

Everything You EVER Wanted to Know About Your  
**EXPLORITAS AT ECCO** ... and More

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Welcome to Exploritas at ECCO. We're delighted you've decided to visit our home.

This guide should answer most of your questions, but because ECCO staff is committed to making your stay at ECCO the best it can possibly be, please don't hesitate to contact us if you have any questions which aren't addressed here.

Because much work goes into preparing for your arrival, please complete and return the attached Health & Supplemental Information forms (and any other program-specific forms enclosed) as soon as possible. We need to

receive them **no later than three weeks before your program begins.**

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## Program Beginning/Ending Times and Check-in at ECCO

To assist you in planning cost-effective travel, all of our programs begin with registration from 3:00 to 5:00 p.m. on the day of arrival. (Please note that staff is not on duty until 2:00 p.m., so please don't plan to arrive before that time.) All programs conclude after lunch on the final day unless otherwise indicated on your program-specific schedule.

### **Special Arrival Information**

**Please arrange to reach ECCO no later than 5:00 p.m.** ECCO is both tranquil and secluded—and can be a bit difficult to find if you arrive after dark. If you see that you will be arriving later than 5:00 p.m., please call our office at 559/683-8162 or e-mail us at [eccoelderhostel@gmail.com](mailto:eccoelderhostel@gmail.com) or [judi@ECCOyosemite.org](mailto:judi@ECCOyosemite.org). If a live person doesn't answer, it is very important that you leave a message stating your name, approximate arrival time and a way to contact you, if possible. Dinner is served promptly at 6:00 p.m. and is not served after 6:20 p.m. Please note that we are unable to save dinners for those who arrive late.

### **Cancellations**

If you find it necessary to cancel your reservations within two weeks of the program date, please be sure to contact Exploritas, Inc., first (**877/426-8056** or [www.exploritas.org](http://www.exploritas.org)) and then call (559/683-8162) or email us ([Judi@ECCOyosemite.org](mailto:Judi@ECCOyosemite.org)) to advise that you will not be joining us.

### **Our Facilities**

ECCO is situated on approximately 160 acres of forested land set back about a mile from Highway 41. We are a conference/retreat center at an elevation of 3,100 feet--a peaceful respite in the midst of a busy world, and we hope you'll enjoy our serene surroundings. In order to enhance the restfulness of your time with us, there are no telephones or televisions in guest lodge rooms. Satellite TV is available in our main lounge area. Clock radios with alarms are installed in each sleeping room.

Room amenities include climate control and hair dryers. Each room has its own bath. Bring your own shampoo and conditioner, please.

There's plenty to do. During your free time at ECCO during the day, you can choose from volleyball, horseshoes, basketball, ping pong, as well as a self-interpretive nature trail on ECCO property, plus a number of other trails close by (easy to moderately strenuous).

Evening activities of various types are part of your program; however those generally end by 9:00 pm. You may want to come supplied with your favorite reading materials or craft activities. Better yet, we know hostellers are a supremely creative group. Bring your special

talents to share with others. Make yourselves at home in our main lodge/dining hall, which is open 24 hours, and you are invited to enjoy our tables set up with puzzles, cards and games.

## Travel Information

**Airports:** The nearest major airport is Fresno/Yosemite International Airport, and most major airlines offer service. Some folks choose to fly into San Francisco, San Jose or Oakland. When planning your trip, check fares and schedules for best bargains and flight times. Fresno is approximately an hour's drive from ECCO, and you should allow about four hours' traveling time from San Francisco/Bay Area. Sacramento, at about 3-1/2 hours' distance is another option.

**Rental Cars:** For those hostellers who arrive by air, we urge you to consider renting a car if your program contains substantial free time. (Consult your schedule.) When the program permits, we offer you several hours of free time in order to give you an opportunity to view areas of Yosemite and the Sierra Nevada that we

**We highly recommend you consider renting a vehicle if at all possible. Each program includes a varying amount of free time, and you will need access to a vehicle in order to take maximum advantage of it.**

are unable to visit as a group. You'll need a vehicle to take best advantage of it. (ECCO does not furnish transportation except on scheduled field trips.) Rental cars are available from most major companies at the airports mentioned. Many of them offer special rates and weekend bargains. Most rental companies offer a toll-free information and reservation number. Check your local telephone directory.

**Shuttle/Taxi:** **There is NO public transportation available to Oakhurst.** **ECCO is now offering limited on-demand shuttle service from/to Fresno.** This service is available only on program opening/closing days and is limited to a maximum of 1 pickup/delivery per day and a maximum of 4 passengers. Reservations must be made and paid for in advance. The round trip cost for one person is \$150.00. Costs may be adjusted for additional passengers.

