

Experience Yosemite's Firefall with the Firefall Express and skip the reservations

The shuttle goes from two Groveland hotels and includes a Yosemite reservation



In mid to late February, something really special happens in Yosemite: the **Firefall phenomenon**. This is when the setting sun's light hits the trickling waterfall named Horsetail Fall on the face of El Capitan in a particular way that makes it look like it's on fire. It's a cool effect that draws crowds to the parts of the park where it's visible. Since it only lasts a few minutes each day and sometimes isn't even visible if conditions aren't right (clear skies, water flowing down the rock, sun in the right position), it's a total thrill to be able to see it.

Since so many people come out to see the Firefall, the national park staff limits entry to the park for the last three February weekends by requiring advance reservations (even if you're not visiting Horsetail Fall). These dates are February 8-9, 15-17 and 22-23. If you come on a weekday (except for Washington's Birthday on Monday, February 17), you don't need a reservation. Regardless of your day of arrival, your \$35 per car (including all passengers) entrance fee lasts for seven days. Remember that **fourth graders** and everyone who fits in the car with them are always free.

But if you don't want to drive or are worried about securing a weekend reservation, two hotels in Groveland just outside Yosemite's gates—**Rush Creek Lodge** and **Evergreen Lodge**—are rolling out the **Yosemite Firefall Express**. This is a daily shuttle during Firefall season, which bypasses the reservation system. You'll have transportation to Yosemite Valley, where you'll be met by a guide who will help you pick out a perfect viewing spot. You don't have to be a guest at either hotel to buy a ticket to ride the Firefall Express. The shuttles depart from the respective lodges at 2pm and leave the Firefall area at 8pm to return, and you won't need a day-use reservation unless you wish to enter Yosemite on your own before or after. The shuttle holds up to eight people, so it will be a more intimate experience than being on a full-sized bus.

The Yosemite Firefall Express costs \$110 adults, \$80 children aged 8-15. The **ticket** does not include park admission. That fee is \$20-\$35 per person 16 or older for a standard day pass or \$70 for one that lasts 12 months—better yet, the America the Beautiful pass is \$80 for a year of entry to any national park (with discounts for seniors, military and disabled people). The Firefall Express was created in collaboration with the National Park Service, and all fees go directly back to NPS. If visitors hold an annual park pass or have a receipt from entering Yosemite within the last three days, they are exempt from the admission fee.

Ticket purchasers should be physically capable of walking a mile to the viewing area (it's a flat walk) and should be at least 8 years old. There may be ice and snow, so dress warmly and have good walking shoes with you, as well as a small backpack for water and snacks. The best part of the Firefall Express is that your chair will be provided for you (when I went last year, my kids and I sat on a rock and it was a little—okay, a lot—cold and uncomfortable) as well as a nice cup of hot chocolate.

The Yosemite Firefall Express dates are:

Departing from Rush Creek Lodge: Day trips on February 8-9, 15-16, and 22-23

Departing from Evergreen Lodge: Day trips on February 15-16 and 22-23