms, trapezes, rope ladders, and other equipment high in the treetops. Bring water and other drinks and snacks, and maybe a blanket to sit on. We highly recommend these courses. The same outfitter

offers orienteering (age ten and up), in which you learn to use compass, map, and other techniques to find your own way at a running speed over a cross-country course. They've also set up a 32-foot climbing rock at Mammoth's Main Lodge (see profile) where even the youngest can get hoisted in a harness several feet in the air. At that site, there's also a junior ropes course that allows kids 4 to 9 to move through three challenges and end with a long pulley ride down from a medium-high platform.

Happy Trails

For a memorable way to take your children into the Sierras, head out on horseback. Several outfitters offer everything from half-hour, hand-led rides for six-year-olds and younger to week-long pack trips into the John Muir Wilderness. Here are three favorite outfitters:

Convict Lake Resort www.convictlake.com; (760) 934-3800. This cabin-campground resort offers 75-minute rides around lovely Convict Lake every day, for children age seven and older (grown-ups, too). It's a mellow, beautiful ride at a reasonable price (\$29).

McGee Creek Pack Station www.mcgeecreekpackstation.com; (800) 854-7407. The possibilities are vast here, from a one-hour ride along McGee Creek, to a day trip into historic McGee Canyon, to week-long riding or pack-mule trips into the John Muir Wilderness. A popular family option is a ride-in camping trip to McGee's wilderness base camp; the horses return home, leaving you to hike, fish, and sing around the campfire until they return to collect you a few days later.

Red's Meadow Pack Station (760) 934-2345. Near Devil's Postpile and Rainbow Falls, this is a tidy mountain resort complete with cabins, a general store, and a cafe. The Tanner family leads all sorts of outings, from one-hour rides to a five-day parent-child summertime pack trip up into either the Ansel Adams or John Muir Wilderness areas, in which families with children as young as five years old sleep at two well-equipped base camps.

Sledz

Highway 203, between town and Main Lodge; (760) 934-7533

Hours Winter: daily, 10 a.m.–4 p.m.; spring: daily, 4:30–7:30 p.m.; weather and snow permitting

Admission \$10 per person (any age) for an hour of sledding

Appeal by Age Groups

Preschool ★★★★★	Teens ★★★★★	Over 30 ★★★★★
Grade School ★★★★★	Young Adults ★★★★★	Seniors ★★★

Touring Time 1 hour

Rainy-day Touring Good if it's snowing, closes in rain **Restaurants** No **Alcoholic Beverages** No **Disabled Access** No **Wheelchair Rental** No **Baby Stroller Rental** No **Lockers** No **Pet Kennels** No **Rain Check** No **Private Tours** No

Description and Comments If you haven't had a good, whooping laugh with your kids in awhile, come here and take a ride (or ten) on an inner tube down a wide, luge-style snow chute. Ten bucks gets you an hour of sledding, which is plenty. An iron rope tow takes you up to the top of the 500-foot run, and then you come bouncing and barreling down, which generally involves a lot of screaming and hooting. It's safe enough for preschoolers, and many inner tubes are big enough for a parent and child to ride together.

Family-Friendly Restaurants

Angel's

3516 Main Street, Mammoth Lakes; (760) 934-7427

Meals Served Lunch and dinner **Cuisine** American/Mediterranean **Entree Range** Lunch, \$7–\$9, dinner, \$10–\$17 **Kids' Menu** Yes **Reservations** Not accepted **Payment** All major credit cards

This Mammoth institution is often jam-packed at peak times, and it doesn't take reservations, so try to come on the early or late side. Best bets are the hearty lunch-or-dinner sandwiches (triple-stacked grilled club, Ortega Chile melt, tuna-avocado melt, chicken Caesar wrap), the acclaimed ribs, the homemade soups, and the hickory-roasted barbecued chicken. Note that the modestly priced house wines are actually pretty good.

Nevados

Main Street and Minaret Road, Mammoth Lakes; (760) 934-4466

Meals Served Dinner **Cuisine** American/Californian **Entree Range** \$13–\$22 **Kids' Menu** Yes **Reservations** Recommended **Payment** All major credit cards

We were surprised at the quality of the cooking at this stylish, upscale restaurant—it could pretty much hold its own in L.A., which is not true of most Mammoth restaurants. And despite the niceness of the place, children are welcome, with a fixed-price \$10 menu (steak, pasta, or shrimp, including salad and dessert). We particularly liked the creative pasta dishes, and there's a pretty good wine list.

Perry's Italian Cafe

3399 Main Street, Mammoth Lakes; (760) 934-6521

Meals Served Breakfast, lunch, and dinner **Cuisine** Italian **Entree Range** Lunch, \$5–\$8; dinner, \$8–\$16 **Kids menu** Yes **Reservations** Not accepted **Payment** All major credit cards

A friendly, family-oriented place, Perry's is popular, bright, and lively, perhaps a little too lively during peak seasons, when the wait can top an hour. The food is simple and satisfying fare: a good salad bar, pizzas, burgers, pastas. Our kids love the "old-fashioned" video games (Pac Man!), and the TV in the bar is always tuned to a game.

Susie's Subs

588 Old Mammoth Road, Mammoth Lakes; (760) 934-7033

Meals Served Lunch and dinner **Cuisine** Sandwiches **Entree Range** \$4–\$8 **Kids' Menu** \$3 **Reservations** Not accepted **Payment** No credit cards

We went back again and again to this made-to-order sandwich counter for provolone and avocado subs (among other choices) to take with us on hikes and excursions. Fresh ingredients, excellent bread, tantalizing combinations.

Side Trips

Bodie State Historic Park

20 miles from Bridgeport; (760) 647-6445; ceres.ca.gov/sierradsp/bodie

Hours Often closed because of inaccessible roads in winter, so call ahead; otherwise, open Memorial Day–Labor Day: daily, 8 a.m.–7 p.m.; rest of year: daily, 8 a.m.–4 p.m.