Some companies will offer on-demand service, but it is up to the individual participant to contact them, determine their rates and make appropriate reservations. The following numbers may be of help:

Starlight Taxi	559/641-6641
Yosemite and Beyond	559/641-6789

**Important Note:** ECCO is not staffed to provide luggage service for you. If you are arriving by a taxi/shuttle service other than ECCO, please contact us

for your room assignment, so the taxi/shuttle company can deliver your luggage to your room.

**Carpooling:** Per Exploritas guidelines, we are not able to arrange carpooling for you. If you are interested in seeing if someone else in the group would like to share a shuttle, taxi or carpool, please so indicate on your Supplemental Information Form, giving us permission to share your contact information with other hostellers who may inquire. It will be your responsibility to make any applicable arrangements..

## Driving Directions to ECCO

### From Southern California:

Take Interstate 5 north to Hwy 99. Take Hwy 99 north to Fresno. In Fresno take Hwy 41 north toward Yosemite. You will go up into the Sierra foothills and then drop down into the valley where Oakhurst is located. Although you will stay on Hwy 41, your first landmark will be the traffic signal at Hwy 41 and Hwy 49. Continue north, toward Yosemite, approximately 4 miles. ECCO will be on the right-hand side of the road and is the first driveway after the big Sierra Sky Ranch neon sign. (We share the driveway with Christ Church.) Follow the signs one mile back to the conference center.



### From San Francisco International Airport (Option 1):

Take Hwy 101 south toward San Jose. Exit on Hwy 152 eastbound toward Gilroy. Stay on Hwy 152 until it merges with Hwy 99 southbound. In Madera, exit on Cleveland Avenue. At the end of the offramp, turn left over freeway. Turn right on Cleveland Avenue. Continue on Cleveland Avenue about 2 miles to Highway 145. Turn left on Hwy 145. Go about 15 miles to Hwy 41. Turn left and go approximately 26 miles. Although you will stay on Hwy 41, your first landmark will be the traffic signal at Hwy 41 and Hwy 49. Continue north on Hwy 41, toward Yosemite, approximately 4 miles. ECCO will be on the right-hand side of the road and is the first driveway after the big Sierra Sky Ranch neon sign. (We share the driveway with Christ Church.) Follow the signs one mile back to the conference center.

### From San Francisco International Airport (Option 2):

From SFO go either to Oakland or across the Hayward Bridge (92) to Hwy 580. Travel 580 east (toward Stockton) to Hwy 205 (toward Stockton) east to Hwy 120 (Manteca) to Hwy 99 (Fresno/LA). Travel south on 99 to Merced, exit Hwy 140 east to Mariposa. Turn right onto Hwy 49, follow Hwy 49 to Hwy 41 at Oakhurst. Turn left onto Hwy 41 and travel north

about 4 miles. Sign/entrance to ECCO is on the right side of Hwy 41, just after the big Sierra Sky Ranch neon sign. Drive 1 mile back to the conference center.

**From Northern California (Sacramento, etc):**

Take Hwy 99 south to Merced. Exit on Hwy 140 eastbound, toward Mariposa/Yosemite. Stay on Hwy 140 until you come to the intersection of Hwy 49 (approximately 50 miles). Turn right on Hwy 49. Turn left on Hwy 41 in Oakhurst. Continue north, toward Yosemite, approximately 4 miles. ECCO will be on the right-hand side of the road and is the first driveway after the big Sierra Sky Ranch neon sign. (We share the driveway with Christ Church.) Follow the signs one mile back to the conference center.

**From the Eastern Sierra over Tioga Road (open only part of the year—be sure to check ahead for road closures from October through June)**

From Hwy 395 take Hwy 120 westbound. You will travel through some of the most beautiful parts of Yosemite, dropping down into Yosemite Valley. Watch the signs for Hwy 41 southbound. Take Hwy 41 southbound toward Oakhurst. (It will be 1 to 1-1/2 hours' driving time from Yosemite Valley.) After exiting the park's south gate, travel approximately 12 miles. ECCO will be on the left, after the turn to Cedar Valley Road. Watch carefully because the signs are a little hard to see from this direction. Keep an eye out for the Christ Church sign, since we share a parking lot with them. Once you've turned into the Christ Church parking lot, follow the signs one mile back to ECCO.

