

A D V A N C E D A I R



# *Merced, California*

Marketing + Community Engagement



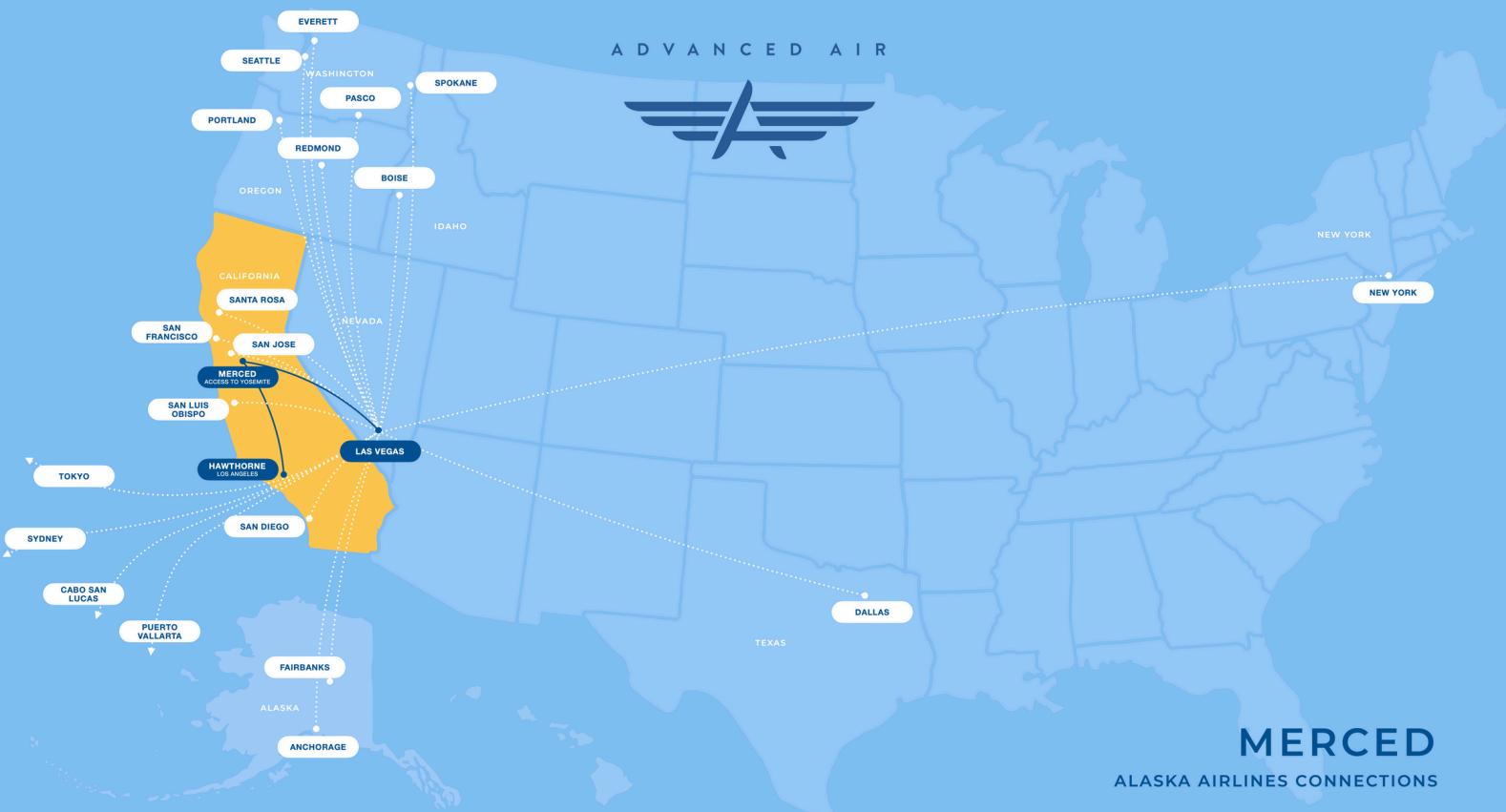
Scan for  
Digital Version



## 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.



# Merced, California

## Email Marketing



### Lower Fares for Flights After January 1st

Good news for Merced travelers – our service has been officially extended through June 30, and flights departing after January 1 are now priced lower.

Those reduced fares are already live and available to book today, giving you more affordable options when flying to Los Angeles (Hawthorne) or Las Vegas in the months ahead.

