

TRAVEL

Sun Valley offers an idyllic winter ski vacation

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SPECIAL WRITER

Idaho may not be the first locale that comes to mind when you think about skiing out west. However, Sun Valley offers an idyllic winter resort experience for both downhill and cross-country skiers, without the crowds that plague more popular resorts.

Even during the New Year's holiday, when ski resorts operate at peak capacity, the lift lines were reasonable. Of course, part of the fun at that time of year is trying to spot celebrities. Since the 1930s, a long tradition at Sun Valley is attracting Hollywood, as well as European royalty. Clint Eastwood, Robin Williams, Arnold Schwarzenegger and JFK Jr. were among those recently sighted enjoying the region's low-key.

The primary ski area, Bald Mountain, known as "Baldy," is regarded by some as the "finest single ski mountain in America." With a 3,400 foot vertical drop, it offers perfectly pitched, consistently well-groomed ski runs that provide more challenges than their slope ratings indicate. The view from the summit at 9,160 feet truly takes your breath away. As far as you can see, the jagged peaks of the Sawtooth Mountains, part of the northernmost range of the Rocky Mountains, etch a stark contrast between sun and shadow.

Sun Valley seems to attract a more mature crowd that skied with greater control than at

Useful Information

Sun Valley is 160 miles east of Boise, an easy 2-1/2 hour drive by rental car or shuttle bus service. Major airlines serving the area include Northwest, Delta, Southwest and United. Salt Lake City, Utah, also serves as a gateway, connecting with Horizon Air or Delta's SkyWest Airlines into the Hailey airport, just 12 miles south of the resort. Once in Sun Valley, the free KART bus service connects the ski areas with the town and resort areas.

In addition to the Sun Valley Lodge (room rates \$145-\$214, (800)786-8259 or www.sunvalley.com), there are many other lodging options ranging from condominiums to cozy bed and breakfasts. Call the Sun Valley/Ketchum Chamber of Commerce at (800)634-3347 or www.visitketchum.com.

1999 daily lift ticket rates are \$54 adult, \$30 child.

most areas. This coupled with the fast chairlifts, fewer crowds and efficient run design made it easier to ski more runs in less time.

Compared with most ski lodges, which are functional at best, the award-winning day lodges at Sun Valley delight the senses. Built in the style of Yellowstone lodges, these massive, log and stone havens provide a warm mountain ambience fueled by soaring fireplaces and tasty cuisine. From the sunny, glass-fronted outdoor deck, the view from Seattle Ridge Lodge, atop Bald Mountain, overlooks a sea of snow-shrouded valleys. Leather chairs and couches, oriental rugs and marble tiled restrooms trimmed with exotic wood, make it hard to believe you're in a day ski lodge.

Snowboarders can access most runs, and beginners practice on their own mountain, Dollar, site

of the Sun Valley Ski and Snowboarding School.

To fully capture the Sun Valley experience, the historic Sun Valley Lodge provides the ultimate in comfort and recreation. Built in 1939 by Averell Harriman, Union Pacific Railroad heir and politician, its legacy as a magnet for the rich and famous is depicted in photographs adorning the hallways throughout the lodge.

Your first impression as you enter the grand foyer is one of welcoming luxury. A crackling fire warms the oak-paneled living room decorated in English country style. The sight of people clunking around in ski boots and parkas seems incongruous with the elegant setting. The second floor boasts a high-ceilinged sun room flanked by roaring fireplaces. Game tables, a grand piano and plush couches that let you sink into a book complete with the room's comfort. Palladian windows overlook the outdoor skating rink, whose twinkling lights cast evening skaters in a magical sparkle.

The Lodge provides frequent shuttle service to the ski areas, just 10 minutes away. As a convenience, guests enjoy complimentary ski storage at the River Run lift. After a breezy day on the slopes, nothing feels better than to melt into the glass-enclosed, heated outdoor swimming pool, followed by a sweat in the sauna. A bowling alley, movie theater, massage center, shops and restaurants round out the recreational pleasures.

When you need to explore beyond the Sun Valley resort complex, the town of Ketchum is a mile away by shuttle, car or foot. A former ranching and mining town that still retains its



Great views: Skiers are rewarded with breathtaking views of Sun Valley and the town of Ketchum from atop Bald Mountain.

rustic flavor, Ketchum hosts a variety of restaurants, shops, galleries and inns, all overshadowed by the benevolent face of Baldy.

Is gourmet French bistro fare tempting you, the charming Evergreen Restaurant prepares exquisite food. That's where we spotted Clint Eastwood, a longtime Sun Valley resident. If you'd rather wrestle with a huge steak and potato, the crowded Pioneer Saloon pleases locals and visitors alike. Try the locally brewed Sun Valley White Cloud Ale. Another casual spot, the Warm Springs Ranch Restaurant, offers petite versions of its menu offerings. Ask to sit in the wood paneled bar area, with its large fireplace and picture windows overlooking the creek.

The excellent lumberjack breakfasts found at the knoedery, Eats and Christina's provide the jumpstart you need to fuel your skiing day.

For a unique dinner experience, take a horse-drawn sleigh ride to Trail Creek Cabin, on the grounds of the Sun Valley resort. Bundle up and enjoy the incredi-

ble stars and moonlit valley on your journey. Be sure to book in advance because this popular outing can sell out quickly.

Those who prefer cross-country skiing will enjoy the complete Nordic Center at Sun Valley resort with a network of 40km of groomed trails that venture further into the valley past beautiful vacation homes and winding, rushing creeks. You can ski back to Trail Creek Cabin and take a lunch break. Snowshoe trails are also provided.

For the ultimate in cross-country skiing, journey 26 miles north to Galena Lodge, where 60km of trails wander into towering pine-studded wilderness. Lunch is also served at the historic lodge. Other area diversions include dog sledding, snowmobiling and winter fly fishing.

If "roughing it in luxury," the design statement of Sun Valley's creator, fit your lifestyle, then you won't be disappointed in the wealth of winter fun opportunities at Sun Valley Resort.

Laura Ash Joekel is a West Bloomfield resident.



Wilderness: Cross country skiers and snowshoers encounter wonderful natural views on their treks.



Off to dinner: A horse-drawn sleigh ride makes for memorable dining at the Trail Creek Cabin.



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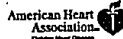
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