



JOHN WALKER TNS

Scott Gediman, Yosemite Park public information officer, speaks during the dedication of the 1917 Chinese laundry building at Wawona on Oct. 1, 2021. The building, principally used to service the Wawona Hotel, was also used for various purposes over the years and was rededicated to tell the story of Chinese American contributions to Yosemite's history.

168-year-old Yosemite National Park hotel is closing. What to know about the Wawona

BY JOSHUA TEHEE
The Sacramento Bee

A historic piece of Yosemite lodging is getting an indefinite closure in December as the National Park Service conducts a “comprehensive condition assessment” on the 168-year-old Wawona Hotel complex.

The park recently started work on a roof replace-

ment project for the main hotel building inside the national park in Central California.

That process “revealed the need for more intensive investigation and assessment of the hotel,” the park service said in a social media post.

The closure takes effect Dec. 2, and room cancellations have already been made for guests with future reservations, accord-

ing to the website travelyosemite.com.

There is no word on when the hotel might reopen.

California’s original mountain lodging The Wawona Hotel is 30 minutes from Yosemite Valley near Mariposa Grove and the southern entrance to the park on Highway 41.

The hotel serves as a step back in time.

It’s one of the state’s original mountain resorts, with a history that can be traced back to 1856 and the establishment of Clark’s Station, which provided lodging and refreshment for travelers going to Yosemite Valley.

Clark’s Station was renamed Wawona (the native word for big trees) in 1882 by the wife of Henry Washburn, who owned the hotel at the

time and was responsible for construction of its main building, which was done in Victorian style popular on the East Coast.

Side note: Washburn’s grandniece, the actress Wawona Washburn Hartwig, was born at the hotel in 1914 and got her start in Hollywood as a stunt double in the 1929 film “Tiger Rose,” which was filmed at Yosemite’s Mariposa Grove.

For comparison, Yosemite’s other historic hotel, The Ahwahnee in Yosemite Valley, opened in 1927.

Over the years, the Wawona complex expanded to include not only the hotel (its 104 rooms are set off a wrap-around porch with Adirondack chairs for guests), but also an antique Chinese laundry building (which reopened to the public in 2022), a nine-hole golf course, swimming pool and riding stables. It became a landmark spot for tourists in the park, visited by no less than three U.S. presidents.

In recent years, the Wawona has come under threat of wildfire on several occasions. The hotel was evacuated by the Washburn fire, which also threatened Mariposa Grove.

Deterioration of historic structures

News of the hotel’s closure comes following concerns about the deterioration of historic structures in Yosemite due to failures by the company contracted to run hospitality services inside the national park.

In May, SFGate reported that a guest was injured at The Wawona Hotel after a fall caused by faulty railing.

“Extensive deterioration and rot of railings” were identified by the park service in annual evaluations in both 2022 and 2023, according to the SFGate report. There have also been reports of deteriorating conditions at the Ahwahnee Hotel, including pieces of its ceiling falling down.

In 2016, the National Park Service began a 15-year contract with Yosemite Hospitality, LLC, a subsidiary of Aramark, to provide concession services, including operation of lodging properties, inside Yosemite.



ANDY MAJORS

Students from the JazzArts Summer Music Camp in 2024. JazzArts is committed to building a jazz audience in Charlotte through music education, workshops and ensemble opportunities for young musicians.



ANDY MAJORS

Ravi Coltrane performs as part of The Jazz Room season in 2024. JazzArts Charlotte’s signature jazz series began with one monthly show but now offers four performances a month.

aiming for it to make a comeback in the next three to five years.

LOOKING TOWARDS THE FUTURE

Davis said the organization not only wants to continue contributing to the local arts economy with its monthly shows but also wants to attract visitors to Charlotte as a tourist destination.

JazzArts has become a model for other organizations around the country, something Davis said is an honor. Outside of Charlotte, Davis also recently finished a two-year term as board president of the Jazz Education Network, a global community advocating for expanded jazz education and performance.

Among her goals for JazzArts is working toward a day when it has its own center for jazz in Charlotte to present educational programs and host the community.

But the recent devastation in Western North Carolina from Hurricane Helene has also been a surreal reminder for Davis. The New Orleans native relocated with her family to Charlotte in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

“It’s really heartbreaking and... I feel the pain of that community and our state very deeply,” Davis told The Observer during her

interview a week after the hurricane made landfall.

“My heart personally goes out to everyone experiencing loss and you know trying to recover... or looking for their loved ones... and don’t know where they are right now. I know that, I know that too well.”

The organization is discussing how it can support the people of North Carolina who are dealing with the hurricane’s aftermath. Davis hopes it can be something meaningful “that will help them to... move forward from this tragedy.”

That’s something she managed to do herself many years ago with her vision for JazzArts Charlotte. And 15 years later, Davis is still looking for ways to use music to bring the community together.

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ANNIVERSARY

roots, Davis said.

It’s also a free program, thanks to grants from the Arts & Science Council, NC Arts Council and the Albemarle Foundation.

HOW JAZZARTS IS MARKING ITS 15TH ANNIVERSARY

The organization is adding several educational and financial initiatives as it ushers in its 15th year. A new adult webinar series will debut in spring 2025.

Davis said one thing that sets JazzArts Charlotte apart from some other jazz organizations around the country is how it aims to provide educational opportunities for adults as well as youths.

“As part of our model, it’s important that we educate everyone.”

JazzArts Charlotte is also introducing a band

director academy next spring, in partnership with Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools, to enrich music education through work with local band and orchestra directors. That program is possible with support from the National Endowment for the Arts.

The organization recently introduced merit-based scholarships that offer full tuition for JazzArts programs to reward the hard work by some of the community’s most dedicated young musicians. That’s in addition to existing financial aid opportunities for youth programs.

Davis said JazzArts is also rolling out a new Legacy Society, providing opportunities for donors to contribute to the organization’s endowment “to help secure long-term stability

for this music and the work that we do in the rich tradition of jazz in our community.”

According to its latest Impact Report, the organization had a shortfall of more than \$117,000 during its last fiscal year. Davis said the Legacy Society is one of a number of strategies the organization has implemented to address this concern.

On the performance side, Davis said JazzArts will highlight fan favorites during its upcoming season of The Jazz Room. This will include “spotlighting some of the most beloved musicians that we have featured over the years,” she said.

“Our audience can expect new collaborations with familiar artists that really helped to shape... what The Jazz Room has become.”

In November, a special alumni concert will feature former students who are now professional mu-

sicians performing around the globe.

Other events this season include the popular family-friendly holiday show “Piano Night, A Charlie Brown Christmas, featuring the music of Vince Guaraldi.”

For Valentine’s Day weekend, Charlotte’s own rising star, saxophonist Adrian Crutchfield returns to play a special concert dedicated to the music of Grover Washington Jr. Crutchfield’s resume includes collaborations with artists including Branford Marsalis, Bette Midler and Prince.

And in March, acclaimed saxophonist and vocalist Camille Thurman, who previously performed at the Charlotte Jazz Festival, will make her Jazz Room debut.

That festival last took place in 2019 and was previously organized by Blumenthal Arts. Davis said she’d like to bring it back to the city, and is