

ADVANCED AIR



Merced, California

Marketing + Community Engagement



Scan for
Digital Version

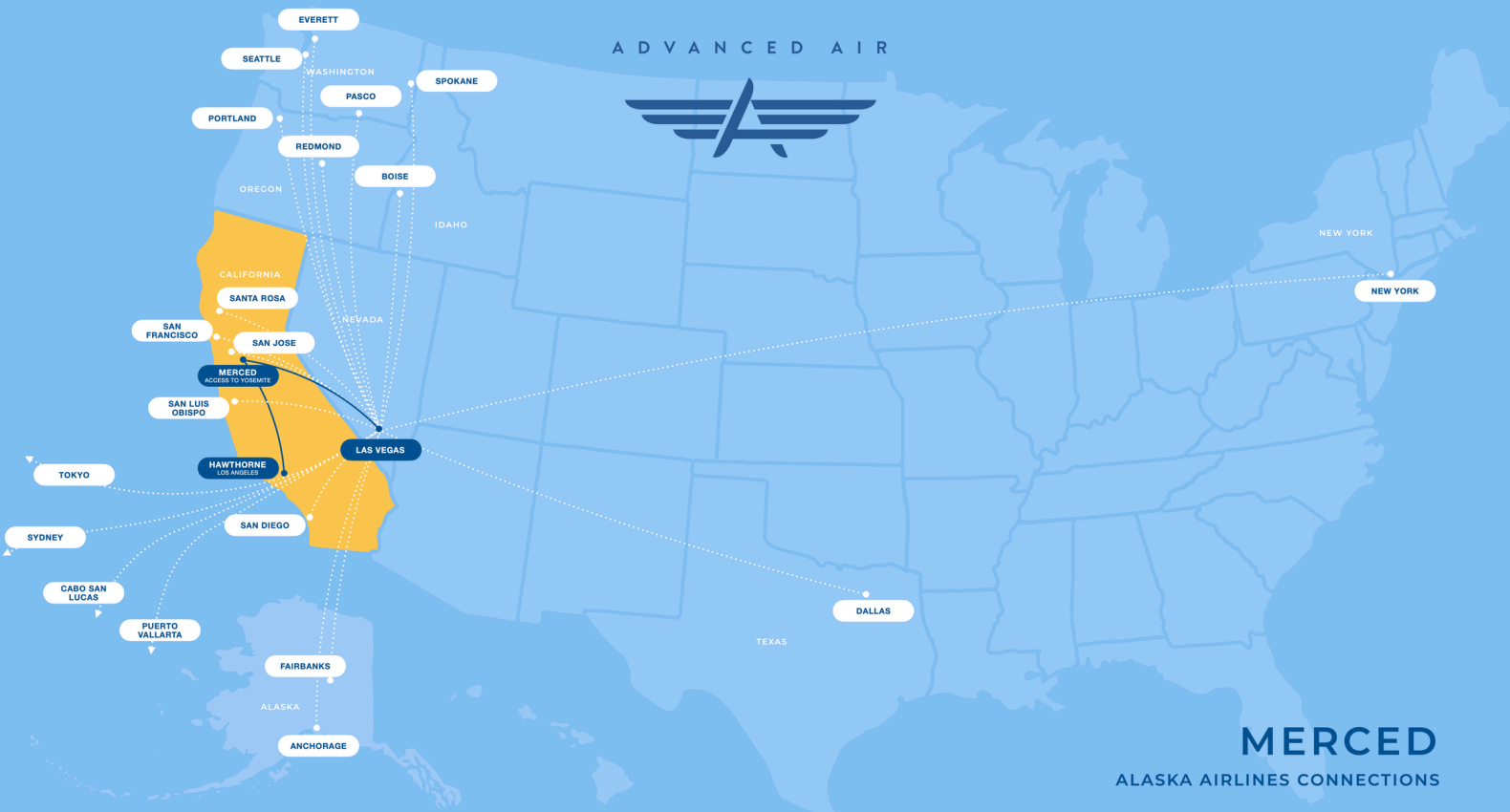
Q1 | 2026



News & Updates

Advanced Air now has an interline agreement with Alaska Airlines, enabling our flights to be booked directly on Alaska's website.

This seamless connection expands our reach, providing travelers with more convenient booking options and enhanced connectivity across our network.



DISCLAIMER FOR ROUTE MAP:

The routes displayed are for illustrative purposes only and represent potential connectivity based on Alaska Airlines' existing network. Final schedules and availability will be determined by operational feasibility and are subject to change.



