

TAPtravel

CHECK IN TRAVEL BRIEFING

Disneyland to add a digital Fastpass

Disneyland's Fastpass ticketing system, which lets visitors avoid the long lines for crowded attractions by booking a ride time, has been a free feature since it was created in 1999.

But Disney announced it will let parkgoers use the Disneyland smartphone app to electronically book and redeem Fastpasses, as well as download unlimited photos taken by resort photographers — for \$10 a day.

The resort said the new electronic feature will launch later this year.

The advantage of the electronic Fastpass is that park visitors don't have to stand in line at a Fastpass kiosk to retrieve a ticket to book a time to get on an attraction and avoid the long queues. But visitors will have to wait until they get past the turnstiles to book the digital Fastpass, rather than doing so from home or elsewhere in the resort.

Disney also announced it will add the Fastpass feature on two existing attractions, Toy Story Mania in Disney California Adventure park and Matterhorn Bobsleds in Disneyland. That means the resort will increase to 16 the total number of attractions that are available for Fastpass access.

The new digital Fastpass option, dubbed Maxpass, will operate alongside the free, paper Fastpass ticket system.



JOURNAL SENTINEL FILES

Visitors watch and take photographs as Old Faithful erupts at Yellowstone National Park.

National park visits hit record high

Visits to U.S. national parks set a record in 2016 for the third consecutive year as landmarks such as Zion, Yellowstone and Rocky Mountain experienced historic levels of popularity that brought collateral headaches stemming from overcrowded roads and trails and increasing visitor misbehavior.

At many parks, visitors waited an hour or more in cars to get through entrance gates and then spent the day trying to outmaneuver fellow visitors for parking spots and room on popular trails. They left behind enormous amounts of trash and sometimes, human waste.

Encountering a crowded, Disneyland-like situation when people were expecting peaceful serenity can lead to aggression and bad decisions, park officials said.

"The level of frustration, we've certainly seen an increase in that," said Kyle Patterson, Rocky Mountain National park spokeswoman. "Sometimes they take it out on each other and sometimes they take it out on the park."

It created a good news-bad news story for park managers. They praise the increased interest but are struggling to preserve iconic mountains, slot canyons and wildlife habitat for future generations. The National Park Service budget has remained basically flat, leaving parks to grapple with the problems without higher staffing levels.

"We love having people come to the park," said John Marciano, Zion National Park spokesman. "But our No. 1 goal, our mandate, is to preserve the park into perpetuity and to ensure our visitors have a best of kind and safe experience."

Overall visitation to national parks is on track to surpass 325 million in 2016, breaking the all-time high of 307 million set in 2015, federal figures show. The record-breaking three-year stretch came after parks visitation ebbed and flowed between 255 million and 287 million for nearly three decades.



THE RITZ-CARLTON

Fire pits on the ocean terrace, overlooking vast beaches, are perfect spots to relax at The Ritz-Carlton in Half Moon Bay.

Revisit San Francisco for 50th anniversary of Monterey Pop fest

STEVE SLOSAREK
SPECIAL TO THE JOURNAL SENTINEL

Are you going to San Francisco?

You should, as 2017 marks the golden anniversary of the seminal Monterey International Pop Festival, which inspired subsequent rock festivals and spawned the hit song "San Francisco (Be Sure to Wear Flowers in Your Hair)" by Scott McKenzie.

The June 1967 festival, which helped kick off what became known as the Summer of Love, is being celebrated with musical performances, art exhibitions and special events all summer in Monterey.

The main event celebrating the festival's 50th anniversary will take place during the same weekend and at the same venue as the original.

The Monterey County Fair & Event Center, about two hours south of downtown San Francisco, will feature retro and modern-day artists throughout the June 16-18 festival.

Instead of roughing it, as many who trekked to San Francisco did five decades ago, baby boomers and others should do the San Francisco area in style to make up for pinching pennies all those years ago.

Rich in outdoor and cultural attractions, the region is ripe to be re-experienced in a comfortable, luxurious manner.



STEVE SLOSAREK

A large bird takes flight in a valley in Yosemite National Park.

Yosemite yearnings, Tahoe treats

Tops on the "living it up" list should be the Yosemite and Tahoe Sierras Tour offered by Incredible Adventures, the only tour company that offers a round trip to Yosemite National Park, the mountain resort town of Mammoth Lakes and spectacular Lake Tahoe.

A mini-coach that can fit 13 to 15 people picks up customers at San Francisco area hotels for a four-day, three-night sojourn.

In Summer of Love, earth-preserving style, the coach runs on petroleum-free renewable fuel. The tour will renew your senses, as Incredible Adventures has included the most soul-enriching, natural-world phenomena possible in the 375-mile round trip.

Yosemite remains a highlight, and the group is allowed to help tweak the trip.

During a recent visit, our group chose to hike five miles down Glacier Point while marvel-

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San Fran

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ing at Yosemite Valley, Half Dome, Bridalveil Falls and the Sierra Mountain peaks.

After a night near Yosemite, our next stop was Mammoth Lakes. Along the way we enjoyed more Yosemite offerings, including up-close views of Lower Yosemite Falls, El Capitan, giant sequoias, the Merced River, Tenaya Lake, Tuolumne Meadows and Olmsted Point. We also stopped in the Eastern Sierras at Mono Lake, which features 30-foot tufa towers, before arriving at the charming Mammoth Mountain Inn, directly across from the 11,000-foot ski haven.

A gondola up the mountain revealed an endless panorama of peaks, valleys and lakes.