If Advanced Air has made travel easier for you, you can also share your support with the U.S. Department of Transportation. [Click Here to leave a public comment in support of Advanced Air.](#)



Open rate

12.4%



Click rate

3.8%

[Book A Flight](#)



*Merced, California*

## Email Marketing

ADVANCED AIR

Celebrate 20 Years with  
**20% OFF ALL FLIGHTS**

Use Promo Code  
"20YEARS"

**20**

**BOOK A FLIGHT**

This week marks 20 incredible years of connecting communities, and we couldn't have done it without you. To celebrate, we're offering 20% off all Advanced Air flights — for a full week!

**HERE'S THE DEAL**

**PROMO CODE:**  
**20YEARS**

Fine Print: Save 20% on all scheduled service flights when you book between: July 16 – July 23. Valid on flights anytime through: December 31, 2025

**49.1%**

Opens

**2.9%**

Clicks

Thanks for flying with us over the past two decades. Here's to the next 20!

Cheers,  
The Advanced Air Team





# Merced, California

## Email Marketing

**BLACK FRIDAY FLIGHT DEALS**

**25% OFF ALL FLIGHTS\***  
with code: BlackFriday25

**BOOK A FLIGHT**

This **Black Friday**, we're making travel irresistible. For four days only (**Nov 28-Dec 1**), get **25% off all flights**.

From your dream destination to a spontaneous weekend escape, there's never been a better time to take off. Book early - your adventure awaits!

**Save 25% on all flights**

\*This promotion is valid on flight purchases only. Not valid for Ticket Books or Altitude Memberships. Only valid for flights that fly from 11/28/2025 through 12/1/2025. Promotion ends at 11:59pm on December 1, 2025.

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**29.6%**

**Opens**

**2.4%**

**Clicks**

**30.6%**

**Opens**

**2.0%**

**Clicks**

**26.5%**

**Opens**

**4.9%**

**Clicks**



Merced, California

## Email Marketing



Open rate

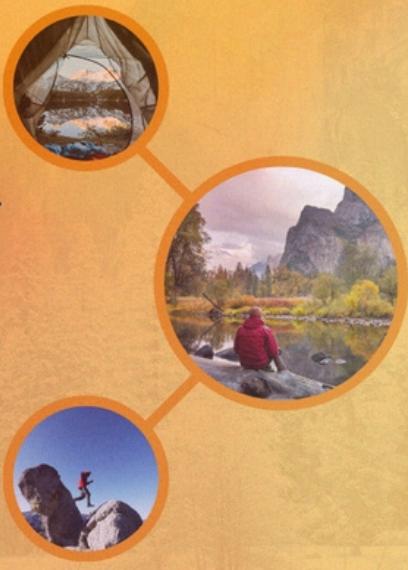
14.7%



Click rate

3.2%

You live for adventure, so why waste time getting there? With **Advanced Air**, skip the long drive and fly from Hawthorne to Merced in under an hour—**no road trip fatigue, just pure adventure, sooner.** Travel smarter and make every moment count. **Book Your Yosemite Flight Now!**



**See you in the Park**



*Merced, California*

## Email Marketing

ADVANCED AIR



Dear Merced Neighbor,

We loved meeting you at the Mercado Night event! Thank you for stopping by our booth and signing up for our flight giveaways.

As a small token of our appreciation, we'd like to invite you to experience Advanced Air for yourself, with a **free roundtrip flight from Merced to either Los Angeles (HHR) or Las Vegas (LAS)**. To claim your flight, simply reply to this email, and we will send you your assigned voucher.

[Offer valid for travel from September 9, 2025 – December 31, 2025.]

### Why Your Support Matters

For nearly four years, Advanced Air has been honored to serve Merced with friendly, reliable flights as part of the Essential Air Service (EAS) program. Our team takes pride in providing consistent schedules, strong on-time performance, and the kind of personal care you deserve.

Right now, the City of Merced is reviewing which airline will serve the community next. One proposal would replace EAS protections with an alternative option that could mean:

- Fewer flights each day
- Less reliability and more schedule changes
- Loss of safeguards that keep fares affordable and service consistent

If having frequent, dependable air service is important to you, we'd be so grateful if you could take a moment to share your voice.



**Open rate**

**25%**



**Click rate**

**2.9%**

### [Click Here to Send Your Support](#)

*This will send a pre-written note to the local officials who are making the recommendation to the U.S. DOT.*

It only takes 10 seconds and helps ensure Merced continues to have strong, reliable air service for years to come.