Email Marketing



ALTITUDE WINTER 2025-2026

Advanced Air's Latest In-Flight Magazine: Now Onboard

[READ THE WINTER ISSUE](#)



Open rate

11.9%



Click rate

1.4%



Instagram/Facebook Posts

FB/IG



advancedairlines California

advancedairlines The Spring Bucket List 🌸🌸

Spring isn't just a season; it's a window. From the superblooms of the coast to the roaring waterfalls of the high Sierras. How many of these are on your list this year?

- 🌸 The Flower Fields: Walk the giant Tecolote Ranunculus in Carlsbad.
- 🌊 Waterfall Season: Witness the spring runoff in Yosemite (via Merced).
- 🏖️ The Great Dunes: Hike the cool, white sands of New Mexico (via Las Cruces).
- 🌲 The Giants: Catch the morning mist in the Redwoods (via Crescent City).

Skip the 6-hour drives and the spring break traffic. We'll get you to the trailhead in record time.

Which one are you checking off first? 🗒️

2w

👍 🗨️ 🔄 📌

Liked by nsandusky22 and others
March 21

😊 Add a comment... Post

Views ⓘ

1,336

Interactions ⓘ

21



advancedairlines California

advancedairlines Merced to the Strip in 96 minutes. ✈️📺 No TSA marathons, no 'big airport' chaos, and zero middle seats. Just a smooth flight from MCE and you'll be checking into your hotel while the rest of the Valley is still stuck in Mojave traffic.

3w

cali.spotlight Wow send me los
3w Reply

👤 2 comments from Facebook

👍 🗨️ 🔄 📌

Liked by thyy.bui and others
March 18

😊 Add a comment... Post

Views ⓘ

1,813

Interactions ⓘ

31



Instagram/Facebook Posts

FB/IG

Want to go on and adventure with me?
Flight: Hawthorne to Merced
Hotel: Autocamp
Smore's by the fire?

advancedairlines California

advancedairlines The kind of pen-to-paper plans we're obsessed with. One quick flight to Merced, two cozy nights at @AutoCamp, and infinite s'mores. Who are you taking to the Airstreams?

4w

sofia_richie Yess

4w 1 like Reply

View replies (1)

ahart621 @rachel.buttrey.hart hometown trip!?

4w 1 like Reply

kpozuelo Please

4w 1 like Reply

View replies (1)

cali.spotlight Wow send me post

4w Reply ...

Liked by mariramirezrom712 and others
March 10

Add a comment...

Views ⓘ

3,390

Interactions ⓘ

49

Yosemite this spring?
Fly from LA to Merced
in 1:20minutes ✈️

advancedairlines Pink Floyd • Breathe (In the Air) (2023 Remaster)

advancedairlines Trading screen time for stream time 🌊💧
With Advanced Air, you can get from LA to Yosemite in just 1 hour 20 minutes ✈️ flying from Hawthorne Municipal Airport to Merced Regional Airport and straight to your favorite hikes, waterfalls, and fresh mountain air.

Less scrolling. More strolling. 🌲 ✨

#AdvancedAir #Yosemite #LivestreamIRL #CaliforniaAdventure #SpringTravel

5w

tessa_traverses Awesome

5w 1 like Reply ...

Liked by firesideorganics and others
February 28

Add a comment...

