



Big Bear Mountain Resort offers something for everyone with plenty of trails for beginner, intermediate and advanced skiiers and snowboarders.

Mountain Magic

WHETHER VENTURING NEAR OR FAR, THERE ARE PLENTY OF PLACES TO HIT THE SLOPES IN CALIFORNIA THIS SKI SEASON.

By ASHLEY RYAN

Explore California's mountains for the perfect blend of stunning landscapes, world-class sports and vibrant apres ski venues this winter.

With dynamic terrain, reliable snowfall and a laid-back atmosphere, the Golden State offers an array of resorts that make it easier than ever to hit the slopes without having to venture too far. Whether you're carving through snow in Big Bear, shredding trails at Mammoth Mountain or enjoying the scenic beauty of Lake Tahoe, there is something for everyone amid California's majestic peaks.

Big Bear Mountain Resort

Only a couple hours away from the romantic coves and vibrant art galleries of Laguna Beach, Big Bear Mountain Resort can be reached with ease—and, luckily, it has plenty to offer.

There are three ski resorts under the BBMR umbrella: Snow Summit, Bear Mountain and Snow Valley. Although they have their similarities—such as ski and snowboard rentals, lessons and exploratory terrain parks—there are also distinct differences that make each stand out.

Snow Summit launched back in the 1950s and has expanded to include 240 acres of skiable terrain, with more trails than the other two properties. Roughly 40% of the trails are intermediate while 35% are designed for beginners, making this a great spot for both families and established skiers.

Bear Mountain was brought into the fold in the early 2000s. With the highest base and peak elevations—as well as the largest vertical drop of the three resorts—this locale is ideal for all levels, with a relatively even split between beginner, intermediate and advanced in its 26 trails. New this year is the Midway lift, which is slated to open in mid-December. The first addition of its kind in Big Bear in 30 years, the high-speed, six-seat lift will provide easier access to mid-mountain terrain and provide increased uphill capacity, covering 1,000 feet per minute.

Snow Valley was added to the Alterra Mountain Co. portfolio at the beginning of 2023, though it originally started in the 1920s. Expert athletes will enjoy traversing the terrain here, with 45% intermediate trails and 41% advanced.

After immersing yourself in the magic of the mountain, relax with apres ski sips and snacks on the sun decks at Snow Valley's Last Run Lounge or Laybacks Bar at Bear Mountain's main lodge or share stories of your day on the slopes at Tommi's or the Slopeside Speakeasy, both at Snow Summit.

Throughout the 2024-2025 season, enjoy night sessions on the slopes at Snow Summit and Snow Valley, views of San Geronio Mountain at Bear Mountain and mountaintop dining at Snow Summit as well as the 60th annual New Year's Eve Party and Torchlight Parade on Dec. 31. Because they are all in close proximity, visitors can experience all three resorts in one day, making this an excellent place for an all-day or weekend excursion.

OPPOSITE PAGE BOTTOM: MATTHEW STUIVER/WHISTLER BLACKCOMB; REST OF SPREAD: COURTESY OF BIG BEAR MOUNTAIN RESORT



Snow Summit, within Big Bear Mountain Resort, originally opened in the 1950s and now boasts 240 acres of skiable terrain.