Admission \$1 per person; pets must be leashed

Appeal by Age Groups

Preschool ★	Teens ★★★★★	Over 30 ★★★★★
Grade School ★★★★★	Young Adults ★★★★★	Seniors ★★★★★

Touring Time Average 2–3 hours; minimum 1 hour (not counting drive time)

Rainy-day Touring Not recommended **Restaurants** No **Alcoholic Beverages** No **Disabled Access** No **Wheelchair Rental** No **Baby Stroller Rental** No **Lockers** No **Pet Kennels** No; leash required, \$1 fee **Rain Check** No **Private Tours** No

Description and Comments This remarkable ghost town is all alone in its remote valley, so it's the fullest experience of the real Old West available today. It's located north of the turnout to Yosemite from US 395; from the highway, you take another road 13 miles east—the last three miles of which are hard-packed unpaved—and arrive at the park. The only services in Bodie are rest rooms near the parking lot and a small museum/bookstore that is sometimes manned by volunteers. There is no snack bar, and the temperatures can be very hot in summer and cold in winter, so bring rations.

The ghost town is preserved by the park service in a state of “arrested decay,” which means that the rangers and volunteers keep the buildings from falling down (by strengthening foundations, replacing broken glass and such), while allowing them to look as if they might fall down at any moment. In its golden years, Bodie had 10,000 residents, and people lived here until the 1940s. Artifacts inside and outside the buildings—furniture, wagons, trucks, mining equipment, beauty-shop fixtures, curtains—are left from all periods of the town’s occupation. Visitors walk around the dirt streets on a self-guided tour, peeking into the windows of houses and churches, the schoolhouse (with a map showing the world as it was just before World War I), and the gas station. A detailed brochure tells about the inhabitants of each address and what is known of their fates.

Our school-age kids enjoyed the chance to inhabit the past, but the heat and strong sunshine cut into their patience and endurance, so we stayed for a shorter time than we might have with history-buff adults. Younger children would do better with a less authentic link to the past.

Mono Lake

Highway 395 near Lee Vining; (760) 647-3044 or (760) 647-3000;
www.monolake.org

Hours Summer: daily, 9 a.m.–4:30 p.m.; limited hours in winter

Admission \$3 in visitor center

Appeal by Age Groups (Add ★★ to each if ranger walk included.)

Preschool ★	Teens ★★	Over 30 ★★★
Grade School ★★	Young Adults ★★	Seniors ★★★

Touring Time Average 1 hour for visitors center and nature walk, ranger walk 1 hour; minimum 30 minutes

Rainy-day Touring Not recommended **Restaurants** In Lee Vining **Alcoholic Beverages** In Lee Vining **Disabled Access** Visitor center, viewing veranda **Wheelchair Rental** No **Baby Stroller Rental** No **Lockers** No **Pet Kennels** No **Rain Check** No **Private Tours** No

Description and Comments Families spending time in the Mammoth area may want to take an excursion to Mono Lake to experience a strange and beautiful landscape: a large flat lake in a desert-like setting with shoreline formations of “tufa” columns rising like stalagmites above the surface of the water. We had stopped at the Mono Basin Scenic Area Visitors Center to enjoy the view and walk the nature trail when we learned that a ranger walk was scheduled soon, so we joined it and had a wonderful experience. The walk included touching, tasting, smelling, and looking through binoculars and magnifying glasses and was conducted right along the lake’s shore. The center also offers a stargazing and storytelling program, a “sounds of the creek” walk, and other hikes and talks

at campgrounds and other sites around the Inyo National Forest. It's also possible to go on guided canoe and kayak tours of the lake.

Family-Friendly Restaurants

Whoa Nellie Deli/Tioga Gas Mart

Highway 120 at Highway 395, Lee Vining; (760) 647-1088

Meals Served Breakfast, lunch, and dinner **Cuisine** American **Entree Range** \$7–\$19 **Kids' Menu** Yes **Reservations** Not accepted **Payment** All major credit cards

This ain't your typical Mobil mart—the setting overlooks Mono Lake, the shop stocks REI-quality gear, and the deli counter goes way beyond the gas-station orange-cheese-nachos standards. Chef Matt Toomey runs an amazing kitchen here, serving everything from grilled-salmon salads to lobster taquitos—but your kids can get chicken fingers, too. The pizzas are superb, as is the barbecue potato salad. Call ahead, and they'll pack picnic boxes for a Mono Lake outing or Sierra hike. An absolute must-stop between Mammoth and Yosemite.

Yosemite

So many gifted writers and photographers have turned their talents to portraying **Yosemite** that we can't possibly do it justice. Suffice it to say that this National Park is one of the world's natural treasures, a place of great beauty, grandeur, and even mysticism. And while the awesomeness of **Yosemite Valley** may not leave your children as speechless as you, it will provide plenty of opportunities to imprint itself on their memories. Whether they're climbing up **Vernal Falls**, riding a bike under **Half Dome**, or searching the **Merced River** for frogs, your kids will find their own reasons to love Yosemite.

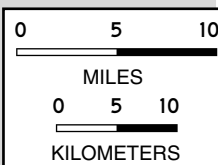
Yosemite is also, of course, a place with man-made roads, visitors centers, and campgrounds, being that this is a National Park. This infrastructure was greatly damaged in a 1997 flood; restoration work has been going on for years and is almost complete. After the flood, the park service put into immediate effect a long-term plan designed to update, upgrade, and improve Yosemite's infrastructure and make visitor facilities more environmentally friendly. So not all structures were rebuilt; there are fewer campsites in the Valley itself and more in the surrounding areas (which are well worth exploring); public transportation has improved and cars are greatly discouraged; and overall, the summer crowds aren't as overwhelming as they once were.

Yosemite's popularity demands that reservations be made as early as possible. Campsite reservations may be made beginning at the 15th of each month up to three months in advance by calling (800) 436-7275 or going to **reservations.nps.gov**. Reservations for hotels, motels, and tent cabins within Yosemite may be made up to a year in advance; call (559) 252-4848 or go to **www.yosemitepark.com**.

The camp entrance fee is \$20 per car (an annual Yosemite pass is \$40, and an annual National Park Service pass is \$50). Once you've arrived and settled into your camp or cabin, please try to use your car as

- 1 Ahwahnee Hotel
- 2 Curry Village
- 3 Marriott's Tenaya Lodge
- 4 Wawona Hotel
- 5 Yosemite Lodge

6 Wawona
7 Yosemite Valley



little as possible and use the park's convenient free shuttle service to get to trailheads and other areas.

