



MAMMOTH LAKES, CALIFORNIA =

BIG, HUGE, IMMENSE, GIGANTIC, GARGANTUAN

by Amanda Bjerke

FUN

Mammoth Lakes, the iconic ski town in California's Eastern Sierra, lives up to its name. There's a whole lot of huge going on in a community that is not your typical, former mining-camp-turned-ski-area. Superlative snowfall—more than 400 inches during a season that extends from mid-November

through June—is the community's chief *raison d'être*. In the 1930s, Mammoth Mountain's amazing ski conditions, including an average of 300 sunny days each year, caught the attention of Los Angeles City hydrographer Dave McCoy. An avid downhill enthusiast, McCoy was part of the Eastern Sierra Ski Club and maintained a Mammoth rope tow during the 1940s. In 1953, the U.S. Forest Service tapped him for a gratis ski-area permit. Two years later, he built Mammoth Mountain Ski Area's first lift. McCoy remained active in the facility's operation until 2005. Today, the recreation area he founded continues to offer visitors the same pristine winter conditions that first nabbed McCoy's attention. There have been improvements through the years, of course, but never at the expense of the essential experience. Here are a few of the colossal attributes that continue to make Mammoth a favorite of winter sports experts.



Shaun White at practice during the 2010 Halfpipe finals on Mammoth Mountain.

1. BIG MOUNTAIN: A gigantic mountain sets the stage for stellar winter sports. More than 150 trails access 3,500 acres. Greater than 3,000 feet of vertical incline rises to a dizzying elevation of 11,053 feet. Skiers and boarders of every ability find something to love here and hotdoggers seeking a challenge are never disappointed. Mammoth is nirvana for freestyle fiends. Its terrain parks consistently rank among the world's best. This is the mountain that gave the world Olympic gold medalist Shaun White. Other superstars calling Mammoth home include Olympic halfpipe silver medalist Danny Kass. The pros hone their skills on Mammoth's seven Unbound Terrain parks. Sprawling across 90 acres, the park boasts more than 80 rails/boxes and in excess of



General Grant Grove in Kings Canyon National Park, near Mammoth

50 jumps. It also boasts three halfpipes, including the 22-foot-tall Super Duper Pipe. Mammoth Unbound's features range from beginner bumps and jibs in the Disco Park to the big, burly massive jump lines of the Main Park. If you've seen Mammoth on TV, this is what you were watching.

2. BIG VISTAS: The town of Mammoth Lakes, population right around 7,000, is just a few miles from the ski area and bounded by open space that is as majestic as it is massive. Mammoth exudes a sense of freedom that can only be conjured by unfettered nature. Yosemite National Park, the Sierra National Forest and its Ansel Adams Wilderness Area and Kings Canyon National Park all lie just west of Mammoth. The Inyo National Forest is north and Death Valley is south by southeast. There's no fear of fences when you go exploring these vast public lands. So, you can fall in love with this little ski town, confident that development isn't going to change it much.

3. BIG ADVENTURES: Proximity to so much preserved space means plenty of year-round fun. Yes, the snow lasts until June. That means all the more time for winter sports. Besides the mountaintop excitement at the ski area, snowshoers, cross-country skiers and even snowmobilers access miles and miles of immaculate backcountry trails. In summer, Mammoth's scenery continues to amaze and entice. Hiking, rock climbing, fishing and all the expected high country diversions are great here. So is mountain biking. To make the most of the experience, Mammoth Mountain operates a bike park offering more than 70 miles of dirt single track and a variety of free ride trails as well as tamer paths ideal for families and more passive



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cyclists. Golfers also get a big boost from Mammoth in summer. The 18-hole, public Sierra Star golf course sits at approximately 8,000 feet above sea level. Golf balls really fly at that elevation. Expect to add yards to your drive.

4. BIG VALUE: Mammoth delivers a huge experience without busting the budget. This is especially true in January when the mountain runs midweek specials and local lodges and eateries often discount their own offerings. No matter the month, midweek is always a great time to visit. Lift lines are almost nonexistent and the gargantuan mountain seems even bigger with fewer visitors taking to its slopes and bowls.



5. BIG OPTIONS: Besides all the outdoor excitement, Mammoth makes it easy to add a dash of history and a dollop of après adventure to any stay. The community is home to the Mammoth Ski Museum, featuring artifacts from the earliest days of California skiing. It also screens a movie documenting the life of founder Dave McCoy. Beyond the slopes there are snowcat tours, dog sled rides and a rope-tow-served tubing hill. When it's time to really relax, book a spa treatment or unwind at one of Mammoth's many restaurants, bars or breweries.

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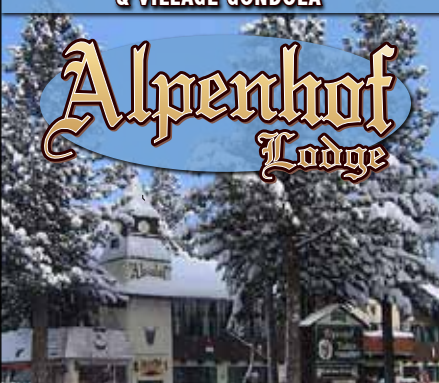
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