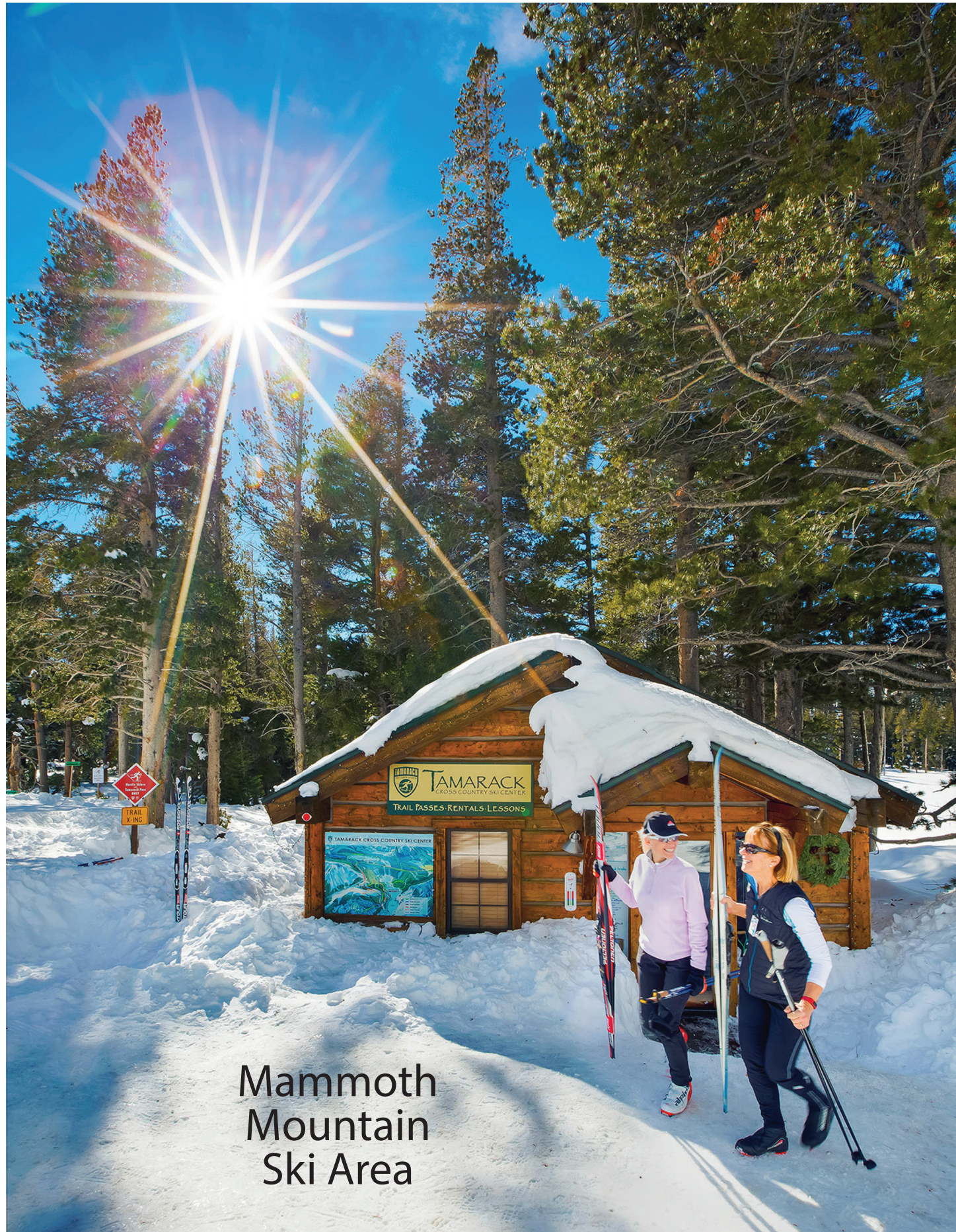
WHISKED AWAY TO WHISTLER

VENTURE UP TO CANADA TO EXPLORE A TRUE WINTER WONDERLAND IN A FAR-FLUNG ADVENTURE.

For those seeking a winter escape that's a bit farther away, consider Whistler Blackcomb for a dynamic vacation this ski season. As one of the largest ski resorts in North America, with more than 8,000 acres of skiable terrain and at least 200 marked runs, this is an exciting destination that boasts exhilarating on-mountain experiences, ski camps and clinics, a peak-to-peak

gondola, apres ski options and live entertainment. This year, visitors can skip the line by buying a hands-free mobile pass through the My Epic app, allowing them to scan in with their phone still in their pocket. The app also offers My Epic Gear, a membership-based program that allows travelers access to more than 60 of the latest ski or snowboard models from 13 popular brands. In addition, the Jersey Cream Express has been upgraded from a four-person to a six-person lift this season in order to reduce wait times and increase uphill capacity to Glacier Creek Zone on Blackcomb Mountain. Experience a once-in-a-lifetime lesson with the Ski or Ride with an Olympian program, offering the opportunity to learn from the best that winter sports have to offer, or journey up the mountain on the Peak 2 Peak Gondola to take in views from 1,400 feet above the valley floor.





Mammoth Mountain Ski Area



Mammoth Mountain offers an extra long season due to its high elevation, often staying open through spring and sometimes into July or August. The resort also accommodates a wide variety of winter activities from skiing and snowboarding to tubing and snowmobiling—plus plenty of apres ski spots.

A little further north, nestled just south of the captivating Yosemite National Park, lies Mammoth Lakes. Those looking for a more secluded escape will love this little town, where the ski resort, Mammoth Mountain, enjoys an extra long season that often runs through spring—sometimes into July or August. The long season is due to the high elevation, which hovers above 11,000 feet at the summit and nearly 8,000 feet at the base, and an average of 300 days of sunshine per year.

Mammoth Mountain Ski Area held its annual opening day celebration, which includes a first chair ride and banner breakthrough from the resort mascot, Woolly, in mid-November, so travelers are already being welcomed at this winter wonderland. There are 178 marked trails at the resort, ranging from easiest to extremely difficult in rating, as well as 10 terrain parks with more than 100 jibs, over 50 jumps and two halfpipes.

One of the best spots for apres ski is Tusks Bar: Here, you'll find a sunny deck complete with fire pits and views of the terrain park. Travelers also gravitate to the Yodler Restaurant & Bar, which features a Bavarian menu with favorites like bratwurst, schnitzel sandwiches and fondue, for a European-inspired experience.

