

ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS

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Getting to The Yosemite The Very Heart of the Earth

By Bernie Bacosa

Imagine an area of wilderness that is bigger than the whole of Metro Manila or even larger than the Philippines' largest city, Puerto Princesa. Such is the Yosemite National Park and it is considered by many to be America's finest national park. The highest waterfalls in America, Yosemite Falls, plus five other waterfalls stream down the Park's luminous granite rocks. The world's most famous vertical rock faces which are the Vatican or Mecca of rock climbers are towers (some higher than 3,000 feet) that define Yosemite. A colony of the earth's largest organism of all time, the giant sequoia tree, inhabits Yosemite Park.

Ninety-five percent of the Yosemite is wilderness, as set by law to be left in its natural state; "where human activities are restricted to scientific study and non-mechanized recreation; and only horses are permitted". This setting allotted 152 square miles or five percent of Yosemite's 1,169 square miles land as the part where my wife, Nancy, and I and the Park's annual 3.5 million visitors toured in a motorized vehicle.

Aside from scenic drives, "things to do" at Yosemite for those who are not rock climbers are biking, hiking, backpacking, rafting, fishing, horseback riding, winter sports, arts and photography. There are more than thirty five magnificent vistas to revere in Yosemite. *"The great rocks of Yosemite, expressing qualities of timeless, yet intimate grandeur, are the most compelling formations of their kind. We should not casually pass them by for they are the very heart of the earth speaking to us."* Those words were said by world-renowned photographer Ansel Adams about the Park that he immortalized in his photos.

In this age of the internet, it is best to let your keyboard do the clicking first before visiting a place and so I surfed:

- ✓ *Wikipedia (<http://en.wikipedia.org/>), a fundamental encyclopedia-website;*
- ✓ *the U.S. government National Park Service's website, for directions to and conditions about Yosemite <http://www.nps.gov/yose/>; and*
- ✓ *the website of Yosemite Park's visitor services concessionaire, <http://www.yosemitepark.com>, for information about lodging.*

With just a few days for a visit, I also read useful tips from New York Times travel section, <http://travel.nytimes.com/>. Here's a scoop that also saved me a lot of dollars during my visit to many places and to Yosemite: <http://www.tripadvisor.com/> showed me credible rankings, reviews and pictures of hotels, inns or specialty lodgings that are submitted by the places' visitors.

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Many tales have been spun around it, but none is as incredible as the reality of the massive rocks that tower beyond heaven's floor... none as captivating as the meadows with their fiery mantle in spring.... and none as wild as the feral creatures that call it home. Ah, Yosemite- taller than the sky, wider than space, freer than the spirit, prettier than beauty. It beckons to you, now... while the sky that hovers above is still blue, while the waters that ripple through the streams are still clear, while the air is still crisp, while the evergreen forests are still lush, while the fields of wild grass still zealously hug the ground below. Beware of the spell that might engulf you, though, for many a breath has been taken away before it shall have taken away yours. But let go in the magic, for you are one of the very lucky few to witness nature's embodiment of the earth's soul.

Alas, time and tide waits for none!

Gerry Abenes, Editor

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

By this time, Bernie Bacosa needs no introduction. Needless to say, he has been a regular contributor of this website – as photographer of events (Pismo) and nature (see his photographs at the Art Works portion). He has also written a "thesis" on servant leadership, and you may read the full article in Features 16.



1 "Thunderstorm, Yosemite Valley" by Ansel Adams (see www.anseladams.com)

It was mainly because of inspiration from the photographs of Pareng Ansel Adams that Nancy and I decided to go to Yosemite. But Pareng Ansel, who passed away before I even had a chance to meet him, did not write the directions to the spots where he took his world famous Yosemite photos. Luckily, a book written by Michael Frye entitled "*The Photographer's Guide to Yosemite*" provides the directions. It also has guides on how to shoot a scene.

Frye's book is temporarily out of stock and Amazon.com says "Order now and we'll deliver when available." If you want to visit Yosemite, you may want to order it right away - for \$8.95 plus shipping cost - so that you may read the book before you get to Yosemite a few months from now.

Summer and public holidays, when throngs of people and motor vehicles are lined up in parking, viewing and eating places, are the worst times to visit Yosemite. Spring, when flowers are blooming and the waterfalls are streaming strongly, is the best time to go there. References say that to see splashes of the color of autumn, the best bet is late October to early November. For winter visits to Yosemite, call (209) 372-0200 to check the road conditions and the weather forecast.

It would be superb to stay in a lodging within or really close to the Park. If you have accommodations within or close to Yosemite, you can have delightful dinners, evening walks or even campfires in the Park. Before booking a lodging near Yosemite, however, check its accessibility from the Park's crown jewel and central area, the Yosemite Valley.

