



Around Sequoia & Kings Canyon National Parks

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Why Go?

Entering the parks from the south, Hwy 198 passes through the small city of Visalia and the tiny gateway town of Three Rivers, which borders Sequoia National Park. Visalia is the last sizable city on your drive up to the park's Foothills area, while Three Rivers, named for the nearby convergence of three forks of the Kaweah River, is a friendly small town populated mostly by long-term locals, retirees and a few artsy newcomers.

To the north, Hwy 180 accesses Kings Canyon, but no sizable towns are located along the way from Fresno, the Central Valley's biggest city.

Road Distances (miles)

Three Rivers	25			
Mineral King	50	30		
Grant Grove Village	25	55	75	
Visalia	55	30	60	55
	Lodgepole Village	Three Rivers	Mineral King	Grant Grove Village

Note: Distances are approximate

Visalia

In the middle of the hotter-than-hell Central Valley and with a population of 130,000, Visalia is the main southern gateway to the parks. Its old-fashioned downtown is walkable, although blistering summer heat will have you scouting for shade. Hwy 198 runs just south of the middle of town; Main St is the major east-west commercial strip.

Sleeping

Budget and midrange motels and hotels line Hwy 198 and are scattered around downtown.

Lamp Liter Motel

MOTEL \$

(☎ 800-662-6692, 559-732-4511; <http://lamp-liter.net>; 3300 W Mineral King Ave; r \$75-125; ⓂⓂⓂⓂ) It could be a run-of-the-mill two-story courtyard motel, but this family-owned establishment surprises with its spotlessly clean, if dated, rooms and country cottages facing an outdoor pool. The Sequoia Shuttle stops here.

Spalding House

B&B \$

(☎ 559-739-7877; www.thespaldinghouse.com; 631 N Encina St; s/d incl breakfast \$85/95; ⓂⓂⓂ) Built by a lumber baron, this atmospheric 1901 Colonial Revival-style home offers three cozy guest suites with private sitting areas and gorgeous details such as mosaic-tiled bathrooms, a stained-glass ceiling or a sleigh bed.



Eating & Drinking

Downtown is chockablock with cafes, restaurants, bars, taquerias and take-out shops.

Char-Cu-Te-Rie

CAFE \$

(☎ 559-733-7902; <http://char-cu-te-rie.com>; 211 W Main St; mains \$6-9; ☉ 7am-4pm Mon-Fri, from 9am Sat & Sun) Truffled eggs on brioche French toast, sourdough sandwiches spread with goat cheese and sweet figs, maple-bacon popcorn, date and Nutella ice-cream shakes and artisan coffee are just a few of the treats at this downtown storefront. Kitchen closes at 3:30pm.

Brewbaker's Brewing Company

AMERICAN \$

(☎ 559-627-2739; <http://brewbakersbrewingco.com>; 219 E Main St; mains \$8-18; ☉ 11:30am-10pm; Ⓜ) Always jam-packed, Brewbakers beckons thirsty hikers with house-made sodas and craft beers like Sequoia Red. A huge menu of burgers, pizzas, pastas and salads promises more than it delivers. Expect to wait, and then wait some more.

Visalia Farmers Market – Downtown

MARKET \$

(www.visaliafarmersmarket.com; cnr E Main & N Church Sts; ☉ 5-8pm Thu mid-Mar-Sep; Ⓜ) Fresh fruits and veggies sold downtown.

Visalia Farmers Market – Sequoia Mall

MARKET \$

(www.visaliafarmersmarket.com; cnr S Mooney Blvd & W Caldwell Ave; ☉ 8am-11:30am Sat; Ⓜ) Year-

UTOPIAN DREAMS: THE KAWEAH CO-OPERATIVE COMMONWEALTH

A few years before Sequoia National Park was created, an idealistic organization of union workers, skilled craftspeople and social progressives settled in the foothills around Three Rivers. The radical group planned a utopian community based on cooperative assets and collective land ownership. In 1886 they applied for inexpensive land grants and got to work setting up a logging business in the Giant Forest.

As the socialist colony toiled to build a logging road, local citizens grew concerned about their unusually large claims. At the time, it wasn't uncommon for railroads and other corporations to fraudulently purchase huge tracts of land, quietly expanding their monopolies. George Stewart, the editor of the Visalia *Delta* newspaper led a campaign for Congress to protect the giant sequoias, and spurred an inquiry into colonists' land claims. Ironically, the Kaweah Colony was suspected of the very capitalist motives it abhorred.

By the summer of 1890, the colony finished a rough road to the edge of the mature sequoia groves and logging began. But within months, Sequoia National Park was created, shielding the sequoias from being cut down, which became the colony's undoing. Their settlement sat squarely inside the national park, so their claims and sweat equity became worthless.

A few relics remain from the colony's heyday, including the Kaweah Post Office, north of Three Rivers town. In Sequoia National Park, the Squatters Cabin at Crescent Meadow is another legacy of the former community.