There are several Yosemite Web pages to explore. The National Park Service site is at www.nps.gov/yose and has park information and "Yosemite Notebooks" with visuals. The Yosemite Association's site, www.yosemite.org, has visitor information, a bookstore, class listings, and a live camera view of **Glacier Point**. The Yosemite Concessions Services page at www.yosemitepark.com has lodging and park activity information, links to other Yosemite sites, and an online gift shop.

Getting There

By Car The most common approach to the park is from the west, via the town of Merced, which is reached by taking Interstate 5 south from San Francisco or north from L.A. and then transitioning to State Highway 140 east. Visitors who are also seeing Mammoth, Death Valley, or Lake Tahoe might approach from the east, via the town of Lee Vining, by taking US Highway 395 north or south, then State Highway 120 west into the park.

By Bus Be really respectful and leave your smelly car behind, traveling via the Yosemite Connection/Grayline, (209) 384-1315 or, in California, (800) 369-PARK. There's service from the Merced Amtrak Station and Transportation Center to Yosemite Valley Visitors Center several times a day.

Family Lodging

Ahwahnee Hotel

Yosemite National Park; (559) 252-4848; www.yosemitepark.com; \$357 and up

This National Historic Landmark hotel is a favorite for outdoorspeople and city-slicker visitors alike, and it's often sold out. Its soaring, Arts and Crafts-era stone and wood architecture fits the majestic setting, and its Native American artifacts and decor are authentic and museum-quality. In addition to 97 lodge rooms, there are 26 cottages, a good choice for families. It's not the most kid-friendly lodging in the park—lots of wealthy retirees visit here, and they like to sit quietly in the awesome public areas, reading or doing elaborate jigsaw puzzles; when we visited, we felt like we had to constantly hush our children and keep them away from those jigsaw puzzles. On the other hand, it does have a pool and a children's play area, and the restaurant is polite to children and has a children's menu. And, of course, you can always take them outdoors into the vastness of the valley, just outside the door.

Curry Village

Yosemite National Park; (559) 252-4848; www.yosemitepark.com; \$64–\$110

The offerings are mostly rustic wooden cabins, with or without private baths, and tent cabins (the least expensive lodging in the park). There are now about 300 units altogether, about 120 with private baths. When we stayed here, we were quite pleased with the location for the kids, because of the bustling village atmosphere with pool, cafeteria, snack bar, mini-market, etc. The cabins were mostly family-occupied, and over several days, the youngsters made friends with neighbors and pool playmates. It's also a center of activities and services, including tour departures, raft rentals, cross-country ski rentals, bike rentals, etc. From mid-November to March there's an outdoor ice-skating rink (rare in California!). Overall, Curry Village is lively and active; don't look for quiet, secluded moments.

Marriott's Tenaya Lodge

1122 Highway 41, Fish Camp; (559) 683-6555 or (888) 514-2167; www.tenayalodge.com; \$259 and up; children free in parents' room

Two miles from Yosemite's south entrance in the town of Fish Camp, this newer full-service resort makes a fine vacation base, even if it does imprint a sense of chain-corporate America on a previously funky little mountain village. Spread among the trees are 244 rooms, two restaurants, a playground, and two pools, one indoor and one out. The best room for families is the double deluxe, a larger room with a sitting area, a sofa bed, and a balcony with a forest view. At the activities desk, you can sign up for a flashlight hike for the kids, a narrated bus tour of the valley, and a guided ten-mile hike to a 30-foot waterfall; other fun stuff to do includes mountain-bike rentals, volleyball, and fishing at nearby Bass Lake. Camp Tenaya, the program for children ages 5 to 12, operates all summer with day and evening activities and includes meals; cost ranges from \$30 to \$35, depending on time.

Wawona Hotel

Highway 41, Wawona, 27 miles south of Yosemite Valley, Yosemite National Park; (559) 252-4848; www.yosemitepark.com; \$87–\$166

Located in the Mariposa Grove area, nearly 30 miles from the Valley, the Wawona, too, is a National Historic Landmark. There's an almost secluded feeling to the hotel, a favorite with Yosemite lovers who want to avoid the hustle and bustle of the valley. Come here in the off season and you're likely to see deer, coyote, and foxes, right in front of the hotel. The homey, rustic rooms are spread among whitewashed turn-of-the-nineteenth-century buildings with great front porches; ask for spacious

or connecting rooms as there are a variety of options among the 105 rooms (50 with private baths). There's a big lawn with a pool, tennis courts, and a nine-hole golf course. Restaurant on site, store nearby.

Yosemite Lodge

Yosemite National Park; (559) 252-4848; www.yosemitepark.com; \$95–\$156

Conveniently located and neither as grand as the Ahwahnee nor as down-home as Curry Village, Yosemite Lodge provides the middle-ground non-camping accommodations in the park. Activities right around the lodge are plentiful. The short walk to Yosemite Falls begins just across the street; the lodge has a bike-rental shop, many paved trails adjacent, and a terrific pool. There are three restaurants, one with a children's menu. Learn-to-ski packages for Badger Pass are offered during the middle of the week in the winter.

Attractions

Wawona

Highway 41 south of Yosemite Valley; (209) 375-9501; off-season, (209) 372-0200; www.yosemite.org

Hours Spring and summer: Wawona Information Station open daily, 9 a.m.–5 p.m.; off-season hours limited

Admission \$20 per vehicle at park entrance

Appeal by Age Groups

Preschool ★★★	Teens ★★★★★	Over 30 ★★★★★
Grade School ★★★★★	Young Adults ★★★★★	Seniors ★★★★★

Touring Time Average several days; minimum 1 day, 1 night

Rainy-day Touring Possible **Restaurants** Yes **Alcoholic Beverages** Yes

Disabled Access Some **Wheelchair Rental** No **Baby Stroller Rental** No

Lockers No **Pet Kennels** No **Rain Check** No **Private Tours** No

Description and Comments This south entrance area of Yosemite is loved by some visitors as a base because of its relative peace and quiet. There's no lack of things to do, however; here's where the Mariposa Grove of redwoods and the Pioneer Yosemite History Center are found. You can stay in the charming, rustic (and inexpensive) old white-sided Wawona Hotel (see listing in "Family Lodging").

