

# THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

## You'll Need a Reservation at Yosemite Again. Better Plan Now.

The popular national park went without reservations in 2023, leading to a surge of visitors

Visitors driving into [Yosemite National Park will need reservations](#) once again.

Travelers planning to drive into or through the park from April through October will often now need to snag a morning or afternoon entry slot. If you plan to take a bus or enter by bike, horseback or on foot, you won't need individual reservations. The required reservations will vary by month and time of day.

Some local businesses and travelers say the new rules are confusing. Many travelers book months in advance and may need to scramble to make sure they can still get into the park. Others welcome the change in the hope that it will limit crowds and create a better experience.

Yosemite [instituted reservation systems](#) early in the pandemic to keep crowds down. It scrapped reservations completely for 2023, saying it had grappled with congestion for decades.

### High-season rules

Most reservations for visits from April 13 through Oct. 27 will be available at [recreation.gov](#) on Jan. 5. Additional slots will become available one week ahead of the reservation date.

The park also will require reservations on weekends Feb. 10 through Feb. 25, during the popular time when Horsetail Fall appears to be on fire because of lighting from the sun.

Two of the park's major roads couldn't open until July due to record amounts of snowfall during the previous winter. That left travelers concentrated in smaller areas of the park. Those conditions, combined with the lack of reservations, meant people [overwhelmed the park](#), visitors said.

The park [posted an advisory last summer](#) cautioning visitors that they could wait one to four hours at entrance stations at any time spring through fall. It also warned of two-to-three-hour delays in the popular Yosemite Valley. In addition to the traffic, tourists left human waste along roadsides and in parking lots.



Park visitors watched the sun rise from Tunnel View in Yosemite National Park in July. Yosemite is instituting a new reservation system. PHOTO: TRACY BARBUTES FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Lee Zimmerman, chief executive of the Evergreen Lodge and Rush Creek Lodge, which are both near the park, helped draft a competing proposal that would have limited access to the popular Yosemite Valley, rather than the whole park.

Local visitors associations, lodging associations and hotels endorsed the plan. It would have delegated a certain number of vehicle passes on a first-come, first-served basis, but permitted open access to the rest of the park.

Zimmerman says the 2024 reservation system is well-intentioned, but misses the chance to test a completely different strategy that didn't require travelers to plan as much in advance.

He's disappointed, he says. "But maybe someday."