

TRAVEL

Protecting our heritage

Holy sites, natural wonders added to UNESCO's world list PAGE 3

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||| SECTION H

It's a
small
world,
after allGUIDED TOURS,
DISNEY STYLE

By Brooks Barnes

New York Times

When Karen Gammieri heard that the Walt Disney Co. had started offering guided tours to places like Peru and China, the San Diego mother was skeptical. She didn't want to arrive at the Great Wall of China to find Winnie the Pooh shaking her hand. "Shudder," she said.

Still, Gammieri decided to risk it after reading glowing online reports, booking a nine-day Disney tour called Viva Italia that would take the family to Rome, Florence and Venice. The verdict: "We loved everything about it and so did the kids," she gushed, citing adults-only wine tastings and first-class Eurostar train seats. "And I never once saw a costumed character," she said.

Restraint and sophistication are not words that you would typically use to describe a Disney vacation. The company has built its \$10.6 billion theme park, hotel and cruise empire around the opposite. Pass through the gates of the Happiest Place on Earth and you're encouraged to eat fudge, hug Goofy and wear mouse ears.

All that sweetness is great — an estimated 117 million customers lapped it up at Disney resorts last year — but the company realized a few years ago that it was missing a vast pool of potential customers.

Jay Rasulo, chairman of Walt Disney Parks and Resorts, says the idea is to "take the magic on the road." In other words, apply some of the company's hallmarks —

See **DISNEY**, Page 4New cards
cut cost
of crossing
border

Staff and Wire Reports

For Bay Area residents who drive often to Mexico but find the cost of a passport off-putting, the State Department's new passport cards may be the solution.

These wallet-sized identification cards can be a good value, especially for families with children. A first-time adult passport costs \$100, as compared to \$45 for the passport card. For children younger than 16, a passport will run you \$85, but a passport card is just \$35.

As of June 1, 2009, Americans will be required to provide a single document that proves both citizenship and identity at border crossings; for most people, that will mean a passport or passport card.

One hitch: These cards are not valid for air travel. They are designed to speed land crossings between the United States and Mexico or Canada, as well as sea crossings to the Caribbean or Bermuda.

More than 350,000 Americans preordered passport cards, according to the State Department, and all existing orders are expected to be filled by Sept. 30. New applications will take about four weeks to process.

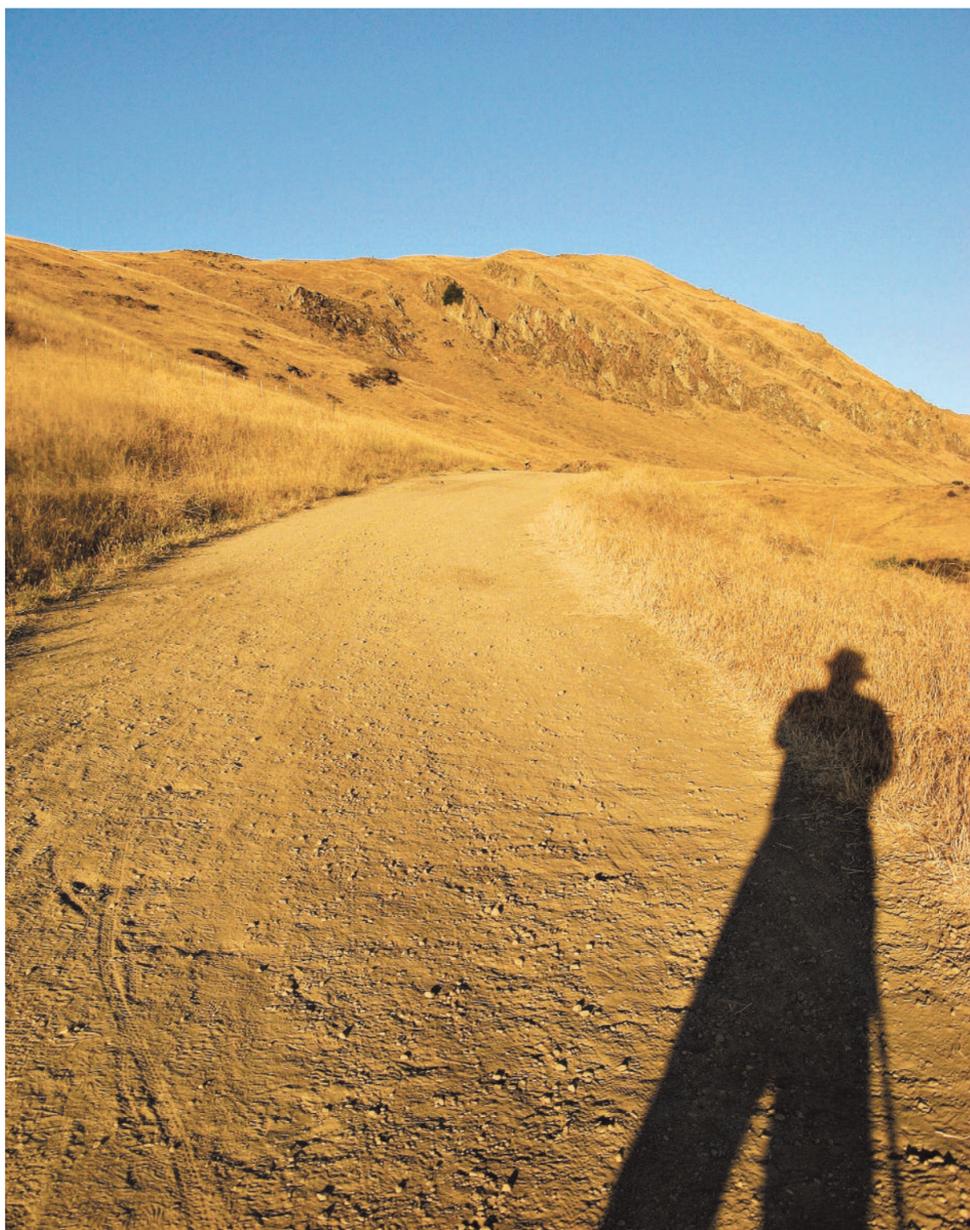
If you already have a passport but want the card anyway because of the convenient size or quick scanning, it's only \$20 and can be ordered by mail.