We're proud to be part of the Merced community and we couldn't do this without you.

Thank you for flying with us, trusting us, and letting us serve you.

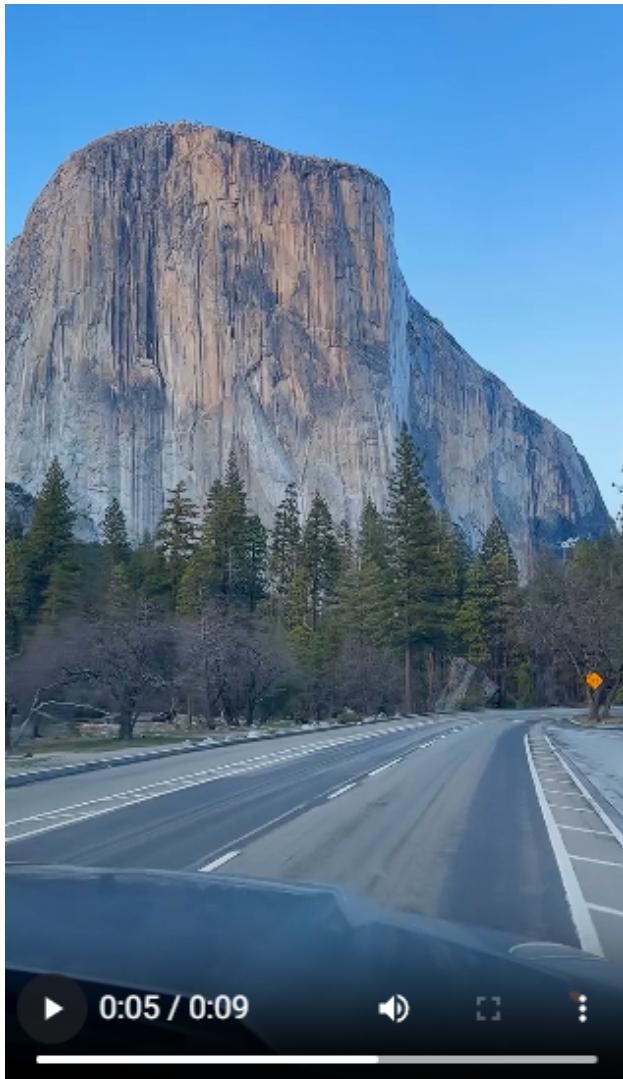
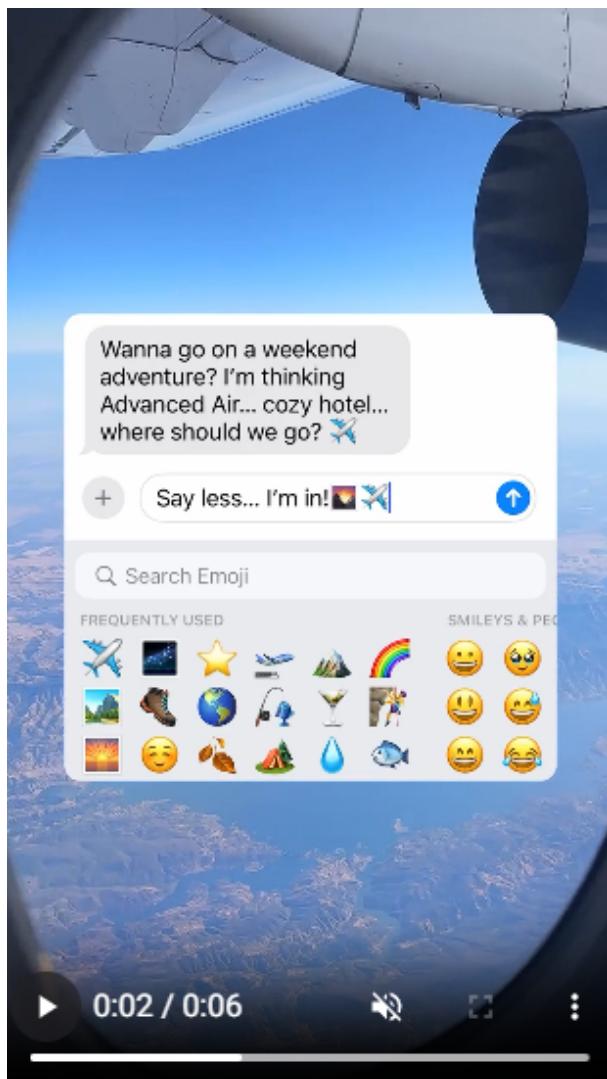
Warmly,