Views ⓘ

1,876

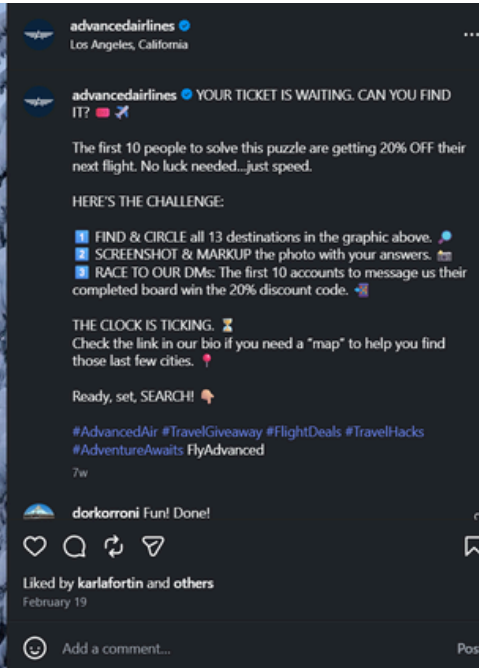
Interactions ⓘ

45



Instagram/Facebook Posts

FB/IG



Views ⓘ
2,394

Interactions ⓘ
60



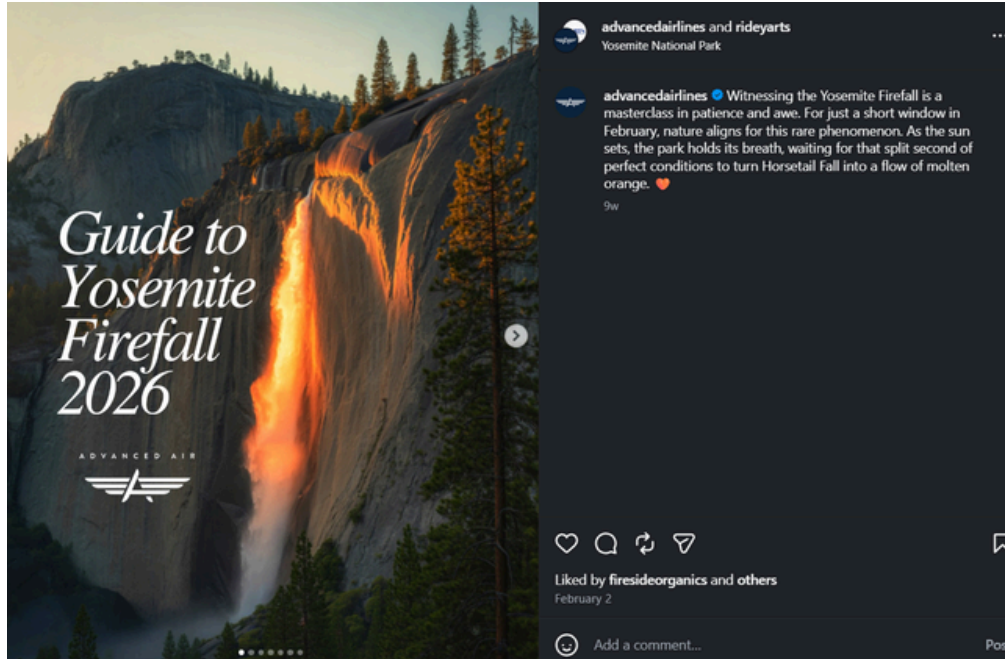
Views ⓘ
2,959

Interactions ⓘ
28



Instagram/Facebook Posts

FB/IG



Views ⓘ

2,954

Interactions ⓘ

70



Views ⓘ

4,486

Interactions ⓘ

71



Social Media Ads

FLY FROM
MERCED
TO
LAS VEGAS



AS LOW AS
\$54

ADVANCED AIR



FLY FROM
MERCED
TO
LOS ANGELES



AS LOW AS
\$52

ADVANCED AIR



ADVANCED AIR



FLY FROM
MERCED
TO **LAS VEGAS**



AS LOW AS
\$54

ADVANCED AIR



FLY FROM
MERCED
TO **LOS ANGELES**



AS LOW AS
\$52

ADVANCED AIR



Merced, California

Print Advertising

ADVANCED AIR

FLY FROM MERCED
AS LOW AS \$81

LAS VEGAS

LOS ANGELES

ADVANCEDAIRLINES.COM

The flyer features a dark blue background with two vertical panels. The left panel shows a night view of the Paris Las Vegas hotel with the Eiffel Tower replica and a hot air balloon. The right panel shows a sunset view of palm trees. The text is centered and uses a mix of white and yellow colors for emphasis.

ADVANCED AIR



Merced, California

Print Advertising

ADVANCED AIR



Mammoth. Yosemite. Redwoods.

WE'LL GET YOU THERE

Shred the slopes with our flights to Mammoth Lakes. Escape to Yosemite National Park with our flights to Merced. Embrace the Redwoods with our flights to Crescent City.

ADVANCEDAIRLINES.COM





Billboard Advertising





Mobile Conquering Ads

A square mobile advertisement with a dark blue background. At the top, it says "ADVANCED AIR" in small white letters above the winged 'A' logo. The main text reads "FLY FROM MERCED TO LOS ANGELES OR LAS VEGAS" in large, bold, white and yellow letters. In the bottom left, a yellow circle contains the text "AS LOW AS \$162 ONE-WAY". In the bottom right, there is a white rounded rectangle with the text "BOOK NOW" in dark blue, and below it, the website "ADVANCEDAIRLINES.COM" in small white letters.

