

Wylder Hope Valley is located in California's Sierra Nevadas.

A Place Called Hope

Wylder Hope Valley provides an outdoor escape in one of California's most remote places

by DANA REBMANN

THE MORNING CHILL HAD NOT WORN off yet, but my dog Max was keen to get going and explore California's Sierra Nevadas. As we charged up the shaded trail, I hastily looked away to zip my fleece only to stumble over his abruptly rooted frame. His stubby tail wagging at a rapid-fire pace, Max had found a presumed friend — a young deer — on the trail. After a quick, mutual once-over, with both parties seemingly unfazed, Max and I were on the move again, swiftly leaving our cabin at Wylder Hope Valley in the distance.

While gaining elevation, we listened to singing birds and rustling aspens, spotted wildflowers such as Indian paintbrush and

columbine, and marveled at pine cones nearly the size of a dinner plate. We took advantage of mountain runoff to cool down a handful of times before continuing our 3-mile climb. Trail markers were few and far between, but an arrow constructed of sticks and stones — imaginatively forged by previous hikers — told us where to turn for our picnic. The scenic overlook known as Indian Head (or Sorensen's Cliffs) rivals the views found at some national parks, but there was one notable thing missing: crowds. In fact, we only saw three people on the entire trek.

It was tough to say goodbye to what felt like our own private mountain, but a clap

of distant thunder told me we had better get moving. We descended quickly and were still happily dry when we plunked down on our cabin porch. A shower — and maybe even a nap — was in order.

Wylder Hope Valley is one of two properties that make up the Wylder Hotels portfolio. The cabins come with all the perks of camping, but without the work that can make an outdoor-focused vacation feel like a tiresome ordeal.

Located in Alpine County, California's smallest county by population, Wylder's neighbors include Lake Tahoe to the north and Yosemite National Park to the south. South Lake Tahoe is just a 30-minute drive away.

A FRESH TAKE



The property comprises cabins, a campground, RV sites and yurts.

The all-season, 165-acre property dates back to 1926, when it began welcoming guests as Sorensen's Resort. Thirty cabins, built across the last century, are being lovingly modernized during a phased renovation. Varying in shape and size, cabins can accommodate one to eight people. So, instead of sleeping on the ground, campers sink into cozy beds after enjoying a hot shower.

"Wylder Hope Valley embraces a sense of nostalgia that is magical," said John Flannigan, founder and CEO of Wylder Hotels. "Families have been coming to this destination for generations, and everyone I meet has the same feeling for it. You have to come here to feel it."

A couple communal fire pits — lit nightly at 4 p.m. — ensure ample s'mores-making opportunities, but dinner can be whipped up in the cabin's modern kitchen, which comes complete with a gas stove, a small refrigerator, a coffee pot and a tea kettle. Even easier, guests can dine alfresco on the likes of burrata and heirloom tomato salad and shaved prime rib carne asada at the on-site Sorensen's Cafe. (As of press time, due to the pandemic, no indoor dining is allowed, and daily housekeeping at the property has been suspended.)

A rugged, 15-minute hike connects the cluster of cabins to Wylder's neighboring campground, where (along with more than a dozen tent and RV sites) guests can stay in one of seven custom yurts with full bathrooms or a vintage 1951 Spartan trailer. The campground offers easy access to the West Fork Carson River, which is just minutes away by car. Along with seeking out its gurgling falls and lying on warm boulders, cabin guests are welcome to splash in clear, but chilly, swimming holes. Anglers will want to pack their poles.

But, for many, the best moments of an escape here might be the simplest. Swinging in a hammock. Roasting a marshmallow. Watching the sunset. And then doing it all over again the next day. **X**

The Details: Wylder Hotels (www.wylderhotels.com)



Accommodations are cozy and well-equipped.