**Priscilla Jimenez**

Culture & Community Engagement, Advanced Air

*Merced, California*

## Instagram/Facebook Posts

**IG****IG****Views** 1

2,206

**Reach** 1

1,487

**Views** 1

1,399

**Reach** 1

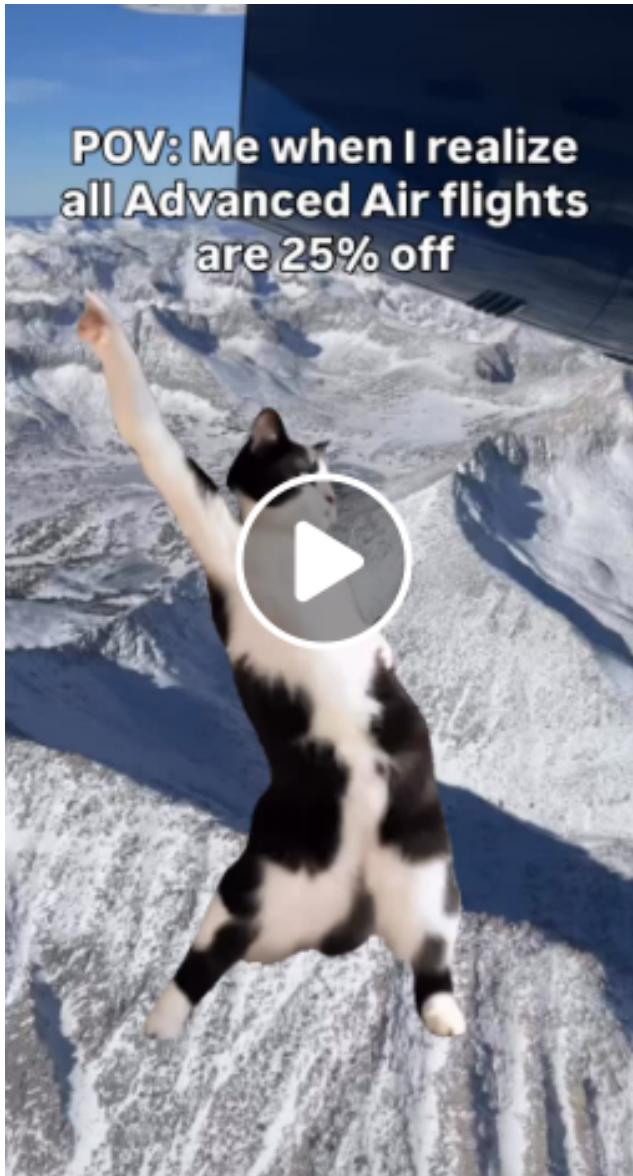
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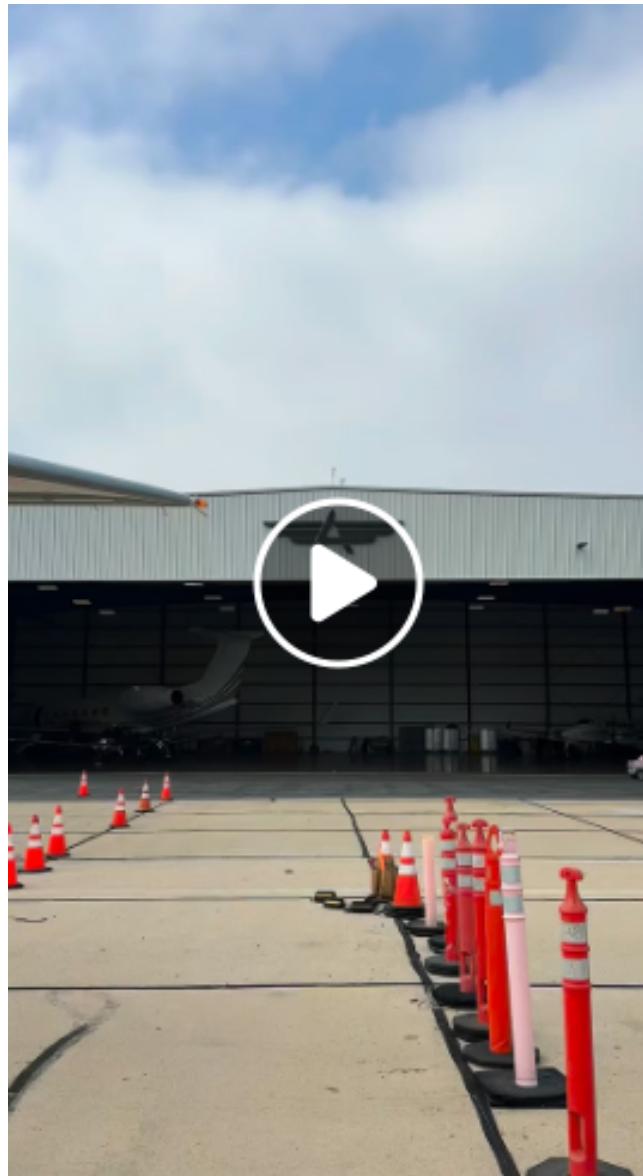
Merced, California

