

myADVENTURES with THE EXPERT TRAVELER

ADVENTURES IN AMERICA: CALIFORNIA BOUND



If the first thing that comes to mind when you think of California is the glitz and glam of Tinseltown, you should get out more. As a matter of fact, you should grab your Persona® Card, rent something spacious from Avis® or Hertz®, load up the family and head to Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks.

Midway between Los Angeles and San Francisco (and just an hour's drive from Fresno for you less ambitious road-trippers,) Sequoia and the adjoining Kings Canyon National Park, make the perfect destination for a relaxing family trip. All you need is a three-day weekend and a spirit of adventure.

As the name suggests, Sequoia National Park (and Kings Canyon National Park,) was set aside to preserve California's magnificent groves of sequoia trees. (Although just as beautiful, Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks haven't been discovered by the masses like their counterpart, Yosemite National Park. That means none of the long lines of creeping traffic you might run into in Yosemite.) When you visit the parks, you'll certainly run into sightseers from all over the world who've traveled to see the giant trees—the largest living things on earth—which grow naturally only in this particular part of California.

Stand at the base of a sequoia tree and you'll understand why. On my visit, I found myself in awe of

“General Sherman,” currently the largest of the sequoias. Its height of 274.9 feet—nearly as tall as a football field is long—was more than my camera could handle. In a word, it was majestic.

On your first day's visit to the parks, you'll want to plan a lazy drive in Giant Forest that will twist and wind you over roads built around—and at one point through—the trees. Don't rush yourself: stop to take pictures and just be amazed by what you see.

Day two, fill first with a trip to Moro Rock. If it's clear, an exhilarating climb to the top will reward you with a view west almost to the Pacific and an eastwardly view to the Sierra Nevada Mountains. Not far from there, Crescent Meadow offers the opportunity to experience a natural meadow and wildlife like the five deer I spied grazing lazily near a spring.

On day three take the unforgettable drive above and down to the floor of Kings Canyon. You'll enjoy the views from thousand-foot vistas, constantly changing fauna and super walking trails (easy ones for beginners or more challenging treks for serious hikers).

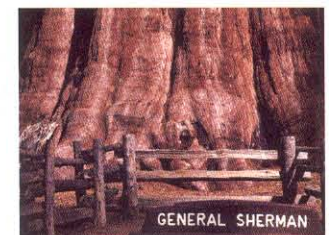
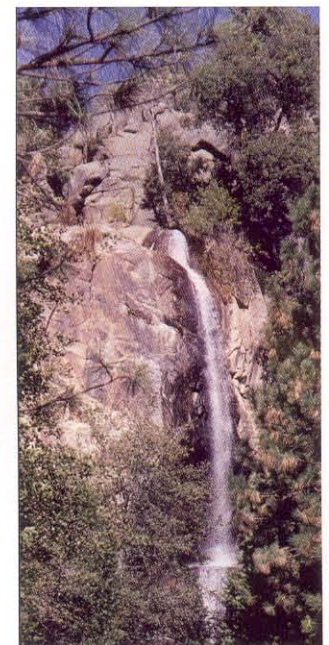
And there are plenty of activities just for the kids. If other diversions like the walking trails, horseback riding and fishing aren't enough, kids can watch a puppet show and sing campfire songs when they join the Children's Campfire Program. Or, they can visit the Walter Fry Nature Center where they can look into a microscope or learn the constellations among other activities. (Some activities are seasonal, so call the park to find out what other activities for kids will be available during your visit.)

Your trip to Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks will put you on an “early to bed, early to rise” schedule because there's so much to explore before the sun goes down. Here's something else to note: even if you're like me and don't usually care for a large breakfast, your taste will change. There's something in the wilderness air that calls up your heartiest morning appetites. Indulge! It's all part of the adventure.

—Gig ■



Travel Specialist, Gig Gwin (founder and CEO of Gwin's Travel in St. Louis, MO) the most traveled travel agent, having visited every country in the world.



All photos courtesy of Gig Gwin