

Destination Wonderland Family-Style Wintry Getaways to Bend & Tahoe

Photo by Rutger Geerling, courtesy of Wanderlust Tours, Bend, Oregon

Whether you and your family just want to spend more time together enjoying your favorite winter sports or you're willing to brave being a beginner and try something new, in the north state you do not have to travel far for world-class scenery and access to every winter sport imaginable. All ages, beginners and experts alike, can find it all in Tahoe, California and in the Central Oregon Cascades: access to classic, skate, downhill and backcountry skiing, to snowboarding, ice-skating, sledging, snowshoeing, tubing, dog sledding and traditional sleigh rides. These renowned winter sport hubs provide something for everyone.

Pack up the kids and the gear (whatever you can fit—rentals are also available) and head for these beautiful, wintry gems. Settled in high desert juniper-sage country west of the snow-draped cascade peaks, Bend, Oregon offers a great gateway for winter pursuits. Anchored in granitic Sierra Nevada splendor, Tahoe boasts so many winter venues you may want to do a little homework to find the best match for your family's ages and abilities.

BEND, OREGON

A three and a half hour drive north on Highway 97 (from I-5 at Weed) lands you in recreation paradise on the east side of the Oregon Cascades. On the way, the **Collier State Park Rest Area**, north of Klamath Falls, is a good place to stretch legs under majestic Ponderosa pines alongside the cold, clear Williamson River. Closer to Bend, watch for the **Newberry Volcanic Interpretive Center** with exhibits about the fiery origins of the region.

Bend offers city amenities with a small town feel. Downtown, the Deschutes River winds through the heart of town and several scenic parks. Though most lodging does not include kitchen facilities, there are many affordable restaurants. The **Bend Visitor's Bureau** is a good place to start your search for lodging, www.visitbend.com.

Sunriver, just 16 miles south of Bend, offers many vacation rental homes if you prefer lodging where you can cook meals or share costs and fun with other families. A huge complex with homes, restaurants, grocery stores, ice-skating rink, golf course and a nature center near the Deschutes River, Sunriver provides easy access to **Mt. Bachelor and the Deschutes National Forest** winter snow park areas. www.sunriverlodging.com or www.sunriver-resort.com

Once you've figured out where to stay, the choices for getting outside to enjoy a variety of winter activities are endless.

CHECK OUT MT. BACHELOR FOR EXCELLENT DOWNHILL SKIING AND SNOWBOARDING, NORDIC SKIING, AND TUBING.

If you are new to **Mt. Bachelor**, (800) 829-2442 / (541) 382-2442; www.mtbachelor.com, you are in for treat. With plenty of groomed terrain for beginner and intermediate skiers and boarders, steep chutes and tree skiing for experts, five terrain parks for air-catching daredevils, two lifts for tubing enthusiasts, and the summit chair for amazing views of surrounding volcanic peaks, everyone can find their perfect pace on this generously proportioned mountain. Winter storms dump loads of dry, fluffy snow and create windy conditions up top, often closing the summit chair. Fortunately, the dry, desert influence leads to a high percentage of crystal clear blue-sky days.

Nordic skiers can access more than a dozen groomed trails at Mt. Bachelor, laid out over 56 kilometers with a flat, oval training track for beginning and experienced skiers alike. The downhill and Nordic area parking lots are accessible by the **Super Shuttle** with several locations in Bend and Sunriver. ▶

HEAD TO LOCAL SNOW PARKS FOR LOADS OF CLASSIC & BACKCOUNTRY SKIING, SLEDDING & SNOWSHOEING OPTIONS.

Snow parks are a less expensive and woody option, and serve as trailheads for classic touring, backcountry skiing, split-boarding, sledding and snowshoeing. Passes for the parks may be purchased at local ski shops and Oregon DMV offices.

Park trail maps and directions for the parks below are available from the Bend/Fort Rock Ranger District of the **Deschutes National Forest**, (541) 383-5300; www.fs.fed.us/r6/centraloregon/recreation/winter/index.shtml.

Dutchman Flat Sno Park, 20 miles west of Bend on the Cascade Lakes Highway, is the place to go for a great climb on skis or snowshoes. With the highest and most vertical terrain, you'll likely find the most consistent snow here. Split boarders and exuberant teens can climb **Tumalo Mountain** to 7,775 feet. The trailhead is close to Mt. Bachelor, making it easy to carpool.