## Instagram/Facebook Posts

IG



IG



Views ⓘ

1,807

Interactions ⓘ

23

Views ⓘ

2,413

Interactions ⓘ

71



Merced, California

## Instagram/Facebook Posts

FB

Views 4,207   Reach 2,313   Interactions 48

ADVANCED AIR

Celebrate 20 Years with  
**20% OFF ALL FLIGHTS**

Use Promo Code  
"20YEARS"

20

ADVANCED AIR

Published by Instagram 16 July 2025  
20 years. Countless takeoffs. Even more memories. 🎈

We've spent two decades connecting the places that need us the most and we're just getting started.

To mark the milestone, we're offering 20% off flights with code "20YEARS" until July 23, 2025. Book now, fly anytime through the end of the year. 🎈

Thanks for being part of the journey. Cheers to 20 more! 🎈

#ad... See more — with Visit Angel Fire and 13 others in Los Angeles, CA.

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Like Comment Share

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Petie Esmeyer Congrats on 20 years! 22w Like Reply Hide

Stella Oliva Advanced Air 20 years! 22w Like Reply Hide

Comment as Advanced Air

BLACK FRIDAY  
**DEALS**  
END TODAY!

ADVANCED AIR

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with code: BlackFriday25

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*Merced, California*

## Instagram/Facebook Story Ads

ADVANCED AIR



Celebrate 20 Years with  
**20% OFF ALL  
FLIGHTS**

Use Promo Code  
“20YEARS”





