



Central Oregon: A Something-For-Everyone Holiday

by Amanda Bjerke

Whether you find your fun in snow, spa or trout stream, Central Oregon has all the makings of an exceptional holiday memory. Each winter, the high-desert communities of Bend, Sisters and Sunriver offer easy access to deep powder, deluxe pampering and world-class waters. But this season is unprecedented when it comes to luring fly-fishing enthusiasts. This is *the* year for the highly prized steelhead trout. The elusive fish, born in fresh water, make their way to the ocean, and then return to lakes and rivers to spawn. Last August more than 34,000 homeward-bound steelhead were counted at the Columbia River's Bonneville Dam in a single day. The previous one-day record was 14,432.



Jeff Perin, owner of The Fly Fisher's Place in downtown Sisters, Oregon, explained the significance of the extraordinary numbers, "many of those steelhead head straight for Central Oregon. This could end up being the best year ever [for steelhead]."

The Fly Fisher's Place offers a variety of guided excursions all through the holiday season, including steelhead trips on the Deschutes River through December 31. Other options include fishing on the Crooked River, a lower elevation, high-desert stream that reflects Central Oregon's reputation for sunny skies and moderate weather.

Throughout the area, avid fisher-people can pursue their passion guilt-free—even if those they love aren't enamored with hooking a big one. Central Oregon is home to two distinct—and distinctive—ski resorts, an assortment of spas, a wealth of acclaimed restaurants, accommodations for every taste and budget, and loads of holiday-themed events and activities.

Just 20 minutes from Bend, Mt. Bachelor Ski Resort sprawls across almost 4,000 acres. One of the largest ski areas in the Northwest, it offers internationally acclaimed skiing and snowboarding and is noted for deep, dry powder. Beginners and experts alike find perfect runs, and those who are weary of the slopes can enjoy a guided snowshoe romp, cross-country trails or dog sled rides.

A folksier alternative, Hoodoo Ski Resort, is a long-time favorite with locals. Located 20 miles northwest of Sisters, (about 45 minutes from Bend)

Hoodoo has undergone major upgrades over the past few seasons. Its 836 skiable acres are now served by faster lifts, and a new 60,000 sq. ft. lodge means more comfort and fewer lines. Both ski areas partner with local hotels to offer package deals. It's possible to find exceptional accommodations 15 minutes to a half hour away from each, and traffic is rarely an issue. Shuttling back to town is as easy as it is advisable. After a day on the snow, a soothing massage may be in order, and Central Oregon is peppered with possibilities. In Sisters, the Shibui Spa at the luxe Five Pines Resort is highly recommended, as is the Jensei in downtown Bend, and the lavish Sage Springs Club at Sunriver.

While the essential spa experiences may be similar at each of these repositories of peace and quiet, the three resort communities retain unique characteristics that make each worthy of a visit. Sisters, a former logging town, benefits from a beautiful situation with a stellar view of the mountain peaks known as Three Sisters—Faith, Hope and Charity. With the decline of the timber industry in the 1980s, Sisters reinvented itself by recreating its long-lost 19th-century ambience. It now benefits from an Old West atmosphere chock-a-block with faux storefronts, wooden sidewalks, antique shops, art galleries and quilting emporiums. Ten miles to the south, Bend also builds on its past, transforming the site of a former lumber



Steelhead fishing on the Deschutes River

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operation into the Old Mill District, a vibrant shopping and entertainment center within walking distance of the historic downtown. Even Sunriver, a planned residential/resort community on Bend's outskirts, incorporates elements of an intriguing yesteryear. Developed more than 40 years ago on the site of a former World War II Army camp, it includes golf courses, residences, guest lodging, restaurants and a retail mall as well as the spa. In the midst of all the modern amenities, the massive Officers' Club, featuring timbers from the nearby forest, stands as testimony to its military heritage. It was transformed into Sunriver's Great Hall and is now used as a meeting and banquet space. It also serves as a focal point for Sunriver's annual Traditions holiday celebration.



Telemark skiing in the Central Oregon backcountry

During December, Sunriver guests and the general public enjoy more than 150 family-friendly Traditions activities. Highlights include Central Oregon's most elaborate light display, the Northwest's largest exhibition of gingerbread houses, sleigh rides along the banks of the Deschutes River and weekend breakfasts with Santa Claus. Each Saturday parents, children and their favorite teddy bears are invited to tea at the Lodge's Hearth Room. A Family Concert is presented in the Grand Hall during Christmas week.

Central Oregon entices visitors with great mountain snow, expansive public lands, trout-rich waters, inimitable shops and eateries and a ubiquitous seasonal spirit. Here, holiday memories come easy. ■



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