The Wawona Information Station, at the park's south entrance, has maps, wilderness permits, trail guides, and books. A free shuttle bus from the information station takes visitors to the Mariposa Grove of giant sequoias; it operates daily in the summer from mid-May, 9 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Yosemite Valley

Yosemite Village west of the main post office; (209) 372-0264; www.yosemite.org

Hours Visitors center open daily, 8 a.m.–5 p.m.

Admission \$20 per vehicle at park entrance

Appeal by Age Groups

Preschool ★★★	Teens ★★★★★	Over 30 ★★★★★
Grade School ★★★★★	Young Adults ★★★★★	Seniors ★★★★★

Touring Time Average several days; minimum a half-day

Rainy-day Touring Possible; can be pretty and quiet **Restaurants** Yes

Alcoholic Beverages Yes **Disabled Access** Yes, ask at visitor center

Wheelchair Rental No **Baby Stroller Rental** No **Lockers** Food lockers vs. bears **Pet Kennels** No **Rain Check** No **Private Tours** No

Description and Comments Much is written in travel literature about Yosemite being more than the Yosemite Valley itself, and it's true, the famous park has miles of wilderness for hiking and camping, and plenty of room in which to spread out if you get off the beaten path. But visitors don't need to apologize for actually liking the valley, with its ranger talks, its world-famous waterfalls and much-photographed views, and its abundant wildlife and scenic bike rides. We know many Californians who return (often with kids in tow) year after year to the valley to settle in for a week of hiking, biking, and campfire-going. These repeaters tell us that Yosemite is a large park with a varied topography and that they do go on excursions, such as the easy walk to Mirror Lake or on one of a zillion incredible hiking trails. But they still love the valley.

Along with the Yosemite Valley Visitors Center, in Yosemite Village west of the main post office, you'll find a museum, gallery, wilderness supply shop, and trailheads to two nature trails.

Yosemite's Little Joys

Bike Riding Bikes can be rented at Yosemite Lodge or Curry Village, and there are level trails crisscrossing the entire valley floor.

Early-Morning Photography Walks These leave at around 8:30 a.m. and last for one hour from either the Ahwahnee or Yosemite Lodge.

El Capitan Take some moments while you're in Yosemite to look at this granite wall at different times of the day. There are often climbers working their way up the face, and if you go to the meadow across from it with binoculars, you can watch their progress. At night, you can see the climbers' lights, or on a full-moon night, simply admire the dazzling rock itself. See "Rock-Climbing Classes" below for your own adventurous climbing kids.

Family Walks These begin at the Valley Visitors Center, and they're led by a ranger-naturalist.

Glacier Point Most families stop here for just a half-hour on their way into or out of the valley, but don't neglect to make the stop. It's the picture-postcard view of your dreams, and even the kids will be awestruck. The scenic overlook is 30 miles (1 hour) from the valley, and the road is open from late spring through early fall. There's a snack stand open 9 a.m. to sundown.

Horseback Riding. Weather permitting, two-hour and half-day rides depart spring through fall from stables in the valley and at Wawona. Call (209) 372-8348 for more information.

Le Conte Memorial Lodge Children's Center In the summer months, there are programs for kids ages five to ten. (209) 372-4542.

Mariposa Grove The largest of three sequoia groves in Yosemite has been a magnet for visitors since the mid- to nineteenth-century. The grove's Grizzly Giant tree, 2,700 years old, is believed to be the oldest living sequoia. There's a small log cabin museum at the grove (May 22 through fall, open 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.). To reach the grove, take the free shuttle bus from Wawona, then follow the interpretive trail signs for a self-guided walking tour. Weather permitting in the summer, a guided tram tour (\$11 adults, \$6 for kids ages 4 to 12, children under age 4 free, call (209) 375-1621 for reservations) leaves every 20 minutes for a one-hour tour through the upper and lower groves. For reservations, call (209) 375-1621.

Pioneer Yosemite History Center This cluster of historic buildings at Wawona is the center of living-history programs and other activities for children. A jailhouse, miner's cabin, and covered bridge can be explored in a 30-minute self-guided tour; there's a stagecoach ride, and there are sometimes demonstrations and crafts depending on the season, such as soap-making, yarn-spinning, and Christmas crafts. The bookstore is open 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. in the summer.

Rock-Climbing Classes Yosemite Mountaineering School and Guide Service (phone (209) 372-1406). Beginning rock-climbing classes are offered from Easter through mid-October; kids must be at least ten years old. Mike Corbett's one-hour talk/walk about the history of climbing in Yosemite leaves from either the Ahwahnee or the Yosemite Lodge twice a week at 8:30 a.m.

Tours of the Valley Two-hour, half-day, and all-day summer tours of the major landmarks of Yosemite Valley are given daily, in part to reduce the flow of auto traffic on the few roads on the valley floor. The summer tour vehicle is completely open-air and allows riders to see in all directions; winter tours are in heated buses. There's also a two-hour moonlight tour in the summer. We thought the tour was an easy, helpful way to get the lay of the land, and we found the guide's comments on wildlife particularly interesting. Call the Yosemite Lodge at (209) 372-1240 for fees and times.

Waterfalls Waterfalls from below and waterfalls from above are one of the attractions at Yosemite, but depending on the time of year and the amount of snowmelt the area is receiving, some of the falls may or may not be filled with water. One of the most popular hikes in Yosemite is up to the top of Vernal Falls, and for purists it's probably a discouraging experience—literally hundreds of people at a time are working their way up and down the waterside trail that goes from the base of the falls to a pool (where people swim) at the top (from which some hikers continue on up to other pools). But families with active preteens and teens may find this a great way to participate in the democratic appreciation of a great national park. The other hikers are from all over the country and the world, and it makes for a fine outdoor social occasion, if not a wilderness experience. Lower Yosemite Falls and Bridalveil Falls can be enjoyed with just short, easy walks from shuttle stops. Yosemite Falls, with its 2,425-foot drop, can be seen from Glacier Point.