ADVANCED AIR

**FLY FROM MERCED
TO LOS ANGELES
OR LAS VEGAS**

AS LOW AS
\$162
ONE-WAY

BOOK NOW

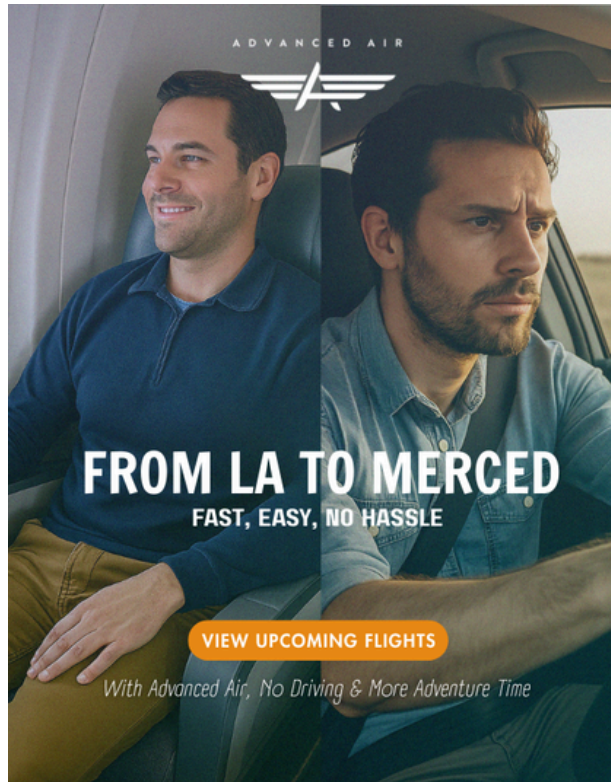
ADVANCEDAIRLINES.COM

A horizontal mobile advertisement with a dark blue background. The text "FLY FROM MERCED TO LA OR LAS VEGAS" is written in large, bold, white and yellow letters. To the right of the text is the winged 'A' logo.

**FLY FROM MERCED
TO LA OR LAS VEGAS**



Lead Magnet



With Advanced Air, No Driving & More Adventure Time

Skip the long Central Valley drive and swap traffic jams for Yosemite views. With **Advanced Air**, you'll be in Merced in just over an hour—more time exploring, less time stuck behind the wheel.


 **FLY with Advanced Air**


VS


 **DRIVE Yourself**

 Over an hour flight time


 4.5–5.5 hrs drive time (I-5 or CA-99)

 As low as **\$81** (includes baggage)

 **\$85–\$130** in gas (round trip via AAA est.) + parking

 No traffic, no hassle

 Traffic delays

 Arrive refreshed and ready

 Arrive tired





Travel Guide



Weekend Travel Guide To **MERCED COUNTY** California



Fly over traffic and into one of California's most underrated gateways: Merced. Just 75 miles from Yosemite National Park, Merced is the launch point for waterfalls, wilderness, and weekend exploration. With charming small-town vibes, scenic drives, and direct airport shuttles to Yosemite, your adventure starts the moment you land.

www.advancedairlines.com

Brought to you by Altitude — the in-flight magazine of Advanced Air

FUN FACTS ABOUT MERCED

01

The historic Merced Theatre, built in 1913, still operates today and showcases concerts, films, and community events.

02

The city is named after the nearby Merced River, which Spanish explorers called "El Río de Nuestra Señora de la Merced" (River of Our Lady of Mercy).

03

Merced's Castle Air Museum showcases one of the nation's largest military aircraft collections, with 70+ restored vintage planes.

04

Merced was once considered a top candidate for California's high-speed rail hub, due to its central location between San Francisco and Los Angeles.

05

Just minutes from downtown Merced, Lake Yosemite offers a peaceful escape for kayaking, fishing, and picnics.

06

Merced's agriculture roots run deep — the region is surrounded by almond orchards, dairy farms, and some of California's most fertile farmland.



ABOUT MERCED COUNTY

Merced, California, is a vibrant city in the heart of the San Joaquin Valley, best known as the "Gateway to Yosemite." With a rich agricultural history, a growing arts scene, and home to UC Merced, the city blends small-town charm with innovation and access to world-class natural wonders. Just 75 miles from Yosemite National Park, Merced offers travelers a central launch point for California adventure — without the crowds.

AT-A-GLANCE TRIP OVERVIEW

- ✈ Trip Length: 3 Days
- ✈ Flight Time: Over an hour from Los Angeles
- 🌿 Seasonal Vibe: Wildflowers in spring, waterfalls in summer, crisp foliage in fall
- 💰 Price: As Low As \$81 (One-Way Flight)



www.advancedairlines.com



3-DAY TRAVEL IN YOSEMITE ESCAPE

Friday: Arrival + Local Flavor



✈ Fly from Hawthorne to Merced

Skip the gridlock and arrive in California's heartland refreshed and ready.