Merced, California

## Social Media Ads



Merced Ad Spend  
\$2,512.83  
1,069,507 Impressions



*Merced, California*

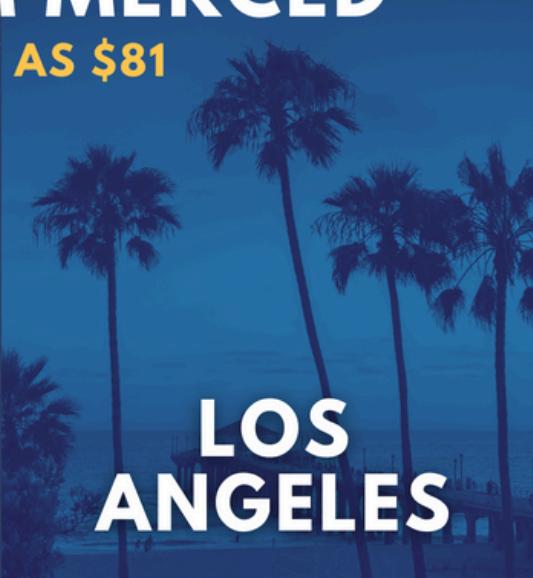
## Print Advertising

ADVANCED AIR



**FLY FROM MERCED**

**AS LOW AS \$81**



**LAS VEGAS**

**LOS ANGELES**

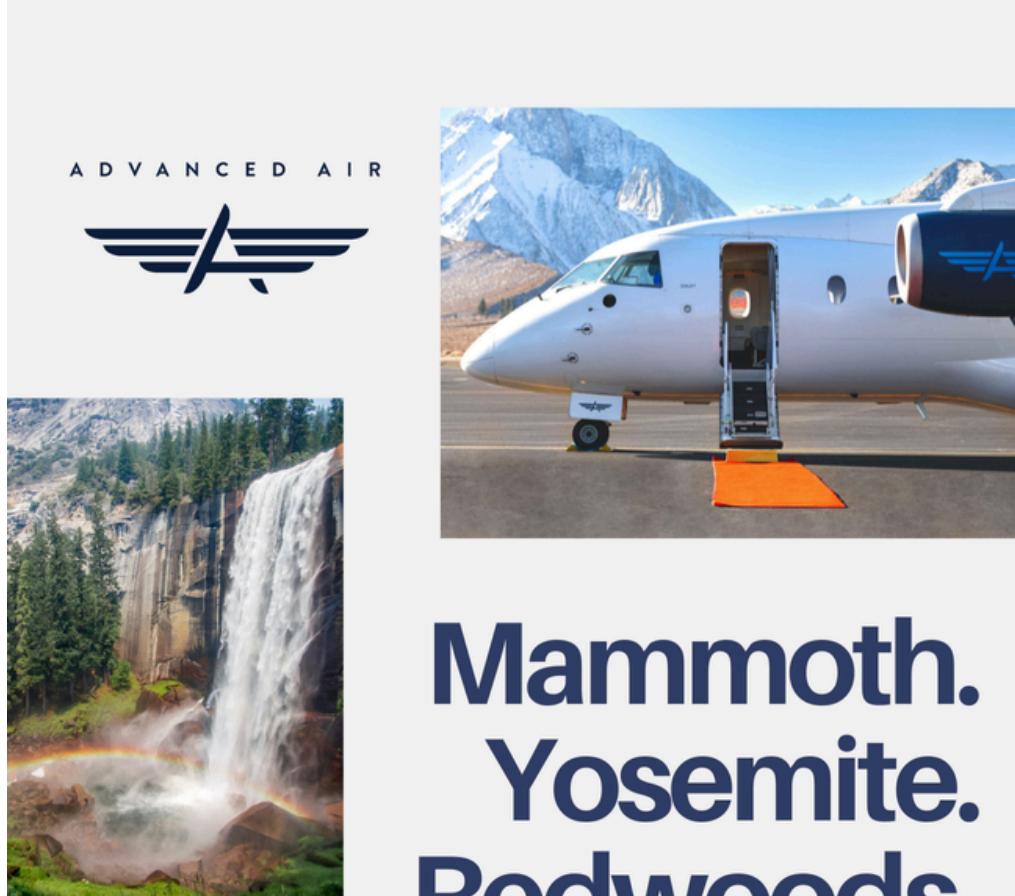
**ADVANCEDAIRLINES.COM**

ADVANCED AIR



*Merced, California*

## Print Advertising



**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](http://ADVANCEDAIRLINES.COM)





*Merced, California*

## Billboard Advertising





*Merced, California*

## Mobile Conquesting Ads

ADVANCED AIR



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

AS LOW AS  
**\$162**  
ONE-WAY

**BOOK NOW**

ADVANCEDAIRLINES.COM

ADVANCED AIR



**FLY FROM  
MERCED  
TO  
LOS  
ANGELES**

**BOOK NOW**

ADVANCEDAIRLINES.COM

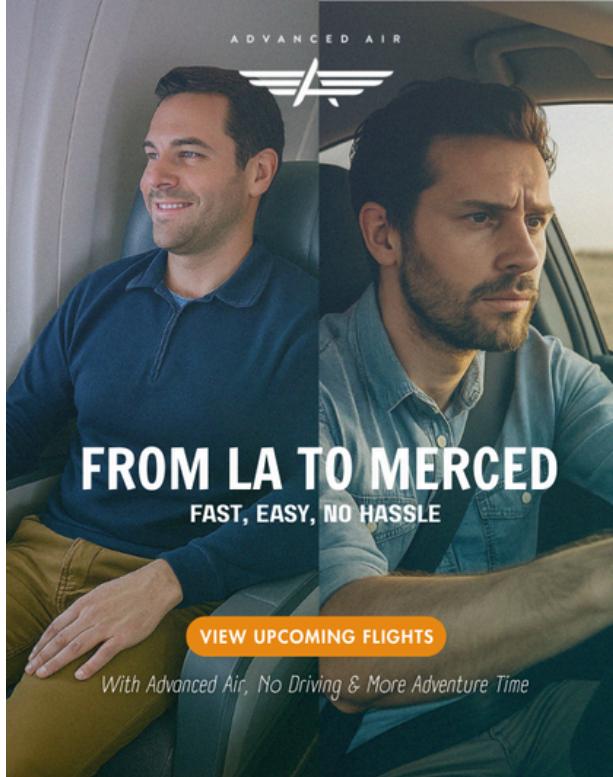
**FLY FROM MERCED  
TO LA OR LAS VEGAS**





# Merced, California

## Lead Magnet



### FROM LA TO MERCED

FAST, EASY, NO HASSLE

[VIEW UPCOMING FLIGHTS](#)

*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





# Merced, California

## 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](http://www.advancedairlines.com)

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

### 01

#### FUN FACTS ABOUT MERCED

01 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).