Wildlife Please, please review safety information about sharing the park with bears and mountain lions, and watch your children closely at all times. You will also see deer, coyote, squirrels, and other smaller animals. Do not feed or disturb wildlife—doing so is a violation subject to fine.

Lake Tahoe

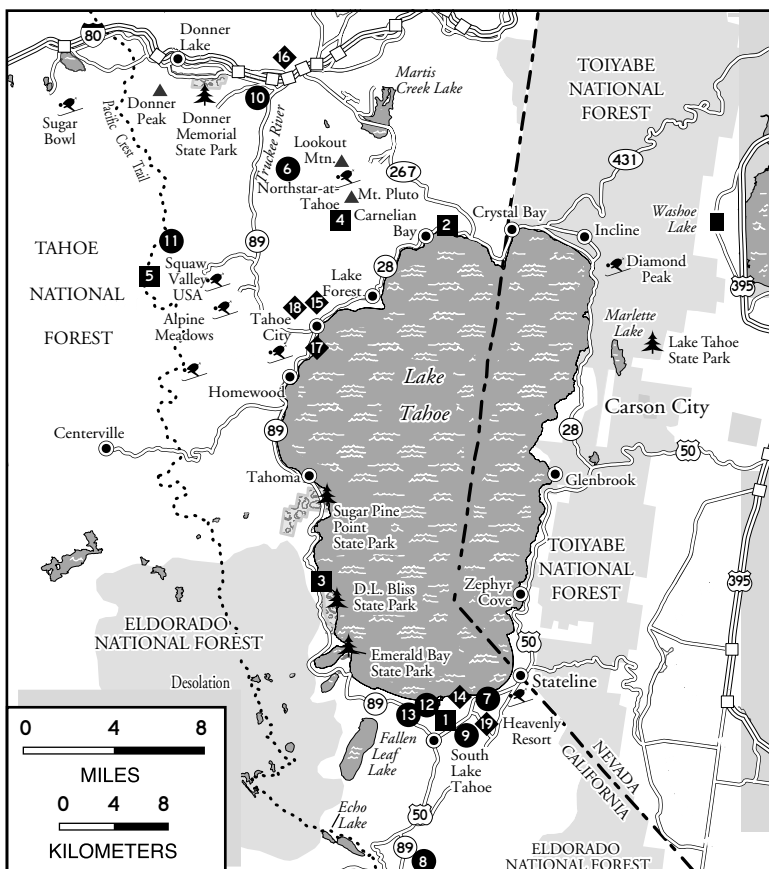
This is a big lake, to be sure—it's 22 miles long and 12 miles wide, with 72 miles of shoreline—but the special characteristic remembered by most visitors here is not the size but the beautiful deep, dark blue of the water. Surrounded by pine forests, and able to be seen from above on some scenic roads and hikes, **Lake Tahoe** presents an indelible impression. That inky blue water will turn swimmers blue, too—it seldom gets warmer than 60°, even in the middle of summer. We found it ideal for instantly soothing aching muscles or swelling feet after a hike in the hot sun, but parents of little ones will want to pull them out of the water for a towel rubdown every now and then.

Two-thirds of the lake is in California, and one-third in Nevada. The several communities on the lake's shore are quite different and are concentrated either north or south. The North Shore California towns of **Tahoe City** and **Tahoe Vista** are summer sports centers, where the best Jet Ski rentals are located and where water-skiers rule. The South Shore includes some Nevada territory, so there are casinos, but the town of **South Lake Tahoe** also offers family-friendly swim beaches, hikes, and sight-seeing excursions. There is skiing on both sides of the lake. The west side of the lake offers access to the hiking trails of the **Desolation Wilderness** and **El Dorado Village**; the east side offers highway junctions to Nevada's gambling centers and historic silver-mining towns.

Getting There

By Car Lake Tahoe is most easily reached by car from San Francisco; it's 200 miles northeast of the Bay Area. Your route will depend on whether you're headed for the North or South Shore. For North Shore, take Interstate 80 east to Truckee; for South Lake Tahoe, take US Highway 50 east.

By Air Among the airlines serving Reno/Tahoe International Airport (60 miles east of the lake area; (775) 328-6400; www.renoairport.com/reno-tahoe) are Alaska Air, America West, American, Continental, Delta, Frontier, Northwest, Southwest, Skywest, and United.



Lake Tahoe



FAMILY LODGING

- 1 Camp Richardson Resort
- 2 Cedar Glen Lodge
- 3 D. L. Bliss State Park Campground
- 4 Northstar-at-Tahoe Resort
- 5 Resort at Squaw Creek

ATTRACTIONS

- 6 Adventure Park
- 7 Heavenly Aerial Tram (Monument Peak Restaurant)

- 8 Lake Tahoe Visitors Center
- 9 Saw Mill Pond
- 10 Sierra Nevada Children's Museum
- 11 Squaw Valley USA
- 12 Tahoe Amusement Park
- 13 Tallac Historic Site

RESTAURANTS

- 14 Beacon Restaurant
- 15 The Bridge Tender
- 16 Ernie's Coffee Shop
- 17 Fire Sign Cafe
- 18 Lakehouse Pizza
- 19 Monument Peak Restaurant

Family Lodging

Camp Richardson Resort

1900 Jameson Beach Road, South Lake Tahoe; (530) 541-1801 or (800) 544-1801; www.camprich.com; \$140–\$270 summer, \$115–\$200 winter

This unique, rustic resort has been home to vacationing families for more than 70 years—it's no grand ski complex, but rather a jumble of lodges, cabins, and campsites (for both tents and RVs) in a pine woods at the shore of the lake. The lodge has a pleasant public space with a big stone fireplace and the wonderful Beacon restaurant. The beach is the big draw for many; it's one of the best for swimming, and the full-service marina is a bustling center of water sports, renting kayaks, windsurfing gear, and more. The 36 lodge rooms and 39 cottages vary in decor and layout; some have terraces, fireplaces, and/or kitchens, but the cabins don't have TVs or phones. Also on premises are an ice cream shop and cafe/bakery, children's playground, bike-rental shop, and stable.