🏨 **Check-in:** El Capitan Hotel — modern, art-forward stay in downtown Merced

🍽 **Dinner:** Rainbird — upscale California cuisine made with seasonal Central Valley ingredients

🌃 **Evening:** Stroll through Bob Hart Square and grab a nightcap at Native Son

Saturday: Yosemite Day Trip



🚌 **Morning:** Take the Yosemite Area Regional Transportation System (YARTS) shuttle into Yosemite National Park

🏃 **Explore:** Hike to Lower Yosemite Falls, cruise the Valley Loop, or take in Half Dome from Glacier Point

🍽 **Lunch:** Grab a picnic at Degnan's Deli inside the park

🌃 **Evening:** Return to Merced and grab casual dinner at J&R Tacos or rustic Italian at Ton's Courtyard Café

Sunday: Local Gems + Return Flight



☕ **Breakfast:** Coffee Bandits — cozy and artsy local favorite

🚶 **Optional:** Stop by the Merced Multicultural Arts Center or take a walk along Bear Creek Trail

✈ **Flight:** Return to Hawthorne with your camera full and your weekend well spent

www.advancedairlines.com



LOCAL TIPS + TRAVEL SMART

🎒 Packing Tips:

- Daypack for Yosemite exploring
- Layers — mornings are cool, afternoons warm
- Hiking shoes or supportive sneakers
- Water bottle & sunscreen
- Park pass or ID if reserving Yosemite in advance

🚌 Transportation Tips:

- YARTS bus from Merced Airport to Yosemite runs seasonally — book in advance
- Rental cars are also available at Merced Airport
- Advanced Air check-in takes just 20 minutes

🏨 Top Summer Stays:

- El Capitan Hotel — boutique downtown stay
- Hampton Inn Merced — reliable, convenient
- TownePlace Suites by Marriott — great for groups or longer stays

www.advancedairlines.com

🏞 Scenic Add-Ons:

- Merced River Trail — peaceful walk close to town
- Castle Air Museum — aviation lovers, don't skip it
- Lake Yosemite — picnic, paddle, or just unwind before your flight

🍽 Other Local Eats:

- Rainbird — locally sourced, upscale dinner
- The Branding Iron — classic steakhouse
- Coffee Bandits — grab-and-go with heart



FLY FROM LOS ANGELES TO MERCED

Skip the gridlock—fly from LA to Merced in just over an hour. With Advanced Air, you'll trade hours of traffic for more time exploring the mountains. Book your seat today and start your adventure sooner!

www.advancedairlines.com





Promotions & Giveaways

- **Merced County Hispanic Chamber of Commerce** – 20% Off Promo Code
- **Merced County Farm Bureau** – 20% Off Promo Code
- **UC Merced (Student & Faculty)** – 15% Off Promo Code
- **El Capitan Hotel - Customer & Corporate Discount Codes**
- **Merced Fireman's Ball** – Auction Items
- **St. Paul Lutheran Church and School Fundraiser Dinner** – Auction Item



MEMBERSHIP:

- 2025-2026 Merced County Hispanic Chamber of Commerce
- 2025-2026 Merced County Farm Bureau

SPONSORSHIPS/EVENTS:

- Merced County Hispanic Chamber of Commerce – Brass Sponsorship
 - o Advanced Air Business Mixer at the Mainzer: August 14th
 - o Annual Latina Women's Luncheon Sponsor
 - o Mercado Night Market Sponsor (July 10th, September 4th or November 6th)
 - o Annual Installation Dinner Sponsor
 - o Travis Credit Union Mixer at El Capitan Hotel – Giveaway Items
- Merced County Farm Bureau's 107th Annual Meeting Dinner – Event Tickets
- Merced County Farm Bureau's MCFB Coffee Talks – Sponsor



Advertisements

- **Merced County Farm Bureau's 107th Annual Meeting Dinner** – Half-Page Ad
- **Merced County Hispanic Chamber of Commerce's Annual Latina Women's Luncheon** – Half-Page Ad

In-Flight Magazine



Merced Articles in Current Distribution:

- 20th Anniversary Issue - Lake Yosemite: A Relaxing Retreat in Merced County
 - Local advertisers confirmed: YARTS and Autocamp
- 2025-2026 Winter Issue
 - On the Planes: January – June 2026

Merced Advertisers in Current Distribution:

YARTS

Promo Code for 25% Off Your Trip to Yosemite

AutoCamp

Boutique Hotel outside of Yosemite



Altitude Magazine (Winter Edition - 2025-2026)

Winter Wonderland: Yosemite in Frost and Light by Eden Calleja

MERCED, CALIFORNIA

Winter Experiences Worth the Journey

When winter drapes Yosemite in snow and silence, the park becomes a wonderland of adventure and serenity. Crisp air, glittering waterfalls, and snow-dusted trails create a backdrop that feels almost magical.

