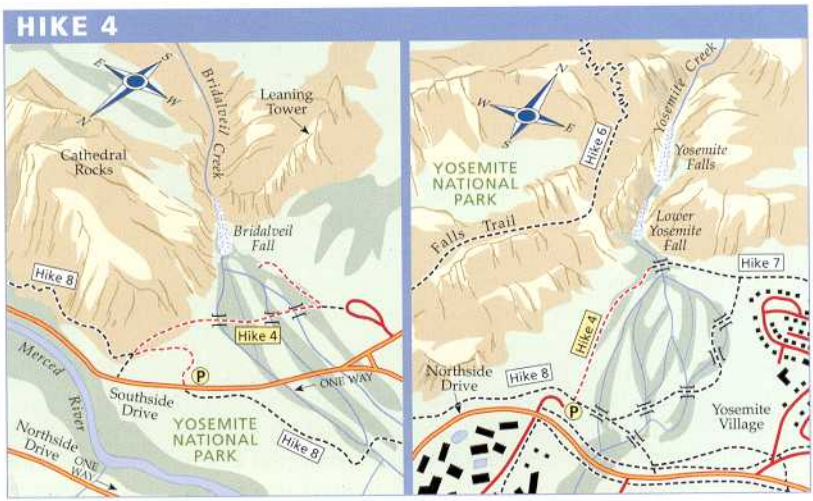
4 Bridalveil Fall and Lower Yosemite Fall

Distance: Up to 2.5 miles round trip
Hiking time: 2 hours
High point: 4065 feet
Elevation gain: 200 feet
Difficulty: Easy
Season: Year-round
Maps: USGS Half Dome, USGS Yosemite Falls
Nearest campground: Sunnyside Walk-In Campground
Information: Yosemite National Park

Call this more of a sightseeing stroll, an endeavor to study and compare two of the world's most popular and photographed waterfalls. Throngs of folks from around the world will be on hand to share the moments of delight with you. Parking will be much easier, and the crowds smaller, if you visit on a weekday, especially after Labor Day or before Memorial Day.

Like most mighty waterfalls, the flights of Bridalveil Fall and Lower Yosemite Fall in spring are loud, incessantly powerful, misty, and the white churning water hides much of the sheer rock cliffs. It's a different story come fall, when both waterfalls become partial screens of streaming water, more subtle, and with streaks of gray contrasting their free falls.

To get there, drive to the west end of Yosemite Valley, where the Bridalveil Fall parking lot is located on State Route 41 (Wawona Road) 100



Bridalveil Fall

feet south of the junction of SR 41 with Southside Drive. If you miss this lot, or if it's full, proceed northeast on Southside Drive and park on the side of the road where other cars are parked.

Paved trails lead from wherever you are parked to the base of the falls. Be sure to walk on all of them, for combined, they feature special views of Bridalveil Fall, an awesome open vista of El Capitan and its rugged and vertical rock face, and three bridges for admiring lovely Bridalveil Creek. The mixed forest features dappled and filtered sunlight, and consists of incense cedars, black oaks, canyon live oaks, California bay trees (fragrant evergreen leaves), white firs, and bigleaf maples.

Resembling a long, exotic veil, Bridalveil Fall nosedives over a shiny and slick, black vertical cliff, V-shaped at the top. When breezes kick up, mist blows into your face and wets your hair. It's especially refreshing on hot summer days. Bridalveil splits into three streams that flow over boulders, and a trio of stone bridges show off their wares.

Hop in your car and drive northeast a short distance on Southside Drive to an often crowded parking lot signed for Swinging Bridge. Park here and stroll over to the bridge for an incomparable view of the meandering Merced River, lined with cottonwoods, fronting Yosemite Falls. Your walk can be lengthened by wandering in the nearby meadow.

Back in your car, proceed through the valley, eventually looping around

to Northside Drive and the large parking lot signed for Lower Yosemite Fall, 0.5 mile west of the Yosemite Valley Visitor Center.

The long and narrow Lower Yosemite Fall is framed by regal conifers, such as incense cedar and ponderosa pine, as the paved path winds toward your goal. After a bit over 0.25 mile, arrive at a bridge spanning Yosemite Creek and a viewing area to photograph the fall. A series of little pools and gentle cascades highlight Yosemite Creek. Because of the exhilarating mist in spring, the boulders are too slippery to safely scramble over to reach the very base of the fall, but by late summer, a lot of folks scurry over them to get a closer look.

5 Inspiration Point, Stanford Point, and Dewey Point

Distance: 10 miles round trip for Dewey Point; 2.6 miles round trip for Inspiration Point
Hiking time: 2–9 hours
High point: 6950 feet
Elevation gain: From 1000 to 3300 feet
Difficulty: Strenuous
Season: Year-round
Map: USGS El Capitan
Nearest campground: Sunnyside Walk-In Campground
Information: Yosemite National Park

Here's a fast way to escape the crowds by heading up a north-facing flank of Yosemite Valley canyon that leads to far-reaching and jaw-dropping views of major place-names normally seen by throngs of tourists below.

For inaugural views of Yosemite Valley seen in privacy, make your goal Inspiration Point, the original view of the valley for travelers along the old Wawona wagon road. For energetic and toned souls who want even more seclusion and better views, press on to Stanford Point (8 miles round trip) and Dewey Point (10 miles round trip). Simply follow the signed Pohono Trail in a light to medium forest via switchbacks. For ultimate solitude, do this on snowshoes when there's sufficient winter snow, even if you have to lug your snowshoes up to the snow line.

To get there, drive to the east end of Wawona Tunnel on Wawona Road, and park in the south lot across from Discovery View.

At first, climb steadily past shrubby canyon live oak, incense cedar, ponderosa pine, Douglas fir, black oak, and large specimens of white leaf manzanita. Sporadic gaps in the forest cover allow teasing glimpses of Bridalveil Fall, El Capitan, and Half Dome punctuating Yosemite Valley. Cross an abandoned road at 0.6 mile. Built in 1875, this was the original