Wanoga Sno Park is located 15.5 miles west of Bend. Jennifer Burkett, Bend resident and massage therapist, likes to go sledding there with her daughter Naomi. Jennifer advises: "The sledding hill at Wanoga is open and wide. Skyliners in town is too steep and hazardous for safe sledding." Wanoga also offers 150 miles of groomed snowmobile trails, four warming shelters, and Elk Lake Resort. Dogs welcomed.

Virginia Meissner Sno Park, just 13 miles west of Bend on the Cascade Lakes Highway, is your best bet for a non-motor-

ized, forested area for snowshoeing and cross-country skiing. You'll find groomed trails, warming huts, and distant views of South Sister and Broken Top mountains.

CLOSER TO TOWN FOR A QUICK SKI OR SNOWSHOE WALK:

The **Skyliner Area**, 10 miles out Skyliners Road, offers a variety of cross country skiing and snowshoeing opportunities. Sledding is NOT recommended due to steep, hazardous conditions. Dogs are allowed.

Only three miles from Bend, **Shevlin Park** offers several miles of cross-country ski or snowshoe-friendly trails meandering alongside Tumalo Creek with several footbridges. Locals recommend at least three to four feet of snow to make smaller creek crossings safe. Expect good skiing here after fresh quantities of snow. Dogs are allowed on leash. www.bend-parksandrec.org.

ICE SKATING IS AVAILABLE NEAR BEND AND AT SUNRIVER VILLAGE

Bend's **Seventh Mountain Resort** is located at the edge of town on the road to Mt. Bachelor. The resort's skating rink is open to all ages Monday - Thursday 12-9pm, Friday and Saturday 12-10pm and Sunday 1-6:30pm; Sundays nights are restricted to ages 16+ from 7-9pm. (541) 382-8711 or www.seventhmountain.com.

The rink in **Sunriver Village** is open Mon-Fri 3-8pm, Sat 11am-3pm and 4-8pm, and Sun 4-8pm with rental skates available. (541) 593-5948.

SIGN-UP FOR A SLED-DOG RIDE FOR AN EXHILARATING ADVENTURE.

Daily sled dog tours are available through **Oregon Trail of Dreams** at Mt. Bachelor. (800) 829-2442.

ENJOY A WINTER FESTIVAL

If you thrive in a crowd, Bend's **WinterFest** may be for you. Billed as "a celebration of local art, culture and winter sports," last year's Winterfest drew over 25,000 visitors for ice carving exhibits, fireworks, children's activities, live music, a snowboard and ski rail jam, ice-skating, art shows and more. WinterFest 2009, February 13-15, features a winter light show, cross-country ski sprint races, and scores of other activities in downtown Bend's Old Mill District. www.bendwinterfest.com

DISCOVER THE FULL MOON DESERT SKY ON A NIGHT-TIME SNOWSHOE WALK AND BONFIRE.

Wanderlust Tours runs monthly moonlight snowshoe trips for the few nights surrounding each full moon through April. Price includes knowledgeable guide,

snowshoes, instruction, transportation & hot chocolate. Children 8 years and older are invited. (800) 962-2862/(541) 389-8359; www.wanderlusttours.com.

MUSEUMS & NATURE CENTERS

If you or your young companions need an interesting, fun and restful break (screaming quads anyone?) check out:

High Desert Museum, just ten minutes south of Bend on Highway 97, is a worthwhile stop. The museum showcases an equal mix of indoor and outdoor exhibits and hands-on activities for all ages, making it fun in any kind of weather. Highlights include live birds of prey and other animals. You may chance upon the river otters body-sledding over snow chutes into their pool! (541) 382-4754; www.highdesert-museum.org.

Sunriver Nature Center and Observatory is a wonderful way for younger kids to spend a couple of hours, with live displays, nature trails and much more. There are naturalist-led programs and fun special events too. (541) 593-4394; www.sunriver-naturecenter.org. 8▶