Fewer crowds mean more space to explore, more moments to savor, and more reasons to fall in love with the season. Thrills on the slopes, peaceful forest walks, cozy lodge nights: **Yosemite in winter has it all.** Here are some experiences to try on your next snowy escape.

Badger Pass Ski Adventures

Perched at 7,200 feet, Badger Pass Ski Area is a winter playground with five lifts, ten runs, and a welcoming, family-friendly vibe. Beginners can glide down gentle slopes, while seasoned skiers explore powder on intermediate runs.

But Badger is more than downhill. Its **90 miles of cross-country and snowshoe trails** wind

ALTITUDE **17**

Winter Wonderland: Yosemite in Frost and Light

By: EDEN CALLEJA

Yosemite's Winter Story

For centuries, Yosemite has inspired awe from the indigenous people who called it home to artists and photographers who helped spark America's preservation movement.

Today, while millions visit each year, few experience its quiet magic in winter. Free from crowds, the park reveals its raw beauty: snow-draped granite, icy meadows, and waterfalls glowing in golden light. Winter also brings play, with Badger Pass Ski Area, California's oldest ski resort offering classic snow fun and a timeless taste of Yosemite's joyful side.

The meadow lies still beneath a silver frost as mist rises from the Merced River toward sunlit granite walls. Half Dome glows pink under its snowy crown, and Yosemite is hushed and empty: a serene winter sanctuary.

From December to March, the park transforms into a tranquil wonderland of glowing waterfalls, icy trails, and quiet majesty, inviting visitors to not just see it, but feel it.

MERCED, CALIFORNIA

through giant sequoias and open meadows, offering some of the most scenic backcountry routes in California. On clear days, guided snowshoe hikes up to Dewey Point offer jaw-dropping views over Yosemite Valley, with El Capitan and Half Dome etched in white against the horizon.

Yosemite Valley: Serenity in Stone

In winter, the Valley is a place of hush and glow. Trails remain open, though sometimes icy, and landmarks like Yosemite Falls and Bridalveil Fall feel different in the cold season, with water thundering through a veil of mist and rainbows shimmering in the winter light. Tunnel View, the iconic overlook, is especially striking under snow: El Capitan, Half Dome, and Bridalveil all gleaming in crystalline clarity. Photographers can find that the winter sun creates softer, moodier compositions, a gift from the season.

The Firefall Phenomenon

Each February, if conditions align, Horsetail Fall transforms into nature's own pyrotechnic display. For about two weeks, the setting sun hits the waterfall at just the right angle, turning it into a glowing cascade of fiery orange and red.

Known as the "Firefall," this spectacle draws travelers from around the world, and with good reason. It lasts only minutes, but those minutes feel eternal. Bundle up, bring patience, and let the moment unfold.

Snowy Trails & Sequoia Groves

Winter is ideal for exploring Yosemite's ancient Mariposa Grove of Giant Sequoias. Snow often dusts the grove's 500 towering trees, including the famous Grizzly Giant, estimated to be nearly 3,000 years old. The silence here is profound, with footsteps muffled, air crisp, and the red bark of

ALTITUDE **18**

sequoias glowing against white snow. Elsewhere, trails like Mirror Lake and Lower Yosemite Fall are accessible year-round, providing easier winter walks with enormous rewards.

Evenings by the Fire

After a day of snowy adventures, Yosemite evenings are their own kind of magic. The historic Ahwahnee Hotel glows with fires crackling in stone hearths and soaring windows framing snow-draped cliffs. Seasonal menus feature hearty California cuisine, and the lodge itself feels like stepping into a mountain fairytale.

The Quiet Glow of Winter

Fly nonstop from Los Angeles or Las Vegas to Merced with Advanced Air, the fastest route to Yosemite. Settle in with local dining and cozy stays before heading into the park, where snow-dusted peaks and granite cliffs await. Winter in Yosemite isn't about crowds or adrenaline. It's about presence, quiet moments, and the kind of beauty that whispers.



Altitude Magazine (Winter Edition - 2025-2026)

A Migration Spectacle Over Merced Skies by Eden Calleja

A MIGRATION *Spectacle* OVER MERCED SKIES

BY: EDEN CALLEJA

At dawn, Merced's wetlands come alive as thousands of sandhill cranes, Ross's, and snow geese rise in unison—a thunder of wings against the pastel sky. For a moment, the world feels timeless, farmland fading into wildness. Each winter, the Merced National Wildlife Refuge transforms California's Central Valley into a living masterpiece of migration.