For those who are not into backpacking and camping, you can choose modest to upscale accommodations within the Park. Tent cabin accommodations are \$76+ per night. Hotel accommodations range from \$114 per night to \$500+ per night. But you have to book your lodging weeks in advance. Modest accommodations are fully booked three to four months ahead. You can avoid travel-agent fees by reserving directly through <http://www.yosemitepark.com/Reservations.aspx>.

Nancy and I stayed in a tent cabin at Yosemite's Housekeeping Camp. Each cabin has two comfortable double-deck beds in the enclosed bed room and a roofed but not walled dining/living area. Cabin guests share the regularly cleaned common bathrooms and toilets spread out in the camp. Each tent cabin has a fire pit on its front lawn. The finest tent-cabins are the ones right near the river with this amazing view.

When we were there, I would take photos at dawn until about eight thirty in the morning, go back to our cabin, wake up Nancy, and utterly enjoy the flavor of coffee with the charming scenes of Yosemite in front of me. After taking our showers, I would take photos again as we drove from one magnificent view to another, or as we take a leisurely hike. I would shoot photos until sunset. In the evenings, we would roast hotdogs and marshmallows and drink wine by the fire pit a few meters from the river. Talk about romantic evenings and the bedroom party after that. Almost a year since then, however, I have never eaten a piece of hotdog as I have had more than my fill of it.

Having touched on food and shelter necessities for the body, let me dwell on matters of the mind and spirit.

There are universal principles that renowned photographers like Ansel Adams have practiced in taking photos and these same principles, I discern, have been applied in Yosemite Park's operation:

1. Work on your subject –

A serious photographer spends adequate time with his subject. Instead of dashing from one area to another for quick shots, he sticks with extra-special subjects until he either runs out of compositions or runs out of good light. Ansel Adams often camped overnight, set up his gear by the break of dawn and spent long hours taking photos of his subject. He habitually worked for eighteen or more hours per day, for days and weeks on end.

Similarly, the composition of Yosemite's operation right now was not done through quick shot projects but through the lifetime efforts and vigilance of champions. John Muir tirelessly worked for the conversion of Yosemite to a national park. Stephen Mather established the government agency that oversees national parks, the National Parks Service, and managed Yosemite to become a recreational and protected wonderland. Ansel Adams did not only take photos of the Yosemite, he lobbied the Congress, Presidents and National Parks Service of the U.S. for the sustainable management of the Park for more than seventy years.

2. Balance the essential elements

An expert photographer like Adams sensibly puts together the appropriate mix among elements like subject, viewpoint, composition, lighting, lines, shapes, tone, color, camera angle, lens opening, shutter speed, etc. to be able to disclose what he saw in a compelling or beautiful way.

In the same vein, Yosemite, as it is disclosed today, is the result of the effective combination of elements from the direction of the National Park Service; the support of private sector members of the Yosemite Association; the fundraising projects of the Yosemite Fund; the services of 70,000 persons who volunteer their talents; the educational outreach under the Yosemite Institute; the exhibition of photographs and works of art in the Ansel Adams Gallery and the Yosemite Museum; and the responsible operation of hotels and tourist services by the private concessionaires of the Park.



2 "View from Housekeeping Camp" by Bernardo Bacosa (coming soon at www.bacosastudios.com)

3. Improve continuously –

The Yosemite National Park's management continuously undertakes planning, consultation, education campaign and collaboration efforts (see <http://www.nps.gov/yose/parkmgmt>) that result in various types of projects, from as simple as removing fallen trees, to as complex as the stewardship of the ecosystem for Yosemite's abundant birds, mammals, reptiles, fish, bears and other wildlife.

In the case of distinguished photographers, they regularly evaluate their own photos especially after the excitement of a shooting experience has subsided. They return to scenes of their past photo setbacks in order to re-shoot and get the best shot. They experiment with new techniques or styles and analyze the work of other photographers for ideas on improving their craft. Ansel Adams, for his part, developed his own photography style and technique, served as photographic consultant to various concerns and

produced ten photography manuals, which are among the most influential books ever written on the subject.

People like me (and perhaps like you) who are inspired by the Yosemite and Ansel Adams have an aspiration called “What You See is What You Get”. We see a wonderful view, take a photograph of it and aspire to get a photo print that is the same as what we saw and took a picture of. It does not always turn out that way for our photographs. For our other projects as well, we see great things in excellent places but when we try to make these best things happen in our own turf, we may not always get what we saw. We carry on. The Yosemite rocks are from “*the very heart of the earth speaking to us*” to carefully take in what we see and carry out universal principles to get our best Yosemite photos and projects.



3 Yosemite Valley Tunnel View by Bernardo Bacosa (coming soon at www.bacosastudios.com)



Web note: Bernie & Nancy's tent cabin at Yosemite's Housekeeping Camp. Willie Vergara will lead trip to Yosemite May 26-27 after SF Grand Reunion. If interested, contact Willie at 'tatang_up@hotmail.com' or 916-412-8890.