

UNITED STATES

Winter-lovers should get a taste of Tahoe

SUZANNE MORPHET

SPECIAL TO THE SUN

“We’re going to keep our speed up as we cross the state line,” Tony, my ski guide, yells as he surges ahead of me on a straight stretch. A few seconds later he looks back with a grin. “We’re in Nevada now.”

I’ve heard about skiing from one country to another in Europe’s Alps, but skiing between American states? At Heavenly ski resort at Lake Tahoe it’s not only possible to ski from California to Nevada (and vice versa), but you don’t have to brush up on another language for when you arrive.

While two-state skiing makes Heavenly unique, it’s just one of more than a dozen downhill resorts around the lake, each with its own distinctive personality. But you needn’t be a skier to enjoy winter at Lake Tahoe. From curling to wine-tasting, The Lake — as everyone here calls it — has something for everyone.

After following Tony down one of Heavenly’s Nevada runs with views over the High Sierra Desert, we return to California where he has something else to show me: “one of the most beautiful ski runs in the world.” Now that’s a boast I want to test.

We jump on the Sky Express and head up to the highest point skiers can access at Heavenly, just over 3,000 metres above sea level. As we carve our way down Ridge Run, The Lake spreads out before us like a giant blue sapphire rimmed with white snow. Tony wasn’t exaggerating — it’s stunning.

Heavenly has the most terrain of all the resorts at Lake Tahoe — 1,940 hectares — so you could easily spend several days or a week right here, but our goal is to be in Northstar at the far end of the lake by Day 4, with a day at Squaw Valley in between. It’s 77 kilometres in total, or an hour and a half’s drive on the



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The Ridge Run at Heavenly ski resort offers unparalleled views of Lake Tahoe.

California side of the lake.

Before leaving South Lake Tahoe, I have a mission: learn to curl, or at least get an introduction to the sport. It might seem odd for a Canadian to take up curling in the States, but the South Lake Tahoe Ice Arena offers 2.5-hour learn-to-curl sessions once a month. I’m here, so why not? I can’t say I fell in love with the game, but after a couple hours learning how to push off (and not fall on my face) and how to hurl 20 kilograms of solid granite, I have a new respect for the sport.

That evening we walk along the 300-metre pier at The Boathouse to watch the sky turn rosy pink before going inside for dinner. Even a few years ago, Lake Tahoe wasn’t known for its food.

But any thought that we might suffer a week of ho-hum meals was banished the previous evening when we dined at Jimmy’s at The Landing Resort. With dishes such as rabbit spanakopita and wood-grilled halloumi, we knew we were in California

and in for a culinary adventure. My lamb lollipops on a bed of parsnip puree and wilted kale at The Boathouse simply confirmed it.

The next morning, we headed north on Highway 89, following the curve of the lake past picturesque Emerald Bay and stopping to walk the shoreline at Camp Richardson, where San Francisco’s wealthy families summered at the turn of the 20th century. Recent efforts to improve the water quality of Lake Tahoe have resulted in big improvements. Clarity has increased almost six metres in the last 15 years, with rocks now visible 25 metres below the surface.

That afternoon we tried some off-mountain activities, first challenging ourselves on the ropes at Granlibakken Treetop Adventure Course, then snowshoeing through a delightful pine forest at Tahoe City Winter Sports Park, a local favourite. (The Tahoe basin supports 11 species of coniferous trees,

including the sugar pine with its enormous cones.)

Before a casual but scrumptious dinner at Jake’s on the Lake, we checked out one of the numerous wine bars in the region. Uncorked at Tahoe City offers a wide selection of limited production wines from around the world. Their tastings and by-the-glass wines change daily.

The next day I’m getting off a chairlift on a mountaintop at Squaw Valley and who do I meet but Superman. Turns out he’s a Canadian living in California and drives up from San Francisco to snowboard on his days off, lucky guy. I didn’t ask about his costume, but you’ll need to be Superman too if you want to experience the six peaks serviced by 29 lifts at this resort in one day. Even if all you do is take the aerial tram to High Camp for lunch, it’s worth it — you’ll see beautiful rock formations and views of the valley and lake far below.

The Resort at Squaw Creek is a

delightful place to recover from your day’s exertions. It boasts three heated swimming pools, a fitness centre with the latest equipment, an award-winning spa and five restaurants.

We reach Northstar the next day in a flurry of snowflakes. They’re so big they’re almost blinding as we stroll around Northstar Village, an upscale resort town with a 835-square-metre outdoor rink. This is where families head after a day on the slopes to skate and roast s’mores over an open fire (you can purchase s’mores kits to build your own tasty treats).

Of course, if you’re staying at the Ritz-Carlton Northstar, you can have your fill of s’mores in the backyard of the triple-A five-diamond hotel, the most luxurious resort in all of Lake Tahoe. Architecturally inspired by classic mountain lodges such as Ahwahnee in Yosemite National Park and Timberline on Mount Hood, the Ritz-Carlton is a fitting way to wrap up any visit to The Lake.

If you go

Stay

Lake Tahoe Resort Hotel, South Lake Tahoe

530-544-5400

tahoeresorthotel.com

The Resort at Squaw Creek in Squaw Valley

530-583-6300

squawcreek.com

The Ritz-Carlton at Northstar

530-562-3000

ritzcarlton.com/en/Properties/LakeTahoe/Default.htm

Eat and Drink

The Boathouse Restaurant in South Lake Tahoe

530-545-4338

Jimmy’s at The Landing in South Lake Tahoe

530-600-3501

jee@thelandingtahoe.com

Beacon Bar and Grill at Camp Richardson

530-541-0630

Jake’s on the Lake at Tahoe City

530-583-0188

Uncorked has three locations on the California side of Lake Tahoe

530-581-1106

Do

Learn to curl at the South Lake Tahoe Ice Arena

tahoearena.com/#/home/

Snowshoe, cross-country ski and sled at Tahoe City Winter Sports Park

wintersportspark.com

Have fun on the ropes and ziplines at Granlibakken Treetop Adventure Course

granlibakken.com/adventure_center.php