This year, the resort is replacing Chair 1 of its Broadway Express ski lift with a high-speed alternative that will improve wait times on busy days with a 25% increased uphill capacity. In addition, terminals at both the top and the bottom of the lift will have indoor storage incorporated so that carriers can be moved indoors during big storms, allowing guests to get onto the fresh powder quickly once it's safe to do so. The project is expected to be completed sometime this season; in the meantime, visitors can use the Unbound Express lift or the

Lower Panorama Gondola.

Over the offseason, Mammoth Mountain also dedicated \$3.5 million to automating and improving the energy efficiency of its snowmaking capabilities, which will also connect terrain between the resort's base lodges. Woolly's Adventure Summit, a tube and adventure park, also saw improvements, including the re-opening of the Woolly's Mountain Coaster. A new full-service Day Lodge is expected to be unveiled sometime this season as well with retail shops, dining outlets, a ticketing area and patios on which to unwind; a rock climbing wall and ropes course are planned for a future renovation.

With a laid-back atmosphere and endless mountain opportunities, from skiing and snowboarding to tubing, snowmobiling and snow play areas for little ones, Mammoth is the ideal escape for those seeking excitement on the slopes followed by cozy relaxation.

THIS SPREAD: COURTESY OF MAMMOTH MOUNTAIN

Lake Tahoe

With a large, freshwater lake as its centerpoint, Lake Tahoe offers stunning winter landscapes, with peaks rising up around the clear water. And with more than 10 ski properties to choose from, there is a whole lot of variety here for travelers looking to explore different resorts during their trip. In fact, the Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority reports that this region stands out in the U.S. for having the highest concentration of ski resorts within a 100-mile radius.

While the alpine terrain here doesn't differ too much from Mammoth, with peaks towering around 10,000 feet and higher, Lake Tahoe has a much more cosmopolitan ambience, with hotels, casinos, shops, nightlife and more spread around the shoreline. These urban amenities ensure that visitors have everything they need at their fingertips before and after hitting the slopes—along with jaw-dropping scenery during trail runs.

Heavenly launched its season in late November, welcoming visitors with a whopping 4,800 acres of skiable land. Choose from a terrain park and 97 trails, almost all of which are intermediate—in fact, there is next to no beginner terrain here. Those that are looking for easier options can take advantage of the resort's Ski & Ride School, which will be offered in 10 different languages for the first time this year. Don't worry about lugging equipment to the mountain, as Heavenly, like Big Bear, added the My Epic Gear membership to its offerings for the current season.

Those looking for a nutritious meal will love the recently opened Golden State Kitchen, where ski lodge dining is being transformed with a lineup of healthy California cuisine options. For a more traditional apres ski experience, visit Tamarack Lodge, where an alfresco deck and savory barbecue dishes help fuel active adventures. Brews & Views, a monthly apres ski celebration that launched last season, will also return this year at Lakeview Lodge with luxe cuisine, live music and beer tastings.

The ski resort also hosts Heavenly Holidays, a daily, family-friendly festival running through the end of the year that features tree lighting ceremonies, ice sculptures, breakfasts with Santa, fireworks on New Year's Eve and much more. The Toyota Air & Après event also returns in March 2025 with a big air show, athlete meet-and-greets, live music and an apres ski party.



Surrounded by high-elevation peaks, Lake Tahoe stands out in the U.S. for having the most ski areas in a 100-mile radius.



Left: Apres-ski options abound; right: a festive atmosphere with fireworks at Heavenly

While the majority of runs at Kirkwood Mountain Resort are advanced or expert, they do have more offerings for beginners than Heavenly. Explore the 2,300 acres of terrain on your own or with Expedition:Kirkwood, a variety of clinics, private guides and more to get skiers and snowboarders to the next level. In part, the program aims to get travelers out in the backcountry that sits within resort boundaries and is reachable by ski lift. Known for its stunning views of the mountains, this is a great

way to explore the region.

The resort is also transitioning to a reservation-based parking program for weekends and other peak days—new this year at Kirkwood, but implemented at Heavenly in 2023. Kirkwood will also play host to a few thrilling events, including the NYE Fireworks & Torchlight Parade on Dec. 31 and the 2025 Slush Cup, a beloved spring-time tradition featuring pond skating guests decked out in retro gear.

And those that fly into the Lake Tahoe area

won't have to worry about not having a car either. Throughout your stay, take advantage of the Lake Link app, a complimentary service that offers on-demand, shared rides in passenger vans to popular destinations within South Lake Tahoe, California, and Stateline, Nevada.

Whether you venture up to Lake Tahoe or Mammoth or stick close to home with a Big Bear adventure, the California mountains are calling with plenty of snow, sun and fun this winter season. ■

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