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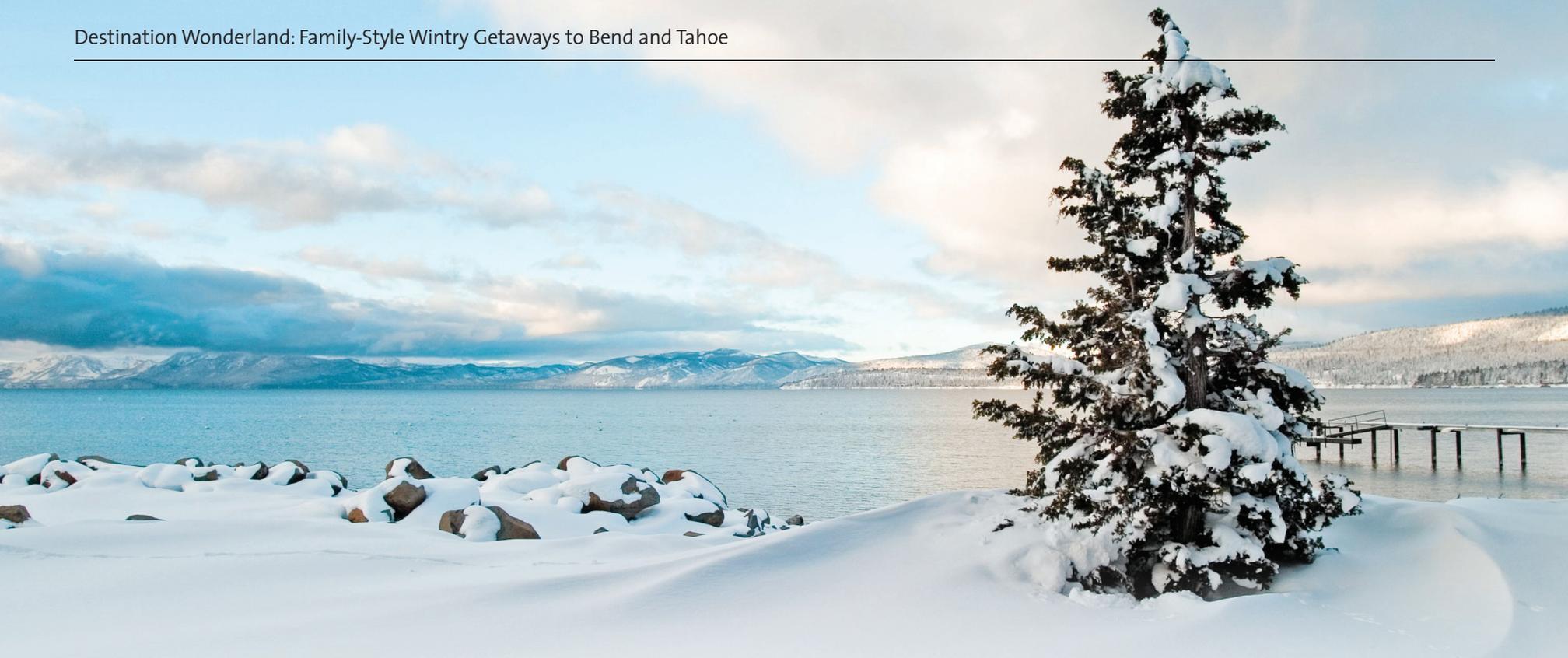
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TAHOE, CALIFORNIA

With visions of snowy granite domes, crystalline lakes and glistening conifers, even full-grown adults turn giddy at the prospect of a winter trip to the Sierra Nevada. For a break along the way, visit the **Big Bend Visitor Center** 10 miles west of Donner Summit (Big Bend or Rainbow Road exit). Learn about emigrant history at this state historic landmark, open on weekends. (530) 426-3609.

Truckee is perched in a central location and can serve as the perfect base

camp for your family's winter adventure. Getting settled in Truckee is easy with a variety of lodging options available. The **Truckee Donner Chamber of Commerce** lists a range of accommodations from economy motel rooms, to vacation rentals large enough to share, to resort-style properties and condos. Most destination resorts offer lodging and lift ticket packages. (530) 587-8808; www.truckee.com

The Tahoe area features award-winning downhill and cross-country ski and

snowboard areas, backcountry trailheads for ski touring and snowshoeing, dog sledding, sleigh rides, snowshoe tours, ice-skating with a s'mores bar, and even a bungee gym for kids – you're sure to find what you came for, and more. For a comprehensive, one-stop guide to winter activities visit www.tahoebest.com.

With so many top-notch downhill areas to choose from, here are some leads for family-oriented resort offerings. **Alpine Meadows** and **Boreal Mountain Resort** of-

fer **Parent Tickets** — one ticket shared by both parents so they can take turns alternating skiing and watching little ones. **Boreal Mountain Resort** also offers tubing, specially designed terrain features for kids, and a family terrain zone.