02 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.

03 Merced's Castle Air Museum is the world's largest military aircraft collection, with 70+ restored vintage planes.

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

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

06



### 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](http://www.advancedairlines.com)



### 03 3-DAY TRAVEL IN YOSEMITE ESCAPE

#### Friday: Arrival + Local Flavor



- Fly from Hawthorne to Merced
- 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 Degan's Deli inside the park
- Evening: Return to Merced and grab casual dinner at J&R Tacos or rustic Italian at Toni's Courtyard Cafe

#### 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](http://www.advancedairlines.com)



### 04 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 Stay:

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

[www.advancedairlines.com](http://www.advancedairlines.com)



### 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 time exploring the mountains. Book your seat today and start your adventure sooner!

[www.advancedairlines.com](http://www.advancedairlines.com)



*Merced, California*

## 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 14<sup>th</sup>
  - o Annual Latina Women's Luncheon Sponsor
  - o Mercado Night Market Sponsor (July 10<sup>th</sup>, September 4<sup>th</sup> or November 6<sup>th</sup>)
  - o Annual Installation Dinner Sponsor
  - o Travis Credit Union Mixer at El Capitan Hotel – Giveaway Items
- Merced County Farm Bureau's 107<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting Dinner – Event Tickets
- Merced County Farm Bureau's MCFB Coffee Talks – Sponsor