IF YOU'RE INTERESTED

For details on how and where to get a passport card, check www.travel.state.gov.

Best summer hikes

SPEND YOUR DOG DAYS EXPLORING THESE FIVE NORTHERN CALIFORNIA TRAILS



TOM MANGAN — MERCURY NEWS PHOTOGRAPHS

So many trails . . .

The Mercury News' Tom Mangan, our Eye section hiking columnist, has decided to devote a little more time to hiking and other pursuits and a little less time to *writing* about hiking. So, as summer begins to wane, we asked him for one last round of recommendations. Here are his favorite hikes for enjoying Northern California's August weather and scenery.

MISSION PEAK

Where: Mission Peak Regional Preserve

Why: Fremont's signature peak bakes in the sun all summer, but there are two cool, captivating alternatives: late evening, when the hill turns golden in the fading light, or early morning, as the fog lifts. Though the park officially closes at sundown, intrepid hikers often can't resist the temptation to catch a sunrise or sunset from the summit. If you dare, go under a full moon.

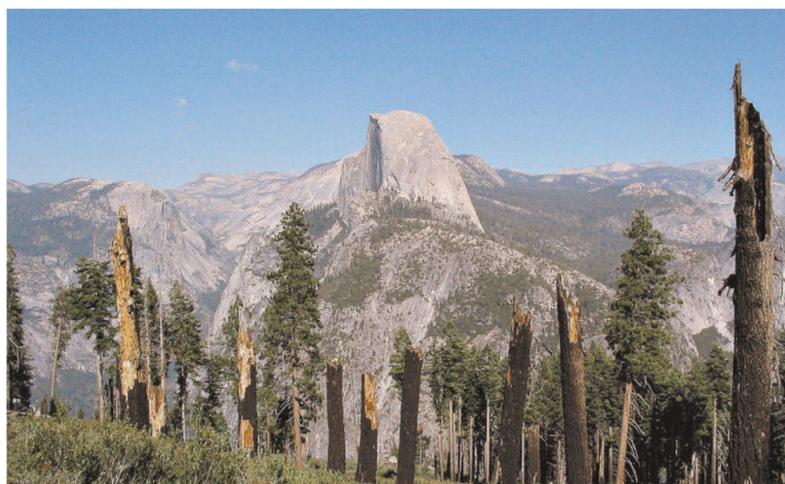
Details: Summit-and-back hike goes 5.6 miles with over 2,000 feet of climb. Bring a windbreaker and flashlight if you're out near dark.