Cedar Glen Lodge

6589 North Lake Boulevard, Tahoe Vista; (530) 546-4281 or (800) 500-TAHOE; www.cedarglenlodge.com; \$75–\$200

A very good value for families, this small motel is located across the highway from a nice beach in Tahoe Vista on the North Shore. It's tucked in the pine woods, with a playground, pool, hot tub, and barbecues. Two two-bedroom units with kitchens are found among the rooms and cabins. There's no restaurant, but a basic continental breakfast is free.

D. L. Bliss State Park Campground

Route 89, Tahoma; (530) 525-7277; reservations: Reserve America, (800) 444-7275; www.reserveamerica.com; campsites \$12 plus \$5 entrance fee

It's blissful here, all right, especially for children, who never tire of scrambling over the boulders, playing hide-and-seek behind the pines, and exploring the gorgeous white-sand Lester Beach, or close-by Emerald Bay. Bliss has three clumps of campsites; if you want to be closest to Lester Beach, reserve a site between 141 and 168. Hot showers, flush toilets, picnic tables, fire pits, wood for sale.

Northstar-at-Tahoe Resort

Highway 267 north of Lake Tahoe, 6 miles south of Truckee; (530) 562-1010 or (800) 466-6784; www.skinorthstar.com; \$184–\$625

This Squaw Valley rival resort has everything an active family could dream of spread over its 600 acres. You and/or your kids can mountain bike,

pony ride, join guided hikes, ski, tackle a climbing wall, learn orienteering, take a ropes course, swim in heated pools, play tennis—it's exhausting just considering the options. The Minor's Camp program handles kids ages 3 to 12, with skiing lessons and snow play in winter and all sorts of amusements year-round. Northstar is one of the most popular learn-to-ski family resorts in North America, known for its ego-enhancing runs and friendly ski school. The accommodations range from upscale motel rooms to suites to fully equipped condos, found one mile from the main complex. There are five restaurants, most of which have kids' menus.

Resort at Squaw Creek

400 Squaw Creek Road, Squaw Valley; (530) 583-6300 or (800) 327-3353;
www.squawcreek.com; \$129–\$499

Modern mountain architecture makes this a distinctly Tahoe resort, with contemporary buildings at the center of 632 acres designed so every room has a view of the Sierra. The resort is a little town, actually, and in the winter especially, families can find all they need for a vacation right within the complex: shopping, skiing (direct access to Squaw Creek mountain lifts), world-class golf, junior tennis programs, even lawn games. In the summer, the wonderful, landscaped pool complex boasts a water slide; in the winter there's an ice rink. Of the 403 rooms and suites, the best bet for families is a suite, some of which have fireplaces. The Mountain Buddies Club offers half- and full-day programs (swimming, hiking, crafts, and games) for kids ages 4 to 13, as well as separate teen programs. One drawback: The lodging is not connected to the lobby area except by outdoor walkways, so in the winter, guests must go outside to get to restaurants.

Little People's Adventures

This day camp accepts children ages 5 to 12 for one or more days with reservations a day in advance. Camp space is limited to 15 kids a day, though, so inquire about availability during the time you plan to visit. Kids are supervised by first-aid- and CPR-certified counselors who take them on adventures ranging from bowling to bouldering. They must bring proof of medical coverage, lunch, water, and equipment. P.O. Box 2914, Olympic Valley, CA 96146, (530) 581-4LPA. The camp operates daily from June to Labor Day, and on weekends through September.

Tahoe Treasures

D. L. Bliss State Park This park contains some great camping, terrific beach and boating areas, and several wonderful trails for day hikers, including the dreamy 4.5-mile Rubicon Trail, which snakes along the shore through the woods to the beach, where you can swim and picnic. Another hike, less than a mile long, takes you to an old lighthouse, and another, just one mile round-trip, takes you to the remarkable Balancing Rock. 168

campsites (see “Family Lodging”). Nine miles north of South Lake Tahoe on Highway 89; (530) 525-7277 or (530) 525-7982; www.parks.ca.gov.

Truckee Historic Town Center Almost 100 19th-century buildings remain in this town, and visitors can get an Old West feel on Commercial Row, where wooden sidewalks remain. The historic area is largely cafes and shops, as well as the Southern Pacific Railroad Depot Gallery; the Bar of America, with its photos of famous outlaws; and the **Old Truckee Jailhouse Museum** (10142 Jibboom Street, behind Commercial Row; (530) 582-0893; free admission, open weekends), which features real cells, historic photos, and Chinese-American historical items. Truckee is located on Interstate 80, 20 minutes north of Lake Tahoe.

Attractions

Adventure Park

*Northstar-at-Tahoe; (530) 562-2285 or (510) 525-9391;
www.skinorthstar.com/summer/family_adventurepark*

Hours Park open in spring to groups; climbing wall: Wednesday–Sunday, 10 a.m.–6 p.m.; junior ropes course: Wednesday–Sunday, 10 a.m.–5 p.m.; senior ropes course: Thursday–Saturday, 12:30–5 p.m.; Sunday, 10 a.m.–1:30 p.m.

Admission Ropes course \$43; junior ropes course \$13; climbing wall \$11 per hour or \$20 day pass; orienteering \$10 kids, \$15 adults; climbing shoe rental \$3

Appeal by Age Groups

Preschool ★	Teens ★★★★★	Over 30 ★★
Grade School ★★★★★	Young Adults ★★	Seniors ★

Touring Time Average depends on activity; minimum 1 hour on climbing wall

Rainy-day Touring No **Restaurants** In resort **Alcoholic Beverages** In resort **Disabled Access** Possible **Wheelchair Rental** No **Baby Stroller Rental** No **Lockers** No **Pet Kennels** No **Rain Check** No **Private Tours** Yes, private courses

Description and Comments This ropes-course, orienteering-course, and climbing-wall complex is similar to the one described in the Mammoth section of this chapter. Participants meet at the Mountain Adventure Shop in Northstar Village in Truckee and go to either the ropes course area (in the woods, with ladders, cables, and games), the start-off point for an orienteering course (hiking exploration, maps, compass), or the climbing wall.