A Living Legacy of the Flyway

The Pacific Flyway is one of North America's great bird migration routes, stretching from Alaska to Patagonia. Each winter, millions of birds travel south along this aerial highway, seeking food and shelter in California's wetlands.

Merced National Wildlife Refuge is a critical stop on that journey. Established in 1951, the refuge was created to protect wintering habitat for geese that were devastating local crops. Today, it encompasses more than 10,000 acres of

wetlands, grasslands, and riparian habitats. Its managed ponds, natural marshes, and cultivated fields now sustain enormous flocks of lesser sandhill cranes, Ross's geese, snow geese, and Aleutian cackling geese. The numbers are staggering: on peak winter



mornings, more than 20,000 sandhill cranes and 40,000 geese can be spotted across the refuge. And it's not just the spectacle of numbers; raptors like hawks and peregrine falcons patrol the skies, while herons, egrets, and shorebirds dot the shallows. For locals and

travelers alike, the refuge isn't just about birds. It's about connection. Watching these migrations, you glimpse the resilience of species that have followed the same paths long before freeways or farms existed.

Experiences That Bring the Refuge to Life

Each winter, the Merced National Wildlife Refuge becomes a spectacle of migration as tens of thousands of birds fill the skies in a breathtaking display. From misty mornings to golden sunsets, it's a rare glimpse of wild beauty in California's Central Valley. Here are some activities to enjoy.

1. The Auto Tour Loop: Front-Row to Flight

The refuge's 5-mile auto tour loop is one of the best ways to experience the migration. Rolling slowly along the gravel road, you pass wetlands edged with cattails, open fields filled with feeding geese, and shallow ponds where cranes roost. The magic often happens at dawn or

MERCED, CALIFORNIA

dusk, when birds lift off in waves that ripple like murmurs across the landscape. On crisp winter mornings, fog lingers low, and the rising sun ignites the wings above with golden light.

Tip: Keep binoculars handy and stay in your vehicle. Many birds are surprisingly tolerant of cars but wary of people on foot.

2. Walking Trails & Viewing Decks

For those who prefer to stretch their legs, the refuge has seasonal walking trails and viewing platforms. The south deck, overlooking a broad pond, is especially popular for sunset viewing, when cranes return in groups, bugling as they settle in for the night. The hush, punctuated by calls echoing across the marsh, is as moving as any cathedral.

3. Sunrise & Sunset Spectacles

Sunrise at Merced is an awakening, the lift-off of thousands of birds, sound and motion colliding in an overwhelming rush. Sunset, by contrast, is a homecoming. Birds return in fractured flocks, spiraling down against a violet horizon, the day's energy softening into rest. Both are essential, both unforgettable.

4. Beyond the Cranes: Wildlife Encounters

While the cranes and geese are the stars, they're hardly alone. You may spot:

- Sandpipers and avocets are probing the mudflats.
- White-faced ibis gleaming bronze in the sun.
- Coyotes trotting the levees in search of careless prey.
- Great horned owls roosting in cottonwoods.

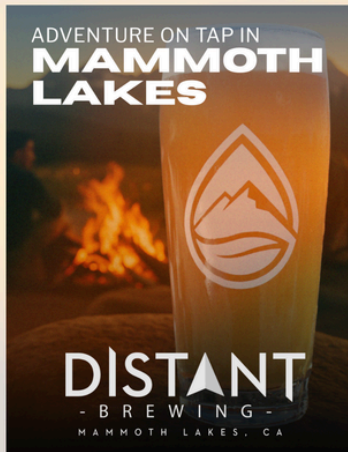
The refuge is a reminder that even in California's heavily cultivated Central Valley, wildness persists.

Whispers in Wingbeats

Merced National Wildlife Refuge is proof that some of the most extraordinary wonders don't require a passport or a long journey. They unfold quietly, season after season, right here in California's heartland.

Standing beneath a sky stitched with cranes and geese, you feel something beyond beauty; you feel continuity. The same migrations that filled these skies a century ago continue today, indifferent to our busy schedules.

For travelers seeking awe without excess, the refuge is a reminder: magic doesn't always shout. Sometimes, it whispers in wingbeats across the dawn.