Next on the eastern California agenda was Rainbow Falls and neighboring Devils Postpile National Monument of columnar basalt, the ghost town of Bodie, and a glorious arrival into chic Lake Tahoe, including a boat cruise on emerald waters that produced a sunset and moonrise for the ages.

Our guide also led us on Tahoe-area hikes at Inspiration Point, Horsetail Falls and the unforgettable Cascade Falls, which included log-jumping over the creek that feeds into Cascade Falls and Cascade Lake, which ultimately drains into Lake Tahoe.

Fantastic 'Frisco

While in San Francisco, go upscale by taking advantage of the only place in North America that offers Audi on Demand, a service that provides visitors an Au-

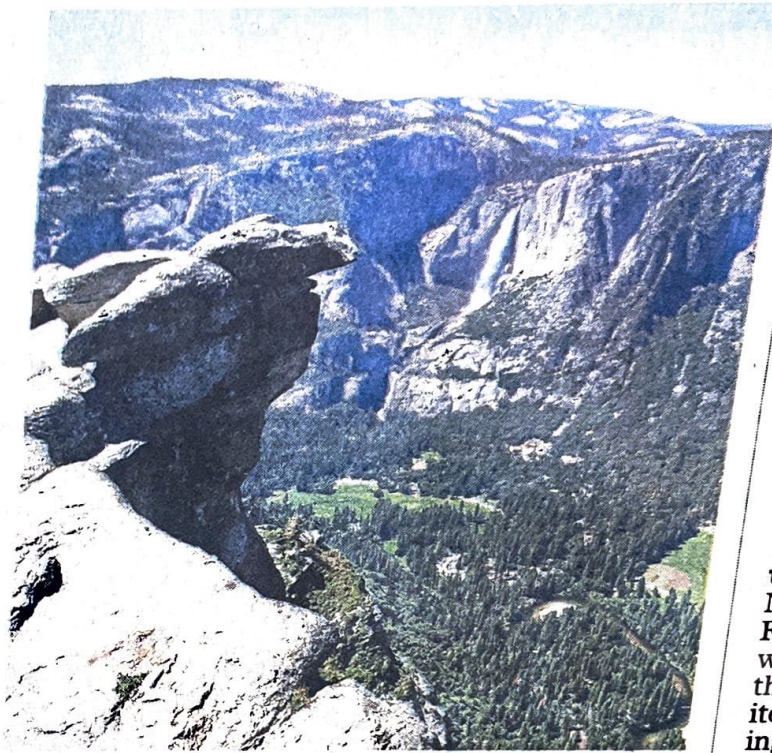
di vehicle that matches their driving needs, where and when they need it. At the touch of a button on a smartphone app, an Audi concierge will personally deliver and pick up the Audi on demand vehicle and will ensure that the car is tailored to any specific needs. A far cry from the Volkswagen Beetles popular during the Summer of Love, the luxurious Audi offers style and the newest technology to vacationers.

If you take that Audi to nearby Muir Woods National Monument, you could go it alone, but you would be missing out on a chance to be guided by a real believer.

Debra Schwartz firmly believes Muir Woods is alive — with history, mystery and a magical presence. Schwartz, the owner of Tam Hiking Tours and lifelong Bay Area resident, offers guided tours of Muir Woods and around nearby Mount Tamalpais.

After being enlightened by Schwartz, you won't look just skyward at the 380-foot redwoods; instead, you'll also peruse the perimeter to find other natural wonders. The veteran guide calls nature our stained-glass windows that tell a story, our sacred grounds, and our vehicle to pull back the invisibility cloak to see things for the first time or in a new way.

Back in San Francisco accommodations are numerous, but the Inn at Union Square offers the best of many worlds: location, a historic building and a recent remodel. The inn closed for much of 2016 for full renovation of all 30 deluxe rooms and suites. Despite being near all the action — including cable cars, Union Square, Fisherman's Wharf and the Financial District — the boutique



STEVE SLOSAREK

Yosemite National Park, from the top of Glacier Point.

hotel is a sophisticated retreat. Many rooms are equipped with whirlpools and fireplaces, and painted murals of Bay Area attractions anchor each floor of a spiral staircase. Complimentary champagne, cookies and fruit are offered every evening, as is breakfast every morning.

While in food-centric San Francisco, dining should be epic — as in EPIC Steakhouse. The restaurant, picturesquely located on the threshold of the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge, goes beyond the traditional steakhouse experience by melding clean and lighter cooking techniques with decadent traditional steakhouse ideals. And the beautiful waterfront restaurant's sourdough bread doesn't have to travel far; the Acme Bread Company is located next door in Ferry Plaza.

Ritzly Ritz

When the Monterey Pop Festival ends, don't drive directly to San Francisco International Airport. Give yourself

one final reward by staying at The Ritz-Carlton in Half Moon Bay. The coastal resort, about 25 miles southwest of the airport, offers dramatic, sweeping views from a bluff overlooking the Pacific Ocean. A wide, paved path makes it easy for walkers, runners and bicyclists to soak in the dreamy scenery for miles, with easy access to the vast beaches below. The acclaimed golf course includes two cliff-side holes, and a soothing spa relieves any remaining tension. Multiple fire pits on the ocean terrace are perfect spots to relax with a glass of wine, hot chocolate and s'mores kits available on the spot. Certain rooms feature private fire pits.

The Half Moon Bay resort also boasts chef-driven restaurants with California-inspired designs. We found the Conservatory to serve tender, fall-off-the-bone short ribs in a perfect wine sauce. The nearby Navio emphasizes seafood and light, savory accompaniments for dinner, but also serves a wide-ranging breakfast.

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