Heavenly Aerial Tram (Monument Peak Restaurant)

*Heavenly Ski Resort, Ski Run Boulevard, South Lake Tahoe; (775) 586-7000;
www.skiheavenly.com*

Hours Summer: daily, 10 a.m.–4 p.m.; winter: Monday–Friday, 9 a.m.–4 p.m.; Saturday, Sunday, holidays, 8:30 a.m.–4 p.m.

Admission Tram; adults \$20, children ages 6–12 \$12, under age 6 free; winter ski-lift ticket; \$20–\$57

Appeal by Age Groups

Preschool ★	Teens ★★★★★	Over 30 ★★★★★
Grade School ★★★★★	Young Adults ★★★★★	Seniors ★★★★★

Touring Time Average 2 hours; minimum 15 minutes

Rainy-day Touring Not good for hiking **Restaurants** Yes **Alcoholic Beverages** Yes **Disabled Access** Tram only **Wheelchair Rental** No **Baby Stroller Rental** No **Lockers** In winter **Pet Kennels** No **Rain Check** No **Private Tours** No

Description and Comments Theme parks sometimes try to duplicate the thrill of a ski gondola or tram ride, but there's nothing like the real thing. The ride itself is a spectacular mile-long ascent to a point 2,000 feet above Lake Tahoe. At the top is a cafe with a large deck and a self-guided nature trail. For a memorable supper, come just before sunset and eat enjoying the view—the lake reflects the gorgeous light.

Lake Tahoe Visitor Center

Highway 89, 4 miles south of US 50 and Highway 90, South Lake Tahoe; (530) 573-2600

Hours Summer: daily, 8 a.m.–4:30 p.m.; closed in winter

Admission Free

Appeal by Age Groups

Preschool ★★★	Teens ★★★	Over 30 ★★★
Grade School ★★★	Young Adults ★★★	Seniors ★★★

Touring Time Average depends on trail chosen; minimum 30 minutes

Rainy-day Touring Okay on paved path **Restaurants** Nearby **Alcoholic Beverages** Yes **Disabled Access** Yes **Wheelchair Rental** Yes, free **Baby Stroller Rental** No **Lockers** No **Pet Kennels** No; leashed pets allowed **Rain Check** No **Private Tours** No

Description and Comments While one parent peruses the maps and brochures, another can take the kids along one of the six self-guided nature trails at this center run by the U.S. Forest Service. Among the trail attractions is an underground fish-viewing chamber that provides a window on the lake's aquatic life. Interpretive programs are offered on site June to Labor Day, 10 a.m. to 8 p.m.

Saw Mill Pond

Past the Y at Lake Tahoe Boulevard and Saw Mill Road, Lake Tahoe Basin Management, 870 Emerald Bay Road, South Lake Tahoe; (530) 573-2600

Hours Daily, 24 hours, year-round

Admission Free**Appeal by Age Groups**

Preschool ★★★★★	Teens ★★★	Over 30 ★
Grade School ★★★★★	Young Adults ★	Seniors ★

Touring Time Average 2 hours; minimum 1 hour

Rainy-day Touring Yes, but you'll get wet **Restaurants** 2 miles from civilization **Alcoholic Beverages** Yes **Disabled Access** Not yet; in the works **Wheelchair Rental** No **Baby Stroller Rental** No **Lockers** No **Pet Kennels** No; leashed pets allowed **Rain Check** No **Private Tours** No

Description and Comments Serious fishing families will scoff, but for non-fishing adults, this is a pleasant little pond for introducing your kids to the activity. Kids under age 13 fish free in this pretty little pond stocked with trout by the California Department of Fish and Game, but you must supply your own bait and equipment. It's not open to anyone over age 14, so parents can teach but not fish. The pond is popular for ice skating and hockey in winter.

Sierra Nevada Children's Museum

1140 Donner Pass Road, Truckee; (530) 587-5437

Hours April–November: Wednesday–Saturday, 10 a.m.–4 p.m.**Admission** \$4, free for children under age 2**Appeal by Age Groups**

Preschool ★★★★★	Teens ★★	Over 30 ★
Grade School ★★★★★	Young Adults ★	Seniors ★

Touring Time Average 2 hours; minimum 1 hour

Rainy-day Touring Yes **Restaurants** Next door **Alcoholic Beverages** Next door **Disabled Access** Yes **Wheelchair Rental** No **Baby Stroller Rental** No **Lockers** Cubbyholes **Pet Kennels** No **Rain Check** No **Private Tours** No

Description and Comments A modest example of its kind, but, for very little ones, a welcome respite from the macho world of skiing or waterskiing. A variety of educational hands-on exhibits are here, as well as some imaginative temporary special exhibits and arts and crafts projects.

Squaw Valley USA1960 Squaw Valley Road, Squaw Valley; (530) 583-6985 or (800) 403-0206; www.squaw.com**Hours** Open year-round; hours vary by activity**Admission** Varies by activity**Appeal by Age Groups**

Preschool ★★★	Teens ★★★★★	Over 30 ★★★★★
Grade School ★★★★★	Young Adults ★★★★★	Seniors ★★★

Touring Time Average 1 day; minimum 1½ hours

Rainy-day Touring Not great **Restaurants** Yes **Alcoholic Beverages** In some restaurants **Disabled Access** Yes **Wheelchair Rental** Yes **Baby Stroller Rental** No **Lockers** Yes **Pet Kennels** No; leashed pets allowed in summer **Rain Check** No **Private Tours** No

Description and Comments There's little to remind visitors of the 1960 Winter Olympics that were held here, but there's plenty to do year-round. Summer activities include an aerial tram ride to the High Camp Bath and Tennis Club, where you can swim, mountain bike, play tennis, and bungee jump—all at an altitude of 8,200 feet. In winter, don't miss the chance to ice skate in the beautiful outdoor Olympic Ice Pavilion (it's even open in summer). The Headwall Climbing Wall (call (530) 583-7673) is an indoor climbing wall at the cable-car building with both easy and difficult routes; harness and ropes are supplied, and climbing shoes can be rented. And, of course, there's the skiing, some of the best in the West, with spectacular views of the lake. Kids get their own ski area, Children's World, with a playground, ski school, day-care center, and complete facilities.