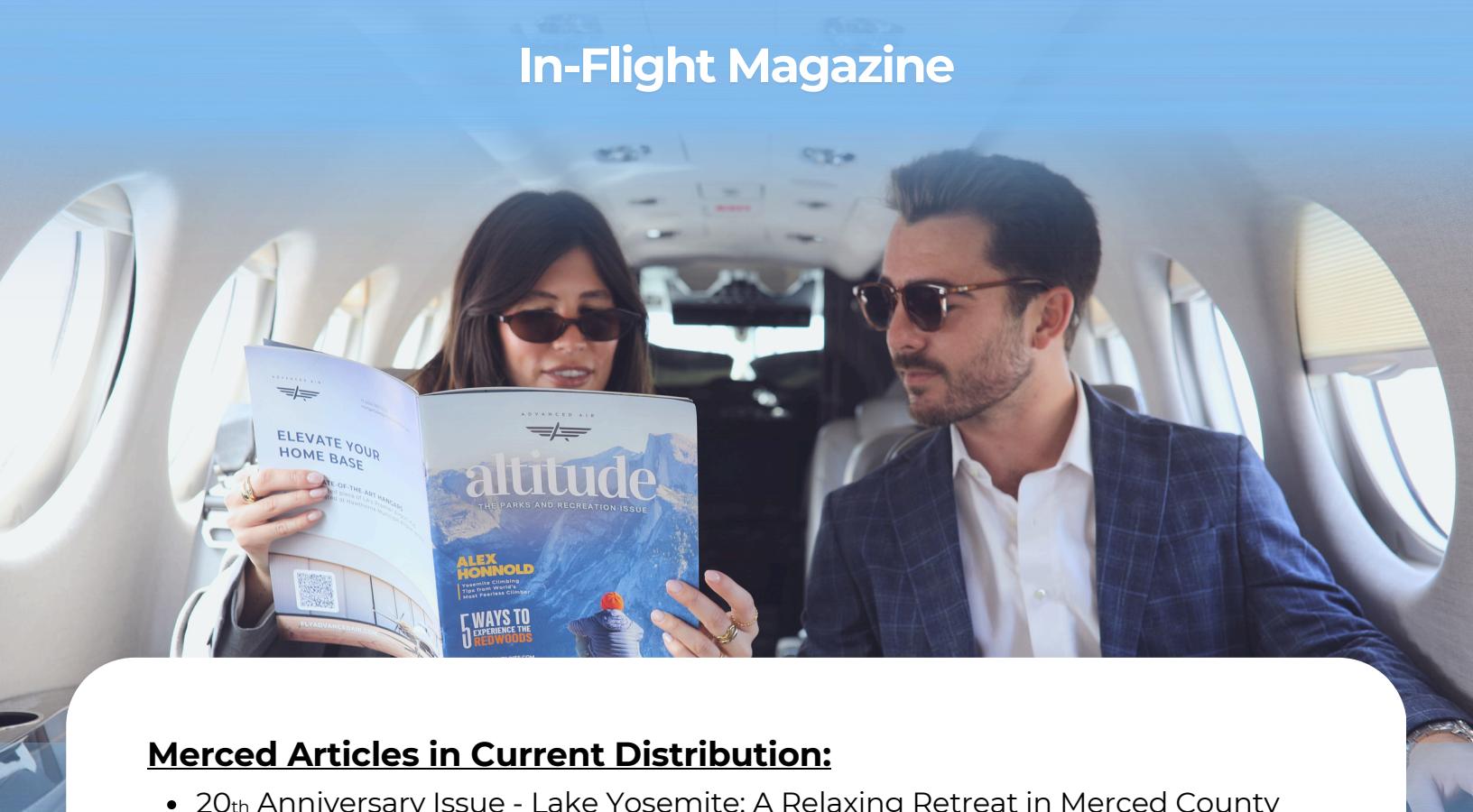


*Merced, California*

## Advertisements

- **Merced County Farm Bureau's 107<sup>th</sup> 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:**

- 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Issue - Lake Yosemite: A Relaxing Retreat in Merced County
  - o Local advertisers confirmed: YARTS and Autocamp
- 2025-2026 Winter Issue
  - o 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



# Merced, California

## Altitude Magazine (Winter Edition - 2025-2026)

### Winter Wonderland: Yosemite in Frost and Light by Eden Calleja

**Winter Wonderland: Yosemite in Frost and Light**

By EDEN CALLEJA

**Yosemite's Winter Story**

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.

**Badger Pass Ski Adventures**

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.

**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.

**Yosemite Valley: Serenity in Stone**

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.

**The Firefall Phenomenon**

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

MERCED, CALIFORNIA

ALITUDE 17

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.

#### The Firefall Phenomenon

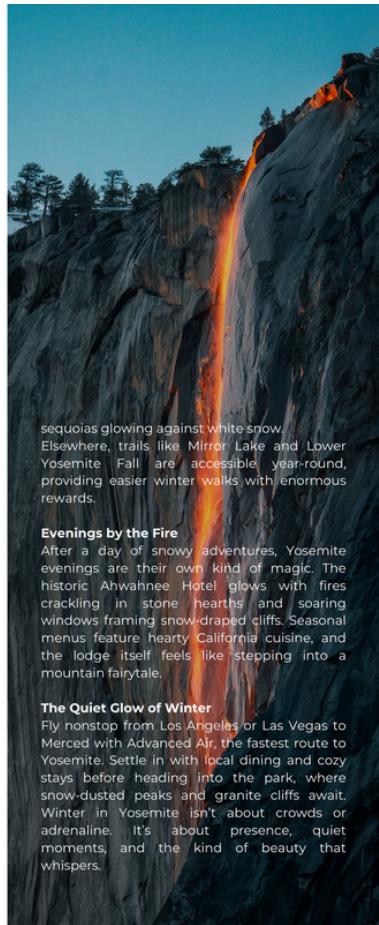
In winter, the Valley is a place of hush and glow. Trails remain open, though sometimes icy, and landmarks like Yosemite Falls and Bridalveil Fall feel different in the cold season, with water thundering through a veil of mist and rainbows shimmering in the winter light. Tunnel View, the iconic overlook, 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 Quiet Glow of Winter

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



ALITUDE 18



## Altitude Magazine (Winter Edition - 2025-2026)

## A Migration Spectacle Over Merced Skies by Eden Calleja

## A MIGRATION Spectacle OVER MERCED SKIES

BY: EDEN CALLEJA

**A**t 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 harriers and peregrine falcons patrol the skies, while herons, egrets, and shorebirds dot the shallows. For locals and

### 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

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.

### 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.

## ADVENTURE ON TAP IN MAMMOTH LAKES





# Altitude Magazine (Winter Edition - 2025-2026)

## Gravity & Grace with Tommy Caldwell



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 sieve.

"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."





*Merced, California*

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