**From Fresno-Yosemite International Airport to ECCO:**

From FYI turn left on Clinton Avenue. Continue across McKinley Avenue straight ahead to the on-ramp to Highway 180 (Clinton becomes Peach). Go west on Highway 180. Merge onto Highway 41 northbound (toward Yosemite). Stay on Hwy 41 for approximately 45 miles. You will drop down into a valley where the town of Oakhurst is located. At the traffic signal at the intersection of Hwy 41 and Hwy 49, YOU WILL NOT TURN. This is just for identification purposes. Stay on Hwy 41 approximately 4 miles. ECCO is on the right. Look for the large "Sierra Sky Ranch" neon sign. Ours is the first driveway after the SSR sign. After 2 p.m. there will be a red and white "Welcome Elderhostel" banner at our entrance. Follow the signs one mile back to ECCO. Registration will be at the east entrance to our main lodge building, Lyles Hall.

**Automobile/Fuel Service**

The nearest service station facilities are located 10 minutes from ECCO in the town of Oakhurst. You will find Valero, Yosemite Gas, Von's Gas, and Chevron brands available.

**Towing Services:**

AAA Emergency Roadside Service - 800/222-4357

Doc's Towing – 559/683-7676

Technique Towing – 559/683-6808

## **ECCO Emergency Information, Telephones and Message Service**

ECCO staff is concerned about your security and peace of mind while you're in residence with us. When our office is closed for the evening, the following procedures are in place:

**ECCO has 24-hour voice mail service.** Friends and relatives may leave messages at 559/683-8162 at any time. We post all messages received overnight first thing the next morning on our message board to the left the dishwashing window in Lyles Dining Hall and as we receive them during the day thereafter. If it's an emergency, we'll track you down.

**ECCO telephone number for friends and family:  
559/683-8162**

This number is answered live from 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. and by voice mail at all other times.

If you need to reach us (or your family needs to contact you) after hours on an urgent matter, our voice mail will give you an option to transfer to our manager on duty.

All messages received overnight are posted on our message board first thing next morning. Please check the board often during your stay.

**During your stay with us, if you have a  
medical or fire emergency, call 911 first,  
then contact our manager-on-duty.**

**Program Coordinator Judi Hussain can be reached at 559/683-8162 from 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. She may also be reached in an emergency via cell phone at 559/760-4263. Any program questions should be addressed to her at 559/683-8162 during office hours. Additional emergency numbers which apply to your specific program will be included in your welcome packet.**

If you reach an answering machine or voice mail, be sure to leave a message and advise friends/relatives to do so also. We're mountain folks here. We're often out on the south 40 and can't hear or reach the telephone before it stops ringing. Voice mail doesn't allow us to monitor incoming calls.

Because of our mountain location, cell phone reception at ECCO can be marginal. (Verizon customers seem to have the best luck.) We have a telephone in Lyles Hall (our main building) for guest use. Local calls (Oakhurst, North Fork, Ahwahnee, Bass Lake, Coarsegold, Fish Camp) are free. You must have a credit card or telephone card to make long-distance calls.



**Wireless internet service** is available in Lyles Hall. We have one computer station in Lyles Hall for guest use (but no printer). You are invited to bring your laptop. At present we do not have an internet station in our office which is available to guests.

**Outgoing mail** can be left in the outgoing mail tray located on the counter in the administration office. ECCO mail goes out in the afternoon and/or evening. For your convenience, postcard and letter stamps may be purchased in the office.

### **Gift Shop/Office**

We invite you to visit our gift shop, located in the Administration Office. The store is open whenever the office is staffed, generally 8:00 am to 4:30 pm Monday through Friday or whenever Exploritas office personnel are on duty. We sell ECCO shirts, tote bags and postcards; notecards, posters, framed and/or matted pictures, many by our Exploritas instructors; and locally-crafted handmade jewelry.

### **Lost and Found**

During your program any items found will be placed on the black desk across from the office. If you are missing something, that's the first place to look. If it's not there, please report the loss to the office. All unclaimed lost items are turned in to the Administration Office and stored for 60 days. We will make every effort to contact the owner if at all possible. If found we will mail the item back upon receipt of \$10.00 to cover costs of shipping and handling. (Larger items may cost more.) ECCO is not responsible for any lost, stolen or damaged personal property.

### **Miscellaneous Facility Information**

**Extended Stays at ECCO**—We regret that we are unable to offer accommodations for early arrivals or late departures; however Oakhurst features a number of fine motels which are located within 5 miles of ECCO.

- **Yosemite Gateway Best Western** - 800/528-1234
- **Comfort Inn** – 800/221-2222
- **Oakhurst Lodge** - 800/655-6343

### **Laundry**

ECCO does not have on-site laundry facilities for guests; however Oakhurst has a Laundromat. Our office will be happy to give you directions.

