



Visiting Yosemite in Winter

Winter is a magical time of year to visit Yosemite. There are many recreational opportunities such as skiing, snowshoeing, and ice skating. However, these activities can present numerous safety concerns and require appropriate preparation in advance of your trip.

Areas to Visit

During the winter Yosemite Valley, Wawona, Hetch Hetchy, and Big Oak Flat areas remain accessible by car, weather permitting. From mid-December through March, the Glacier Point/Badger Pass Road is plowed to the Yosemite Ski & Snowboard Area (formerly Badger Pass Ski Area), where downhill and cross-country skiing, along with snowshoeing are popular.

Short on time? Walk to the base of Lower Yosemite Fall, take the 2 hour sightseeing tour by bus, visit the Yosemite Valley Visitor Center and Yosemite Museum, go ice skating, or snow tubing (Yosemite Ski & Snowboard Area, formerly Badger Pass Ski Area).

More time to visit? Moderate activities include hiking to Mirror Lake, snowshoeing (on your own or with a ranger), skiing, or hiking to the Vernal Falls Footbridge (may be icy).

Have a day or more in the park? Strenuous activities include hiking to Columbia Rock along the Yosemite Falls Trail, visiting a sequoia grove, exploring the wilderness in winter (experience required), or cross-country skiing. Or, take the time to visit other areas of the park!

Winter Driving

Snowy or icy road conditions are common in Yosemite from late fall through early spring. When these conditions exist, federal and state regulations require that you use chains or cables in order to reduce the chances of accidents. Chain requirements are strictly enforced. We strongly recommend that you have chains when visiting Yosemite from November through March; road conditions can change at any time.

You must have tire chains or cables in your possession when entering a designated chain control area, even if you're driving a four-wheel drive or rental vehicle. Conditions dictate when chains are required, therefore, it's not possible to predict if chains will be required ahead of time.

- R1: Chains are required - snow tread tires allowed (without chains).
- R2: Chains are required on all vehicles except four wheel drive vehicles with snow tires on all four wheels.
- R3: Chains are required - all vehicles - no exceptions.

Check current road conditions by calling 209/372-0200 (press option 1, and then 1 again). For roads outside of Yosemite National Park call Caltrans at 800/427-7623.

For more information visit: <http://www.nps.gov/yose/planyourvisit/chains.htm>

Wilderness Trips in Winter

From December through April, backpacking in Yosemite nearly always involves snow camping and travel by skis or snowshoes. Even in May, if you want to avoid snow, you're likely to be limited to trailheads in Yosemite Valley, Wawona, and Hetch Hetchy, and, even then, you'll have a difficult time finding multi-night, snow-free trips.

Most winter users enjoy the marked winter trails around the Yosemite Ski & Snowboard Area (formerly Badger Pass - elevation 7,200 feet) and Crane Flat (6,200 feet). Roads are maintained in these areas, although chains are often required. Each area has beginner, intermediate, and advanced trails, which range in length from less than one mile to over 20 miles round-trip. These trails are marked with colored triangular or rectangular signs in trees. Most summer trails cannot be seen or easily followed in winter.

While Tioga Road and destinations in the high country are inaccessible by car, advanced skiers and snowshoers can head towards Tuolumne Meadows. There are potential for avalanche hazards in the high country so users should be competent in avalanche assessment, winter backcountry travel, route finding, and winter camping. Carry emergency equipment, such as a signal mirror, whistle, waterproof matches, emergency space blanket, and a flashlight/headlamp (with extra batteries). Drink plenty of water and carry extra. Eat and carry high energy food.

Wilderness permits, which are required for all overnight Wilderness trips in Yosemite, may be obtained at the Big Oak Flat Information Station, Yosemite Valley Visitor Center, Badger Pass Ranger Station, Wawona Visitor Center, or Hetch Hetchy Entrance Station. Please register at the station closest to your starting point. From November through April, wilderness permit reservations are not necessary or available.

In winter, bear containers are only available for rent in the Yosemite Valley Visitor Center, so if you aren't renting from there, you will need to bring your own. Additionally, be prepared to dig through snow to bury human waste or pack it out in appropriate containers. For more information, visit: <http://www.nps.gov/yose/planyourvisit/wildwinter.htm>

Winter Clothing and Safety Gear

Expect icy conditions in winter. Traction devices for your shoes are recommended. Always remove traction devices when enter buildings as they become very slippery on floors. Use trekking poles to enhance your stability on icy trails. Wear waterproof footwear with good tread when hiking and snowshoes if the snow is deep. Check in at the visitor center for current conditions.

Clothing: Always dress in layers so that you can add clothing when cold, and remove clothing when too hot. Sweating from exertion and getting wet is a danger in cold temperatures. Wear proper clothing (no cotton). Synthetic or wool clothing keeps you warm when wet. Always keep an extra layer of warm, dry clothing in your backpack if hiking or backpacking. Wear or carry a hat, sunglasses, sunscreen, gloves, warm jacket, and raingear (both jacket and pants). Be prepared for sudden changes in weather.

Skating and Skiing: Whether you are a child or adult new to skating, you should always wear a helmet to protect yourself during a fall. Wear waterproof winter pants, gloves, and jackets when skiing. Helmets are recommended for skiing, especially for those new to the sport.



Be Prepared

Be prepared for visiting Yosemite in winter! Use common sense and caution when planning a trip, keeping the weakest member of your group in mind.

- Choose a reasonable route-know your limitations. Keep in mind your physical condition and winter travel experience
- Let someone know your plans and when you are due back. Don't go out alone unless you are very experienced.
- Do not separate from your group. Watch out for each other. Know the symptoms of hypothermia and acute mountain sickness.
- Carry and know how to use a map and compass. Be prepared to spend a night out if necessary.

