

*Hibba al Kindi recommends*

# THE SIERRA NEVADA, US

What had I got myself into? That's what I thought when I found myself in a car with a bunch of strangers and forced to listen to what might as well have been the world's worst music. A couple of months earlier, being a lonely freshman at the time, I had decided to sign up for a rock-climbing trip in the hope of an adventure and in fear of not having any plans for spring break. But after going through mid-terms, the only thing that I wanted to do was to lie in bed and binge watch all the TV in the world. Unfortunately, it was too late to cancel.

So after a two-day drive from Pullman, Washington, to California state, I was shocked when I got out of the car and found what seemed to look like the area behind our house in Al Amerat, near Muscat. Except for the fact that it wasn't as hot and the mountains were actually covered in snow. Fast-forward a couple of days, with all the fresh air in the world, the breath-taking scenery and I was in love with the Sierra Nevadas!

The Sierra Nevada, home of Mount Whitney, the highest point in the contiguous United States, is a major mountain range in the western part of the country. The majority of the range runs along the edge of the state of California, while the Carson Range lies in the state of Nevada. Running 640km north to south and approximately 110km across east to west, the high Sierra peaks at 14,505 feet (4,421 metres) at Mount Whitney. Translating to "snowy mountain range", the Sierra Nevada is home to three national parks, 20 wilderness areas and two national monuments. The range's most notable features include Lake Tahoe, the largest alpine lake in North America, Mount Whitney and Yosemite Valley.

**My favourite place** Located towards the east of the Sierra, a range of hills and rock formations, known as the Alabama Hills, were definitely my favourite. Not only did the hills mark my first "official" rock climbing experience (after so many failed tries), they are actually known for their very unusual looking rocks that were featured in some western and sci-fi films. Two particular rocks that stood out were the Mobius Arch (known as the arch that frames Mount Whitney) and Shark's Fin rock, which was exhilarating to climb.

**Highlights** Rock climbing, hiking, cycling; you name it! Think of an outdoor activity and the Sierra Nevada probably offers it. With year-round activities that suit all ages and interests, the Sierra Nevada can be described as the "outdoor adventurer's wonderland". If you love trees, then you are in luck because the Sierras happen to have the world's largest and oldest trees. Visit the Ancient Bristlecone Pine Forest, home of the 5,000-year-old beautifully twisted bristlecone pine trees. And make sure to visit the world's largest trees, the Sequoia trees at the Sequoia National Park, where you can see General Sherman Tree, the largest known living single stem tree on earth, stretching up a dizzyingly height of 83.8 metres. A visit to Yosemite National Park to stand at Tunnel View, an outlook where you can see the iconic waterfall Bridalveil Fall and the famous granite hills, is also a must.

**Lowlights** Although the weather is cooler than Oman, you are still at risk of heat exhaustion, so make sure you wear sunscreen and stay hydrated. If you decide to camp outdoors, be warned that temperatures drop below 9°C (48.2°F) at night, so take the necessary precautions to keep yourself warm. Also, since the state of California is in a drought, make sure to check with the campsite's rules and guidelines regarding fires so you don't miss out on roasting marshmallows.

**Souvenirs** Towns surrounding the Sierras are packed with gift shops that sell all of your cliché touristy souvenirs. But what I really found interesting were some antique stores, which had all sorts of vintage items from coins to jewellery to old letters and photographs.

**Where to stay** Various hotels, guest houses, hostels, motels, bed and breakfasts and campsites are available to choose from. I camped out in various camp sites surrounding the Sierras. I strongly recommend camping out, not only are S'mores (a traditional nighttime campfire treat popular in the US and Canada, which consists of a roasted marshmallow and a layer of chocolate sandwiched between two Graham crackers – a sweet wholewheat type biscuit) great, but the night sky full of stars is to die for.



ROCKCLIMBING IN THE ALABAMA HILLS



HOLIDAY LODGE IN THE SIERRA NEVADA



STUNNING ROCK FORMATIONS IN THE ALABAMA HILLS