## ECCO's Food Service

ECCO's kitchen staff is committed to providing our guests with wholesome, nutritious cuisine, and we have received consistently excellent reviews of our food service. It is our desire to please you.

If you have a *physician-prescribed* dietary restriction, please so indicate on the Health Information Form. We will do our utmost to accommodate you. We also need to know any other food restrictions (i.e., religious) prior to your arrival.

For those of you who are on self-chosen dietary programs which are not prescribed by your physician (i.e., vegetarian, Adkins, Ornish, Weight Watchers and other specialty regimens) we plan our menus to offer one entrée with a variety of side dishes, salads, etc., so that you generally have sufficient selections to satisfy your needs. You may wish to supplement what ECCO provides with products of your choosing to ensure enough variety to satisfy you. Our two local supermarkets, Raleys and Vons both have health food sections where many specialty items can be obtained.

**If you have requirements such as lactose-free dairy products, wheat-free products, etc., you may wish to bring your own as our kitchen does not stock these or other specialty items. We gladly provide space in our pass-through refrigerator (accessible around the clock) for those foods which need to be chilled.**

While our serving line generally has a variety of foods to suit most needs, it is YOUR responsibility to provide those entrees/products you know you can eat when you have special needs (i.e., vegetarian, lactose-intolerant, gluten-intolerant, etc.)

If you have any questions about our menus, please contact us in advance of your arrival.

## Bear is a Four-Letter-Word (aka Food Storage)

Don't worry. Hostellers have yet to see a bear at ECCO, let alone be chased by one. But they do exist here, and in recent months they've made their presence known wherever they think they can get a free meal. Please don't bring any food items into your sleeping rooms.

Actually the “bigger” problem is the rodents who seem to scope out great eats whenever a resident brings them in. We got a handle on the problem when we hired Douglas Fur II and his staff, but we need your help to keep things under control.

Please DON'T store any food items in your room. Small amounts of perishables can be stored in our pass-through refrigerator in Lyles Hall (which is available to guests 24 hours a day), and we'll have a table set aside by the beverage bar for those items not requiring cold storage.

Any questions? Please feel free to call or e-mail us. We'll be happy to assist you.

### Personal Food Storage

Depending on other groups who may be sharing our facility, the Coopman Room in Sanford Lodge is a convenient place to “hang out” when not in class. A small refrigerator is available there for guest use for storage of medicines or other small items. Please be sure to ask your host if the room is available if no announcement is made during orientation.

### Weather

ECCO is a year-round facility—and one with four distinct seasons. Below are handy links to NOAA for local spots you'll be interested in:

#### **ECCO:**

<http://forecast.weather.gov/MapClick.php?lat=37.38093395288544&lon=-119.6249771118164&site=hnx&smap=1&marine=0&unit=0&lg=en>

#### **Yosemite Valley:**

<http://forecast.weather.gov/MapClick.php?lat=37.74954362315467&lon=-119.59854125976562&site=hnx&smap=1&marine=0&unit=0&lg=en>

#### **Fresno/Yosemite International Airport:**

<http://forecast.weather.gov/MapClick.php?lat=36.76769842537383&lon=-119.71758842468262&site=hnx&smap=1&marine=0&unit=0&lg=en>



Douglas Fur II, ECCO's Official Greeter, Supervisor of Security and Pest Control, does his best to keep rodent issues under control, but he needs your help!

**Spring** in the Sierra Nevada is delightful. Temperatures are generally mild (50-80). Although we sometimes experience rain showers (and even an occasional snow shower through April), days are full of sunshine, with green fields awash with wildflowers. Yosemite's waterfalls are usually at full flow.

**Summer** days can be warm, with temperatures ranging from 60 to 70 in the evenings and early mornings to daytime highs in the high 90's (rarely 100+).

**Fall** is marvelous. Leaves turn golden and red, and the daytime temperatures begin to cool, ranging from 50's to 80's and sometimes 90's.

**Winter** is the magical season in Yosemite and the Sierra Nevada. Temperatures can range from a high of 50 degrees to lows in the 20's. Snow can happen, but it rarely sticks to the ground for more than a couple of hours. And you haven't really seen Yosemite until you've glimpsed it in the winter—birches bent over with snow, frozen waterfalls and rivers, meadows white and inviting. You can see it without having to drive because our buses are prepared to navigate in winter conditions. Best of all, you'll have the park virtually to yourselves. Should you decide to take your own side trips, please be aware, however, that Yosemite National Park requires that you carry chains and know how to put them on.

