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HIGH HEAVEN

On the border of California and Nevada, Lake Tahoe offers spectacular views, world-class skiing courtesy of the Heavenly region and divine lodging at Edgewood Tahoe Resort



California is not a place you immediately associate with skiing. Coastline, beaches, social-media giants, wine and the Beverly Hills Chihuahua, check; shooting through deep powder, maybe not. But skiing is exactly what is on offer at Lake Tahoe, in the Sierra Nevada mountains in the east of the state.

The lake was formed from volcanic and faulting activity, is bigger than Lake Como and so wide you can't always see from shore to shore, although you are always aware of the mountain ring around. It is located at an altitude of 1,900m, more than enough to make up for its relatively southerly location, while the influence of North America's vast and icy interior means winters here are usually colder than in the Alps. The lake straddles California and Nevada and there are a few significant ski areas in its mountains. The most famous, and the one we chose, is Heavenly,

one of the premium mountain destinations owned and operated by Vail Resorts Hospitality, the luxury-travel company for the great outdoors.

Rising up across steep forested mountains at the southeast of Lake Tahoe, Heavenly's ski area is split between California and Nevada. At its base on the lake's edge is the resort town of Stateline, Nevada. This being the US, Stateline is a high-altitude mix of wonderful, wacky and tacky. While the natural location is among the most spectacular of any winter-sports resorts in the world, drive down the main street and you find a panoply of strip mall-type boutiques and a casino complex that could have been airlifted out of the suburbs of nearby Las Vegas.

But the area was a resort for the well-to-do from the outset and, just beyond the border in a Nevada forest glade, the buildings disappear as you cruise along the driveway of Edgewood

Tahoe Resort. With giant Jeffrey pines beside the lake near the tasteful low-rise hotel complex, you are suddenly in a ski location of dreams.

The welcome from the valets is amenable and efficient. The resort has significant eco-credentials: the main Lodge is Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Silver Certified, and it has received plaudits for its water and land management. Walking into the high atrium, you have the feeling of being in a giant mountain cabin. Turn right and you enter the open bar and restaurant area, which looks out over a stone terrace into which is built a huge outdoor pool, steaming in the subzero temperatures of winter with vitality pools all around. Beyond the pool are a few more giant trees before the gardens drop into the lake.

Arriving after a drive from San Francisco, we switched between the pool, very hot Jacuzzi



Clockwise from far left: Edgewood Tahoe Resort on Lake Tahoe's southeast shore; Heavenly's mountains rise behind the eco-friendly complex; luxurious mountain-cabin design in the North Room; the west-facing terrace, complete with Jacuzzi and heated pool



and sun loungers. Warmed by the Jacuzzi, it was remarkably pleasant to lie on the terrace as the sun descended towards the mountains to the west, in a temperature of -3°C . It is a hotel ritual to grab a cocktail from the bar and watch the sun disappear behind the mountain ridge beyond the lake, which separates the resort from the low central valley and population centres of California. It is an astounding welcome by nature and one that no European resort can replicate.

Sunset over and empowered by our margaritas, we wandered to another part of the atrium, which features a bookstore and an exhibition on the hotel's history. It was founded in the late 19th century as a mail stop for traffic drawn by horses between New York and San Francisco and the gold-rush lands. Just beyond is the hotel sports shop, where we were measured for rental skis and boots by a young and very

friendly team. The equipment would be ready and waiting for us at the hotel entrance, from where we would be shuttled to the slopes in the morning.

Heavenly's ski area is accessed by a long, panoramic and rapid gondola ride, rising from the town a five-minute drive from the hotel. The view from the gondola as it scythes between the trees, while the bowl of Lake Tahoe opens out in its full glory, are worth the journey in itself. The ski area is a delight, with a mix of undulating red and blue runs and eye-popping views of the lake and California on one side, and the Nevada desert on the other. The snow is granular and dry, making turns a treat, with the most exciting routes through the trees. The forest glades are spaced apart, so you can pick your own route through the snow between runs. Wonderful.

The many lifts are efficient and quick, our only bugbear being the mountain food, which

is generic (chilli, burgers, chicken). But we had Edgewood to return to at the end of the day, for excellent tapas-style platters in the bar, and vibrant California cuisine in the bistro and restaurant: our favourite dish of seared ahi tuna with togarishi rub, avocado crema, ponzu vinaigrette and Asian greens sums up the style.

Our room was large with some lovely woodland details in the décor and furnishings made of found forest materials. Our balcony overlooked the pool and lake; others overlook the forest, which is equally peaceful. You would, I suspect, have a very tranquil and resetting break if you went to Edgewood and never set foot outside. But combined with the skiing above at Heavenly, it's a match made in, well, paradise.

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