



FOSSILS TO FALLS: VISITING YOSEMITE, CALIFORNIA



This article was created in partnership with the [Southern Yosemite Visitors Bureau](#), California. All photos by [Emily Sierra Photography](#).

“Hi, do you have the [‘Sandy the Squirrel’ card](#)?” I asked, standing in the [Yosemite National Park](#) Visitor's Center. See, I was on a mission. Essentially a [scavenger hunt](#) leading through Yosemite National Park and beyond. By collecting two or more trading cards, I could win a serious vacation package to return to some of the most [amazing country](#) in the USA! What I didn't know was that this “highway” of sorts would bring me to some incredible places.

MARIPOSA GROVE OF GIANT SEQUOIAS

We hopped on the morning [shuttle](#) and headed up the winding road to crane our necks at some of the most [massive living trees](#) on the planet. One of the first sights in the grove is the "Fallen Monarch". To me, this giant downed tree resembled a large dinosaur that had

fallen—there was just an archaic feeling about it. Moreover, each tree in the grove took on its own personality, illuminated by their name and shape. If I wasn't seeking 'Galen, the Great-Horned Owl' card, I'm not sure I would have explored this natural wonder.



FOSSIL DISCOVERY CENTER

We peered around at over 15,000 fossils in the [Fossil Discovery Center](#) in [Chowchilla](#). Life-size replicas and a variety of exhibits offered us a glimpse into the ecosystem that once ruled the area. We learned about flat-faced bears and dire wolves—species we didn't know existed! Not only did we score our [Fossils to Falls card](#) here, but it was an easy stop on our way back to [San Francisco](#) for our flight home.



VINEYARDS

Who would ever suspect that you'd be able to [sample wines](#) and collect a [cartooned trading card](#)? At [Ficklin Vineyards](#), we did just that. We sampled award-winning port and learned the nuances that delineate port from wine. Almond and pistachio crops dominate the region, but grapes have grown there for a long time also. [Madera County](#) is now establishing itself with tasting rooms and a place to explore wine country. This is a convenient stop while visiting [Yosemite National Park](#).



BASS LAKE

We paddled onto the [lake](#) at sunset and watched the water dance with colors from the sky. It was smooth and easy, and the water was a great temperature for swimming. With more time at [Bass Lake](#),

we'd definitely consider a motorized option for [other lake fun](#) and fishing! It's really no wonder that this lake was named one of "The West's Best Lakes" by *Sunset Magazine*.



“I HAD NO IDEA...!”

I don't recall how many times I used this phrase. Chasing the [‘Fossils to Falls’ trail](#), I visited places I wasn't previously acquainted with. We enjoyed uncrowded areas while visiting [Yosemite National Park](#), and found unique experiences along the way. Collecting the [playing cards](#) was a fun pursuit for us, and I imagine that it would be a wonderful family road trip activity as well.



For more road trip ideas in California's High Sierra, check out our [custom itinerary!](#)