### Half Dome

Half Dome is the iconic symbol of Yosemite. It rises more than 4,737 feet (1,444 m) above the floor of Yosemite Valley, and looks like a perfect dome that has lost one side. Although visible from most places in the park, one of the best views is from Glacier Point on the south side of the valley.

For many years, Half Dome’s smooth granite surface appeared totally inaccessible to climbers, but it was finally conquered in 1875 by drilling and placing iron eyebolts into the rock. Nowadays thousands of hikers reach the top each year with the aid of steel cables that act as handholds. The route has become so popular that it’s now necessary to obtain a climbing permit in advance.

For the less energetic, viewing Half Dome from the valley floor and other vantage points in the park remains an unforgettable sight.

### Yosemite Valley

Yosemite Valley is the main tourist attraction in Yosemite National Park. Surrounded by high granite summits, including Half Dome and El Capitan, the floor of the valley features both forest and lush meadows. Many high waterfalls cascade from surrounding cliffs, and are particularly spectacular in spring when water flow is at its peak as snow melts off the Sierra Nevada.

The high volume of visitors detracts somewhat from the spectacular beauty of the surroundings. The wise visitor will quickly move on to less crowded locations, such as Glacier Point, one hour’s drive away. Glacier Point offers close-up views of Half Dome and a bird’s-eye view of the valley floor 3,200 feet (975 m) below.

Also close by is Mariposa Grove where you can wander among ancient giant sequoias, often accompanied only by the local wildlife.

### Climate

Because of its high elevation (ranging from 4,000 to 9,945 feet / 1,219–3,031 m), you can find yourself literally with your head in the clouds, one day bathed in brilliant sunshine, the next in swirling mist and drizzle. Summers are hot in Yosemite Valley, but cold in Winter.

Yosemite Valley is accessible all year round, but snow falls in winter, and tire chains are often required on park roads. Snow closes the roads to Glacier Point and Tioga Pass generally from November to May.

When the snow starts to melt in spring, creeks and rivers are rushing with water. Small, unnamed waterfalls and cascades appear all along the valley rim. The major waterfalls reach the peak runoff in May or June.