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A special Holiday edition
**SEASON'S
BEST
2013**

The best in this Holiday's wine selection

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National parks put out the welcome mat for the holidays

SEQUOIA, KINGS CANYON AND YOSEMITE NOT FAR FROM HOME

For your winter holidays this year, in addition to turkeys and Santa, how about a visit to the home of the world's largest tree, the tallest mountain in the continental United States, and the country's deepest canyon? Winter holidays in California's National Park loop — Sequoia, Kings Canyon and Yosemite — can even be enjoyed during a three day adventure. For a more leisurely holiday, select just one of these treasures or, even better, extend your stay for a longer period.

An interesting idea for entering Sequoia National Park through the south entrance is to overnight at the historic town of Three Rivers, which is known as "The Gateway to the Sequoias," located just before the park entrance. Because of its mild weather and absence of valley fog, Three Rivers is a popular retirement community, offering many art, music and outdoor activities. On the banks of the Kaweah River, the Lazy J Ranch and Gateway Restaurant provide charming lodging and delicious cuisine. The well-run Three Rivers Historical Museum offers the visitor a unique collection of Yokut artifacts and authentic Indian huts.

One unique aspect of this area is that the Kaweah Cooperative Colony, a Utopian community that attracted international notice, settled here in 1886, and some of those descendants still live in the area. Their post office (1890), measuring 10 feet by 12 feet, is the smallest PO in USA and is a popular spot to post a letter or take a photo.



**Photography by
John Montgomery
By Diane LeBow**

Did you know that Sequoia National Park was California's first national park, dating from Sept. 25, 1890, and was the second national park established in the country after Yellowstone?

Wuksachi Lodge, the only lodge in the park, is conveniently located to explore the park's treasures and offers many programs throughout the year.

Enjoy an elegant holiday dinner at the lodge's Peaks Restaurant, the Christmas Eve program with Santa, ornament decorating, as well as a Christmas Day feast. Evenings often are spent with storytelling and hot cocoa by the fireside. Dine and dance there for a romantic New Year's Eve. Reserve early for any of these events as this is a popular season out amid these giant trees.

During the day at Wuksachi, work up an appetite with family sledding, snow shoeing, or cross country skiing. The lodge offers rentals and lessons and even a snow chains concierge. On Dec. 8, the 88th annual Trek to the General Grant Tree in neighboring Kings Canyon National Park will take place. This tree, the second largest in the world, is more than 3,000 years old. In 1926, President Calvin Coolidge proclaimed it the Nation's Christmas Tree. Since then, each year people gather at its base to sing, pay tribute to nature, and wish peace on earth and good will to men.

Some other upcoming events at the Wuksachi are the Dec. 14 Sequoia Christmas Bird Count, Dec. 28 Guided Snowshoe Walk and the Fireside Story Time.

The National Park Service of Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks along with the Sequoia Natural History Association complement each other, providing education, preservation, and interpretation for visitors. www.sequoiahistory.org. They explain that the cinnamon-barked Giant Sequoias, "the largest vegetables in the world," can grow as high as a 25-story building and the oldest lived more than 3,500 years. Their ancestors shared the earth with dinosaurs more than 144 million years ago.

Giant Forest Museum and Big Trees Trail are easily accessible highlights near the Wuksachi. The Giant Forest contains the General Sherman, the world's largest tree. Mount Whitney, the tallest mountain in the continental U.S., towers over the park, while 240 caves burrow deep into the earth. Crystal Cave remains open until Dec. 1, and Moro Rock's granite dome awaits photo ops. Enjoy snowshoeing or cross country skiing around Round Meadow or on 32 miles of marked ski trails, as well as family sledding at Wolverton Meadow.

The aroma of fresh gingerbread is in the air, along with invigorating pine-scented mountain freshness at the Tenaya Lodge at Yosemite, located just two miles from the park entrance. This beautifully run all-season 302 room resort — from suites to mountain cottage accommodations — offers a unique alternative to staying within the park itself. The many activities located on or near the pet-friendly property include guided hikes, mountain bike rentals, spa, ice-skating, snow shoeing, as well as downhill skiing at Badger Pass

which has the advantage of being less crowded and more family oriented than other downhill areas. A short scenic drive from the lodge is Zip Yosemite where even apprehensive first time zip-liners become enthusiasts under the careful guidance of Wayne and Tyler. Yes, snow zipping through the tree canopies is an amazing high!

At Tenaya, dining choices range from candle-lit elegance to casual. Some upcoming events to enjoy include their Grand Ballroom Thanksgiving Buffet on Nov. 28, which features luscious food along with live entertainment. The popular ice skating rink opens that week as does the famous Gingerbread House Decorating Workshop and Competition, which repeats during December. One previous winner was an upside-down house that had experienced a tornado "Wizard of Oz" style. Some 200 of these houses have been created since the event's debut in 2006.

There is tree decorating and lighting, regular visits from St. Nick, choral singing, kids dinner with Santa, Mrs. Claus assisting with cookie decorating and reading "The Night Before Christmas" on Christmas eve, the fun New Year's Eve gala in the Grand Ballroom, and even a separate party for adults with kids — including dancing for both.

Ah, relax in the heated pool and be pampered at Ascent, the lodge's full service spa and its top quality staff. While you're soaking or being kneaded, the Lodge offers pet or child care, including appropriate entertainment.

Of course, just next door, Yosemite beckons with its towering cliffs, waterfalls, and Sequoias, and famous valley: Half Dome, El Capitan, Yosemite Falls, and diverse wildlife. Brunch or dinner at the magnificent Ahwahnee is a short drive away.

Enjoy the silence, forest scents, birds' songs, and crackle of pine needles or snow underfoot. Not far from the Bay Area: California's National Parks.

Soon we'll be ready for spring out among our Sequoia. In the parks, early poppies and endless spring continues the higher you go.

IF YOU GO:

- Wuksachi Lodge, Sequoia National Park
<http://www.nationalparkreservations.com/sequoia.php> 888.252.5757
- Tenaya Lodge at Yosemite www.tenayalodge.com 877.382.8618
- John Muir Lodge at Kings Canyon National Park: "a miniature Grand Canyon" <http://www.nationalparkreservations.com/sequoia.php>, 877.436.9615
- Yosemite National Park <http://www.yosemitepark.com/winter-package-deals.aspx>
- Visit General Grant Tree on Dec. 8, 2013. If you prefer not to drive: Hosted bus trips from Sanger, Calif. Contact Sanger Chamber of Commerce at 559.875.4575.
- Zip Yosemite <http://www.zipyosemite.com>, 559.642.6688
- Check current road conditions before traveling to the parks: <http://www.nps.gov/seki/planyourvisit/road-conditions.htm>.

TOP PHOTO:
Tenaya Lodge Lobby
THIS PAGE (Left to right)
Wuksachi Lodge; Tenaya Lodge
Dumplings; Tenaya Lodge Cabins