## Suggested Clothing

No need to get formal at ECCO. Casual clothing is most appropriate. Comfortable walking shoes are a must; hiking shoes are a bonus but not mandatory. "Layering" is the key word, no matter the season. Temperatures can vary dramatically from morning to midday to evening. Even during the summer be sure to bring a sweater or light jacket because evenings tend to be cool. A heavier jacket in winter, fall and even early spring is not a bad idea.

## What to Bring with You

**Please bring a flashlight**, cap or hat, sunscreen and an umbrella (usually not necessary in summer). Also make sure you carry an ample supply of any medications you might need. Optional but helpful is a "daypack" in which to store your lunch and personal items during field trips as well as a personal first aid kit and any prescription or OTC medications you regularly take. Don't forget your camera, and binoculars are great if you have them. A walking stick can be handy, too.

Be sure to bring your Senior (Golden Age) Pass for entry into Yosemite during your free time. If you're over 62 and don't already have one, you can obtain a pass at the park entrance for a fee of \$10.00. The pass is good for life and admits everyone in your vehicle to all national parks and monuments even if they're under the magic age of 62. If you don't already have a pass and don't plan to purchase one before your arrival at ECCO, entry fees into Yosemite during your program are included in your program fees.

**If you already have a pass, please list its number on the Supplemental Information we have enclosed.**

## Housekeeping

Because we're a conference center, our housekeeping staff does not make your beds or change your linens. Depending on the length of your program, we will either provide clean towels and wash cloths and freshen your paper products once during the week, usually on Wednesday, or we will supply extra towels at the beginning of your stay. You may wish to bring additional towels/wash cloths as you see the need.

**Our sleeping rooms have hair dryers.** You will want to bring your own shampoo, conditioner, toothpaste and other toiletries, although ECCO's office does stock a limited supply of these items for sale. Our two supermarkets in Oakhurst also carry a wide supply of personal items.

Our office staff stands ready to assist you with anything you might require during your stay. Please convey your needs to your host or to the office staff.

## Health Concerns/Physical Activities

Except for our active outdoor programs (Program #13977 Hiking Yosemite Up Close & Personal [Activity Level 5], 14610 Yosemite: A Birder's Paradise[5] and #16459 Yosemite Watercolor Spectacular: Rocks, Cliffs & Domes [4]), our programs are not considered strenuous. You should, however, be prepared to walk approximately 1,000 feet each way on stepped and gently sloping paths to and from meals. (If you feel the need, you are able to drive to and from the dining hall.) The balance of the program can be filled with as much or as little walking as you feel you're up to, even in Yosemite Valley; **however the ability to walk up to a mile over uneven terrain is necessary for complete enjoyment of the program.**

Please consult your physician before your arrival if you have concerns about altitudes. Most of our activities will be at the 3,000 to 4,000-foot elevation; however some activities may take place at 7,000-8,000 feet during late spring/summer, depending on the program. If you have concerns about your abilities, please contact ECCO's program coordinator, Judi, at 559/683-8162 or email her at [Judi@ECCOyosemite.org](mailto:Judi@ECCOyosemite.org).

It is vital that you disclose any health conditions which may affect your participation in this program on the Health Form(s) which accompanies this booklet.

At certain times of the year (especially late summer/fall) insects can be very active in our area. If you are allergic to bee/wasp/hornet stings, etc., please come prepared with medication (e.g., EpiPen) and know how to use it.

Be sure to bring meds for motion sickness if you're prone to that sort of thing. The front seats on our buses are reserved for guides and hosts so they can have access to the bus's PA system.

ECCO's staff wants to make sure your stay with us is the best it can be and that you're comfortable and happy in our home. If you have any questions about our facilities or any aspect of your Exploritas experience, please don't hesitate to give us a call or send us an email: We **want** to hear from you.

**Telephone**                      559/683-8162  
Monday through Friday 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Pacific time  
(Ask for Judi) - [eccoelderhostel@gmail.com](mailto:eccoelderhostel@gmail.com)  
This is a special email address for Exploritas guests only, so that your emails don't end up lost and discarded in our junk mail filter; however please be sure to show "Exploritas" and your program number in the subject line of your email.

**ECCO's Website**                [www.conferencecenter.org](http://www.conferencecenter.org)  
ECCO's website has a wealth of information about our facility and our area. We invite you to take a look at it as you're making travel plans.

**ECCO's Newsletter**          *Echoes from ECCO*  
<http://conferencecenter.org/newsletters.html>  
is available at our website. Check it out if you have a chance.