Driving: 20-30 minutes, about 10-15 miles from San Jose.

Getting there: Take Interstate 680 to southern Mission Boulevard exit, go east on Mission Boulevard for a half-mile, turn right at Stanford Avenue and follow it to the park.

Parking: Free. Lot is often full, but you can park on a nearby side street. Never leave valuables in your car: The area is a favorite of smash-and-grabbers.

On the Web: www.ebparks.org/parks/mission



PANORAMA TRAIL

Where: Glacier Point, Yosemite National Park

Why: Once the smoke clears, Yosemite's celebrated Half Dome will be your constant companion along this lovely walk through rocky, forested terrain. Hike 5.2 miles to Nevada Falls and return if you're feeling strong; otherwise just go till you feel like turning back.

Details: Moderate 5-10 miles out and back above 7,000 feet; some tricky terrain. Stay on dry land; the waterways can lead to waterfalls — falling over one is fatal.

The drive: 4.5-5 hours, about 210 miles from San Jose.

Getting there: Forget the Hecker Pass mess. Instead, take Interstate 580 to I-5, and turn off at Highway 120 at Manteca. Stay on Highway 120 all the way to Yosemite Valley. From the valley, follow signs to Highway 41 South, turn right, go just over nine miles to Glacier Point Road, take it 15.7 miles to Glacier Point visitor center. Trail head is on the right side of the parking lot.

Entrance fee: \$20 for a seven-day pass.

On the Web: www.yosemitefun.com

OHLONE BLUFF TRAIL

Where: Wilder Ranch State Park

Why: This trail has everything you need for a casual stroll: ocean breezes, crashing waves, California's spectacular coastline and wide, flat trails. It's one of the best hikes for beginners in this part of California.

Details: Easy 2-5 miles, mostly flat. Bring a windbreaker and avoid cliff edges.

Driving: One hour, about 30-40 miles from San Jose.

Getting there: Take Highway 17 south to the Highway 1 north exit in Santa Cruz. Take Highway 1 out of town and watch for the Wilder Ranch sign a couple of miles past the city limits. Turn left into the park.

Parking fee: \$6.

On the Web: www.santacruzstateparks.org



LASSEN PEAK TRAIL

Where: Lassen Volcanic National Park

Why: Never climbed a real mountain? Here's your chance: The 2.5-mile path to the top of Lassen Peak (actually a volcano that last erupted early in the 20th century) will give your heart a workout, and you'll see some of the finest scenery in Northern California's volcano country, including Mount Shasta far to the north.

Details: Strenuous 5-mile out-and-back from 8,500 feet to 10,457-foot summit. There's no shade, so wear sunscreen.

Driving: 4.5-5 hours, about 270 miles from San Jose.

Getting there: Take Interstate 680 via Interstate 880 north to Interstate 80 north to Interstate 5/Interstate 505 to Exit 649 at Red Bluff. Take Antelope Boulevard to Highway 36, turn left, go 43 miles and turn left at Lassen Peak Highway and go about six miles to park entrance. Trail head is along the main road about six miles into the park.

Entrance fee: \$10 for seven-day pass.

On the Web: www.nps.gov/lavo



TOMALES POINT TRAIL

Where: Point Reyes National Seashore

Why: Pacific breezes can make this a cool outing even on the hottest days of the year. Speaking of heat: Tule elk breeding season begins in late summer, so it's a good time to check out the mighty bulls as they build their harems (from a safe distance; those antlers are sharp).

Details: Moderate 5-10 miles out and back. Bring a windbreaker.

Driving: 2.5 hours, about 100 miles from San Jose

Getting there: Take the scenic drive up Highway 1 from Highway 101 in Sausalito. Stay on Highway 1 until Point Reyes Station, then turn west on Sir Francis Drake Boulevard. Go six miles and turn right at Pierce Point Road, stay on it till the road ends in the parking lot at Pierce Point Ranch. The trail head is well marked at the parking lot.

Entrance fee: None.

On the Web: www.nps.gov/pore



ONLINE EXTRA

Read more of Tom Mangan's hiking reviews at www.mercurynews.com/travel. Contact him via his Two Heel drive blog (www.tommangan.net/twoheeldrive) or travel@mercurynews.com.