Tahoe Amusement Park

2401 Lake Tahoe Boulevard, South Lake Tahoe; (530) 541-1300

Hours Off-season: daily, 11 a.m.–6 p.m.; summer: daily, 10 a.m.–10 p.m.

Admission Varies by ride

Appeal by Age Groups

Preschool ★★★★★	Teens ★★★	Over 30 ★
Grade School ★★★★★	Young Adults ★	Seniors ★

Touring Time Average 2 hours; minimum 1 hour

Rainy-day Touring Very poor **Restaurants** Snack bar and picnic area **Alcoholic Beverages** No **Disabled Access** Yes **Wheelchair Rental** No **Baby Stroller Rental** No **Lockers** No **Pet Kennels** No **Rain Check** Yes **Private Tours** No

Description and Comments It's just a small facility (11 rides), but the mini–Ferris wheel, slide, merry-go-round, electric golf, and mini-golf make for a nice afternoon. It's a reminder of how far a few small rides can carry vacationing kids.

Tallac Historic Site

Highway 89, 3.5 miles north of South Lake Tahoe, next to Camp Richardson; (530) 541-5227

Hours Late May–early September: daily, 10 a.m.–4 p.m.; closed Tuesdays

Admission Free

Appeal by Age Groups

Preschool ★★	Teens ★★★	Over 30 ★★★★★
Grade School ★★★	Young Adults ★★★★★	Seniors ★★★★★

Touring Time Average 2 hours; minimum 45 minutes

Rainy-day Touring Yes, places to escape from rain **Restaurants** Adjacent **Alcoholic Beverages** At restaurant **Disabled Access** About half of buildings **Wheelchair Rental** No **Baby Stroller Rental** No **Lockers** No **Pet Kennels** No; leashed pets allowed **Rain Check** No **Private Tours** Yes

Description and Comments There are several mansion museums in the Tahoe area, but the most interesting with children is a three-building complex in South Lake Tahoe called Tallac Historic Site. It's accessible by paved bike paths from the town and is adjacent to white-sand beaches and a couple of easy hiking trails, so it makes for a nice destination for a bike ride or combination sight-seeing/swimming/hiking afternoon. The buildings are composed of a 1921 "log cabin" estate that is now a museum, with exhibits on Washoe Indians and the history of the estate owners; an 1894 mansion retreat still in the process of being restored; and a 1923 estate used for music and arts events, where you'll find several cabins turned over to crafts and arts exhibits and workshops for children.

Family-Friendly Restaurants

Beacon Restaurant

Richardson's Resort, 1900 Jameson Beach Road, South Lake Tahoe; (530) 541-0630

Meals Served Lunch, dinner, and weekend brunch **Cuisine** American **Entree Range** Lunch and dinner, \$6–\$25 **Kids' Menu** Yes **Reservations** Recommended **Payment** MC, V, D

Sitting on the deck here, eye-level with that blue, blue lake, watching kids in their bathing suits pad barefoot and dripping up to the takeout window for a snow cone—it all made us want to be a kids again. Then again, watching the gang of 20-somethings laughing over margaritas made us want to be footloose and single again. But then, as we looked around our own table at the contented smiles as we scarfed down our just-fine summer-vacation food in a carefree, boat-and-beachy setting, we were, of course, happy to be who we are and where we were.

The Bridge Tender

30 North Lake Boulevard, Tahoe City; (530) 583-3342

Meals Served Lunch and dinner **Cuisine** American **Entree Range** \$5–\$10 **Kids' Menu** No **Reservations** Not accepted **Payment** D, MC, V

A noisy, casual locals hangout in the heart of Tahoe City, the Bridge Tender is known for its delicious, messy burgers, its ribs, its onion rings, its mountain-folk bar scene, and its location right next to Fanny Bridge—so named for the dozens of fannies sticking up in the air on summer days as people lean over the bridge to see (and feed) the huge spawning trout. Older kids will like the food and scene at this place, and little ones will love tossing bread crumbs down to the fish.

Ernie's Coffee Shop*1146 Emerald Bay Road, South Lake Tahoe; (530) 541-2161*

Meals Served Breakfast and lunch **Cuisine** American/coffee shop
Entree Range \$5–\$10 **Kids' Menu** Yes **Reservations** Not necessary
Payment No credit cards

Just a place where neighbors gather to drink coffee and chew the fat before the day gets too far along. You and the kids will be comfortable here.

Fire Sign Cafe*1785 West Lake Boulevard, Tahoe City; (530) 583-0871*

Meals Served Breakfast and lunch **Cuisine** American **Entree Range** \$5–\$9 **Kids' Menu** Yes **Reservations** Not accepted **Payment** MC, V

A good stop between hikes, this modern coffee shop has a nice woodsy atmosphere and an outside deck for summertime. Choices include teriyaki steak, a turkey club sandwich, veggie baked potatoes, and awesome breakfasts, especially the buckwheat pancakes and lattes. The staff brings out a basket of toys and crayons for kids. Expect a wait on Sunday morning.

Lakehouse Pizza*120 Grove Street, Tahoe City; (530) 583-2222*

Meals Served Breakfast, lunch, and dinner **Cuisine** American **Entree Range** Lunch and dinner, \$6–\$9; pizzas \$8–\$22 **Kids' Menu** No **Reservations** Not accepted **Payment** AE, MC, V

Only in Lake Tahoe can you find a modest pizza parlor with terrific outdoor deck dining right at the water's edge. Straightforward pizza, pastas, and Chinese chicken salads. Sometimes they'll give the kids some pizza dough to play with, which was a huge hit with the four-year-old at the next table the last time we were there.

Monument Peak Restaurant*Heavenly Ski Resort, Ski Run Boulevard, South Lake Tahoe; (530) 544-6263*

Meals Served Lunch and dinner **Cuisine** Californian/American **Entree Range** Lunch, \$8–\$10; dinner, \$20–\$35 **Kids' Menu** Yes **Reservations** Required for dinner **Payment** All major credit cards

Although the fun is in the getting here on the aerial tram, it's not a bad restaurant considering how far the staff has to come to cook. And you can't beat the view. It's a special-event-feeling place at dinner, when the steak and seafood dishes get pricey; for families with younger kids, it's best at lunch.