Altitude Magazine (Winter Edition - 2025-2026)

Gravity & Grace with Tommy Caldwell by Ed Derrico



Photo Credit: Instagram - @TommyCaldwell

GRAVITY & GRACE

BY: ED DERRICO

A FIRESIDE CHAT WITH TOMMY CALDWELL AT THE CENTER OF THE ROCK CLIMBING UNIVERSE

The flight from Hawthorne to Merced is a study in efficiency - a swift transition from the bustle of Los Angeles to the gateway of the Sierra Nevada. But for a group of passengers on a recent Advanced Air charter, the arrival in Yosemite National Park offered a different perspective on speed, risk, and the art of the impossible.

Instead of heading straight to the Ahwahnee Hotel for a standard conference room presentation, the group diverted to El Capitan Meadow. There, amidst the tall grass and the late afternoon shadows, they met Tommy Caldwell. Caldwell is more than just a climber; he is a defining figure in the history of the sport.

Standing in the meadow, looking up at the 3,000-foot granite monolith that has defined his career, he set the stage. "This is El Capitan," Caldwell told the group. "And this is kind of like center stage for rock climbers around the world. It's like Fenway Park. This is where all the creativity and the action happens."

As the group settled into the meadow - some standing, some sitting in the grass - the conversation evolved into a masterclass on performance, fear, and the relentless pursuit of mastery.

THE EVOLUTION OF THE IMPOSSIBLE

To understand the feats Caldwell describes, one must first understand the history etched into the stone. Caldwell pointed out the "Nose," the prow of the ship that juts out from the center of the wall. When it was first climbed in the 1960s by Warren Harding, it was a siege.

"It was done with this style called Aid Climbing," Caldwell explained. "It's this very mechanical form of climbing where you pound pitons into the rock... It's like having a job up there."

That first ascent took six months. Harding would climb, fix ropes, descend for food and water, and go back up, slowly stitching his way to the sky. For decades, that was the only way to climb El Cap. It was an endurance test measured in weeks. But Caldwell and his climbing partner, Alex Honnold, saw a different game. They saw a race track.

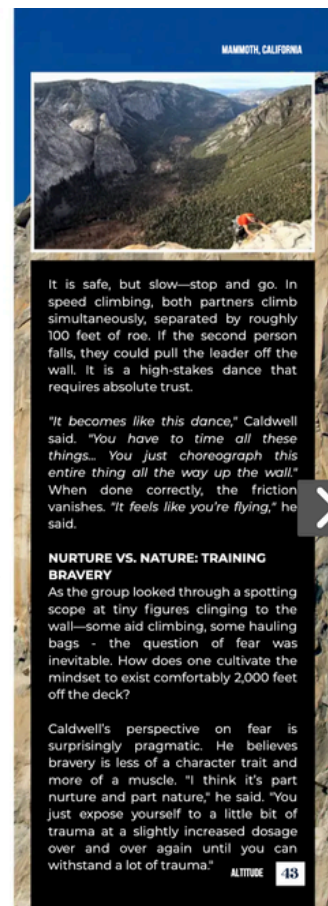
THE TWO-HOUR MARATHON

The group asked about the speed records - specifically, the sub-two-hour ascent that shattered the climbing world's perception of what was possible. How do you turn a multi-day vertical haul into a two-hour sprint?

"The idea of getting it down to two hours seems really absurd," Caldwell admitted. "And it did to me at first too... But it's a matter of just spending a lot of time up there getting things wired."

He described a process of stripping away everything non-essential. When you climb for six days, you are heavy - hauling bags of water, food, and sleeping gear. When you climb for speed, you are shirtless, carrying only a few pieces of gear, "running up the thing."

The technique they use is called "simul-climbing." In traditional climbing, one person climbs while the other stays anchored, holding the rope.



MAMMOTH, CALIFORNIA



It is safe, but slow—stop and go. In speed climbing, both partners climb simultaneously, separated by roughly 100 feet of rope. If the second person falls, they could pull the leader off the wall. It is a high-stakes dance that requires absolute trust.

"It becomes like this dance," Caldwell said. "You have to time all these things... You just choreograph this entire thing all the way up the wall." When done correctly, the friction vanishes. "It feels like you're flying," he said.

NURTURE VS. NATURE: TRAINING BRAVERY

As the group looked through a spotting scope at tiny figures clinging to the wall—some aid climbing, some hauling bags - the question of fear was inevitable. How does one cultivate the mindset to exist comfortably 2,000 feet off the deck?

Caldwell's perspective on fear is surprisingly pragmatic. He believes bravery is less of a character trait and more of a muscle. "I think it's part nurture and part nature," he said. "You just expose yourself to a little bit of trauma at a slightly increased dosage over and over again until you can withstand a lot of trauma."