Alpine Meadows caters to nature enthusiasts, provides interpretive exhibits about Sierra Nevada ecology — plant and animal life — on the designated Eco-Trail, accessible via a beginner lift and the Eco-Board in the Main Lodge. Loaded 9►

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with information about animals indigenous to the Sierras, interactive signs help guests learn about who uses the mountain besides skiers and snowboarders. (530) 583-4232; www.skialpine.com & www.rideboreal.com

Northstar-at-Tahoe creates an ongoing winter carnival for kids and their families. Northstar's 40-kilometer **Cross-Country, Telemark and Snowshoe Center** is well worth a visit, with picnic tables and warming huts with hot drinks available. www.northstaratahое.com

The centerpiece of **The Village at Northstar** is the 9,000 square foot **ice-skating rink** with free admission and \$5 skate rentals. Open year-round from 2-8pm, the rink features outdoor fire pits, s'mores kits and fun events like Turtleneck Tuesdays (skate to the music of the 70s & 80s). **Apex Bungy** at Northstar features a Bungy Trampoline for jumpers between 20 - 220 pounds. All ages are welcome at \$12 for 5 minutes or a 10-pass pack for \$100. (530) 562-3689/(530) 414-1935.

In addition to excellent skiing, ice-skating at **Squaw Valley's Olympic Ice Pavilion** is a memorable adventure for all ages. Perched on a mountain crest, the rink offers panoramic views of Lake Ta-

hoe and the surrounding Sierra Nevada. Open daily through mid-May, 11am - 9pm. Access the rink by climbing 2,000 vertical feet on the dramatic aerial Cable Car ride. (530) 583-6955; www.squaw.com.

Nearby, **The Resort at Squaw Creek** also offers skating at their outdoor **ice-rink**, open daily from 10am - 10pm through April. (800) 327-3353.

For skate or classic cross-country ski outings, Truckee resident Chip Reed and his family prefer **Tahoe Donner XC Ski Area**. Close to Truckee, this premier area assures consistent snow conditions over 115 groomed kilometers on 50 trails of varying terrain. Here, you can ski to your heart's content, cozy up in the **The Day Lodge**, enjoy lunch or a snack at the **Alder Creek Café**, or stop by the **Euer Valley Cookhouse**, a warming hut only 3½ easy kilometers from the Day Lodge. Always economical, a tasty homemade sack lunch hits the spot on winter excursions. (530) 587-9484; www.tahoebest.com.

If you seek the promise of peace and quiet while backcountry ski touring or snowshoeing, check out the **Donner Summit Sno Park** (I-80, Castle Peak exit.) Sno Park passes cost \$5/day or \$25/annual. Day passes can be purchased at the

Boreal Inn near the trailhead, or Monday - Friday 8am - 4:30pm at the **Truckee Ranger District** of the **Tahoe National Forest** (530) 587-3558; (530) 587-2158 for taped info.

Sugarbowl, an excellent family resort, features a new Sledding and Snowplay Area geared for young children located at the **Donner Summit Lodge**, with sleds for rent. Open 9am - 4pm weekends & holidays (subject to weather conditions). Tickets are \$5; sled rentals \$10. Plastic sleds only. (530) 426-7692; www.sugarbowl.com.

Guided Snowshoe Tours are also available at Sugarbowl. Learn about winter ecology and local history, including the ill-fated Donner Party, while touring beautiful mountain scenery. Tours start at 11am or 1:30pm on weekends & holidays. \$20 includes snowshoes. (530) 426-9000 x 7510.

For the ultimate Tubing experience, visit the big daddy of tubing parks, **Kingvale Tubing and Sledding Center**. 18 miles west of Truckee, the park is open weekends & holidays 10am - 4pm. Under-12 year-olds can enjoy parent-supervised sledding, while older kids take a lift ride up a 400-foot hill with four

downhill tubing lanes to choose from. Prices include sleds—no personal sleds allowed. (530) 426-1941; www.kingval-etubing.com.

Dog sled rides pulled by hearty Alaskan and Siberian Huskies showcase beautiful terrain and include sunset and moonlit tours. Call **Sierra Sled Dog Adventures** at (530) 412-3302, or **Tahoe Dogsled Tours** at (530) 550-8133; www.tahoeogsledtours.com.

As a final suggestion for a unique, memorable family event, head over to **Stateline** near South Lake Tahoe and enjoy **Borges Family Sleigh Rides**. Ride bundled in warm blankets in a hand-made sleigh pulled by 2,000-pound draft horses on a narrated "over the meadow and through the woods" tour. A photo stop at a postcard view of Lake Tahoe marks the grand finale. ■



For former National Park and Forest Service Ranger Kristen Meyer Stroud and her family, a "good winter" means getting snowed in at least once, and plenty of snow for skiing, sledding, and snowshoeing out the back door of their off-the-grid Northern California home.

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