

Geotourism goes digital: National Geographic app brings Yosemite to the desktop

[Joe Ascanio](#), TERRACURVE.COM

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In 2002, a major geotourism study by National Geographic Traveler magazine and the Travel Industry Association of America found that at least 55 million American adults can be classified as “geotourists” — a strong incentive for scenic regions to protect assets for future visitors.

And as for “scenic” – Yosemite National Park is considered to be one of the greatest, most awe-inspiring natural locales in North America. Each year, thousands of travelers, adventurers, photographers and nature and wildlife buffs from around the world make the journey to this amazing land to witness nature at its best.

Now, nature meets technology with the introduction of a new, interactive GeoTourism Map Guide by National Geographic.

Unveiled just last week, the map moves far beyond the famous park’s borders to highlight the entire region’s unsung treasures, celebrating the world-class natural and cultural heritage of the entire area.

The wonders of Yosemite National Park are just the starting point of National Geographic’s newest online Geotourism MapGuide, the latest in digital mapping loaded with interactive features for fun and custom trip planning.

“The entire world has heard of Yosemite, and rightly so. However, the magic of this MapGuide is that it includes the surrounding Sierra Nevada, a region that deserves to become a household name, too,” said James Dion, associate director of National Geographic’s Center for Sustainable Destinations. “Our commitment is to preserving the enormous scenic and cultural assets of both.”

Gateway to discovery

The MapGuide to the Yosemite Gateway is only the first of four regions to be highlighted within the enormous Sierra Nevada – showcasing locals’ secrets of one-of-a-kind coffee houses in historic buildings, spectacular drives without the crowds, deserted mining towns, even details on the upcoming Mariposa Butterfly Festival.

Over 800 map point nominations were received from the region’s residents, making the MapGuide a unique resource for the millions of annual visitors as well as for locals seeking unspoiled outdoor places and authentic cultural experiences.

For the purpose of this project, the Sierra Nevada is sectioned into four phase areas. The MapGuide Web site reflects the completion of the first phase in the Yosemite Gateway area and the transition into sequential phase areas.

“The breadth of the beauty in the Sierra Nevada is unique. Lassen Volcanic National Park, Lake Tahoe, Yosemite National Park, and Sequoia and Kings Canyon national parks are incredible jewels in this 400-mile-long region,” said Steven Frisch, president, Sierra Business Council. “The Sierra Nevada Geotourism Project is the perfect synthesis of economic outreach to culturally rich communities and respect for the planet.”

This summer, the project will solicit nominations from the Tahoe Emigrant Corridor, which includes the counties of Placer, Nevada, El Dorado, Washoe, Douglas and Carson. The final two MapGuides will guide visitors through the Northern and Southern Sierra regions.

“The Sierra is where Californians come to discover, unwind and imagine,” said Sierra Nevada Conservancy Executive Officer Jim Branham. “With the National Geographic Geotourism initiative, visitors will realize that there is so much more to see than they ever imagined, and they will come away from their next adventure with a better sense of connectedness to the Sierra Nevada, its residents and its resources.”

Making geotourism interactive with local insight

National Geographic defines geotourism as “tourism that sustains or enhances the geographical character of a place — its environment, culture, aesthetics, heritage and the well-being of its residents.”

Dion noted that the online Yosemite Gateway map is “living and breathing, constantly being updated.” Site visitors can add comments, read what others have posted, even hit a key to connect to Facebook or Twitter accounts to advise friends instantly of what they’ve found. They can also make a nomination for the map; suggestions will be considered for possible inclusion on the WebMap or a print copy to come.

History buffs and adventurers, backpackers and foodies, birders and sightseers can discover destinations based on recommendations from those who know best — residents of the Sierra Nevada.