

Hike up to Paradise

Climbing up cliffs and unusual rock formations and gazing down at the valley fed by massive waterfalls may sound like a fairytale but it is the Yosemite National Park we are talking about. **Tarini Pal** recalls her last visit to the park with her family that was not less than an unforgettable wild ride.

Photographs by **Aditi Pal**

If you see a bear in a developed area, make as much noise as possible by yelling or banging pots to scare it away – read one of the safety tips on a placard titled ‘Bear Safety’ at the Curry Village Registration Desk. Among the luggage that my family brought to Yosemite had everything from thermal clothes to a rather questionable banana. It hadn’t occurred to any of us, however, to bring along a bear-repelling pot.

Near the eastern border of central California, nestled in the rough Sierra Nevada, lies Yosemite National Park. Established in 1890, the park delights with its waterfalls, granite structures and giant sequoias among other wild things.

The park can be divided into five distinct areas of attraction: Yosemite Valley, Wawona and Mariposa Grove, Glacier Point, Tioga Road and

Tuolumne Meadows and HetchHetchy. Whether one is looking for a humble cabin or a luxurious hotel room, Yosemite offers both. We had booked accommodation at Curry Village.

Getting around Yosemite Valley was quite easy, courtesy of the free hybrid shuttle bus system. We boarded the green vehicle, which conveniently dropped us off at the trailhead to the base of Lower Yosemite Falls. A fairly easy walk, it offered us impressive views of both the upper and lower falls, which, combined by an intermediate cascade, make a striking waterfall – the tallest in North America. Another, slightly longer trail we set out on, led us to Mirror Lake. As the name suggests, the lake presented us with spectacular views and mirror reflections of Half Dome, Yosemite’s iconic granite structure.

I dragged myself out of bed early in the morning, on the day of our long trek. It was established, as we soon as we got to Yosemite, that I would accompany my father on one of the more challenging trails. He had decided that we would embark upon the Panorama Trail, an 8.5 mile long trail that begins at Glacier Point and ends in Yosemite Valley, which provides a close-up view of Illilouette Fall in eastern Yosemite Valley, before joining the Mist Trail down past Nevada and Vernal Falls.

All the other views of Yosemite Valley that we got paled in comparison to the one we were presented with at Glacier Point. At 3,214 feet above the valley floor, it affords a breathtaking overlook of the valley, and Yosemite’s high country. Standing at the eastern end of the valley was Half Dome, at an elevation of 8,842 feet. Millions of years ago,

Half Dome from Yosemite Valley



Illilouette Fall



Illilouette Creek



Half Dome from Glacier Point



Western Grey Squirrel

vital info

Open all year around, the Yosemite Valley is the pride of the US. Known around the world for its waterfalls, cliffs and unusual rock formations, it can be reached via Highway 41 from Fresno, Highway 140 from Merced, and Highway 120 west from Manteca. The massive cliff faces like El Capitan and Half Dome are intriguingly unique. The plunging waterfalls include Yosemite Falls, the tallest waterfall in North America and Vernal and/or Nevada Falls. You will be awestruck by El Capitan, the massive granite monolith that stands 3,593 feet from base to summit. So, whether you explore the valley by foot, car or with a tour, the scenery will leave you eager to see what's around the next corner.

Entrance Fees (Reservations are not required to enter)

Vehicle: US\$ 20 (valid for 7 days)

Individual: US\$ 10 (bus, on foot, bicycle, motorcycle, horse, valid for 7 days)

Campground Reservations: www.recreation.gov

Lodging Reservations: www.yosemitepark.com

the glinting granite of Half Dome crystallized deep within the earth under miles of overlying rock. Forces of uplift, erosion from rivers and glaciers, and rock fall shaped this weirdly distinctive landmark into what we see today, which quite literally sticks out like a sore, but grand thumb.

After our standard family photo session, my father and I set forth on our trail like a couple of pilgrims, under the beating heat, armed with nothing more than a packet of cranberry flavored trail-mix. Our first stop was Illilouette Fall, a lesser-known treasure, not visible from any road. After we braved the dangers of wandering out onto the edge of a small sloping cliff to catch a decent view of the fall, we made our way down to a footbridge that crossed over a run of delicate cascades at Illilouette Creek.

The course of the Merced River through

Yosemite Valley begins with what is often called the Giant Staircase. We reached a clearing where the turbulent river shot off a high precipice, and thundered its way down in an epic free fall before it smacked into stone below, throwing up a ridiculous amount of mist. To add to this remarkable spectacle was a man, sitting at the edge of the rock face, meditating to the sheer sound of the first step: Nevada Fall. Downstream of Nevada Fall, the river surged over another overhang, into a cascading curtain of white water, the final step: Vernal Fall.

It was then time for our path to converge with the Mist Trail. A lady on her way back from the trail offered me her recyclable rain gear. I was told, before I even got to Yosemite, that walking this legendary trail would be equivalent to jumping into a swimming pool. Let's just say, as I made my way down the slippery granite steps, all I could think

was, thank God for the woman's poncho.

With the steps, ended the spray. We crossed another footbridge and completed the last stretch of our trail, to finally reach the valley floor, beaming with pride at our exceptional fitness. We woke up the next morning, however, to find that neither of us could walk.

John Muir, a Scottish-born American naturalist and author, whose activism helped save the Yosemite Valley, once wrote, "As long as I live, I'll hear waterfalls and birds and winds sing. I'll interpret the rocks; learn the language of flood, storm and the avalanche. I'll acquaint myself with the glaciers and wild gardens, and get as near the heart of the world as I can". As I hobbled my way into the car to leave, I couldn't help but feel a tremendous peace of mind; getting as near to the heart of the world as I could was definitely worth a pair of sore legs. —