



**MOUNTAINS OF CALIFORNIA:**  
The summit of Painted Lady, as  
seen from Upper Rae Lake

**TOUCHSTONE WILDERNESS**  
**John Muir Trail**  
**CALIFORNIA**



Well loved by thru-hikers and weekend backpackers alike, the 211-mile John Muir Trail travels end-to-end through three National Parks—Yosemite, Kings Canyon, and Sequoia—traversing the most inspiring alpine wilderness in the contiguous U.S. Tens of thousands of hikers trek portions of its length each summer, but the protected territory through which the trail meanders is so vast one rarely feels the pressure of a crowd. That would make John Muir, Sierra Club founder and JMT namesake, proud: He lobbied for the trail's creation in the late 19th century because he knew the best way to protect a landscape was to encourage people to enjoy it.

Muir's trail stretches from the summit of Mount Whitney (14,495 feet) to the Yosemite Valley. In the long course of this winding route, it passes through groves of towering redwoods, flanks the dramatic 14,000-plus-foot Palisade peaks, skirts the sparkling Rae Lakes, and winds through the verdant meadows of Tuolumne country. Perhaps even finer than the scenery, however, is the Sierra's legendary summer weather: blue skies and consistent sunshine, day after beautiful day.

**INSIDER ADVICE:** If you are short the three weeks needed to experience the entire JMT, try hiking a ten-day section, either from Whitney Portal to South Lake (northwest of Bishop, California) or from Tuolumne Meadows to Mammoth Lakes.

**WHEN TO GO:** July to September  
**LOGISTICS:** Yosemite National Park serves as the trail's northern staging area; Lone Pine, California, is the southern gateway. Wilderness permits are required for any overnight trip along the JMT. At the Yosemite end, permits are obtained through Yosemite National Park (\$3; [www.nps.gov/yose](http://www.nps.gov/yose)), which grants them up to 24 weeks in advance. At the Mount Whitney end, permits are available through the Inyo National Forest (\$5; [www.fs.fed.us/r5/inyo](http://www.fs.fed.us/r5/inyo)). While the JMT is not especially demanding physically, it does present some significant logistical hurdles. Most thru-hikers travel from north to south and set up resupply stations at either the Tuolumne Meadows post office and the Vermilion Valley Resort or at Mammoth Mountain Ski Area and South Lake. Black bears are a nuisance along the JMT, so be sure to keep your cooking area separate from your sleeping area and protect all of your food in a bearproof food canister, even where not required.

**STAGING AREA:**  
**Yosemite National Park**  
**or Lone Pine, CA**

**RECOMMENDED**  
**DISTANCE:**

**60**  
**MILES**  
(TOTAL LENGTH:  
211 MILES)

**TRAIL TIME:**

**10**  
**DAYS**

**TOTAL TRIP:**  
**Two Weeks**

**DIFFICULTY**  
(SCALE OF 1 TO 5,  
5 MOST DIFFICULT):

**3.5**

**DIY COST**  
(EXCLUDING AIRFARE):  
**\$200-\$300**