

Life & Leisure

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**MAXIMUM
ELEVATION**
EPIC SNOW
ADVENTURE
IN OREGON

TRAVEL UNITED STATES

Snow cone

The flanks of a volcano make for magic ski runs, writes **Roger Johnstone** from the rugged winter wonderland of Oregon.



One of the great things about skiing a snow-capped volcano is that you have a choice to go straight down or you can go round and round. It helps if it's not an active volcano.

A perfect example is Mount Bachelor on the eastern flanks of the volcanic fault in the famous Cascade Range in central Oregon, in the United States. About 30 minutes from the trendy town of Bend, or 20 minutes from the resort area of Sunriver, on a clear day Mount Bachelor can be seen from 80 kilometres away.

Many of Oregon's 12 ski areas can be put in the "town mountain" category, but Mount Bachelor isn't one of them. At a total elevation of 2763 metres, it receives more than 11 metres of dry snow in a good season, and with 1500 hectares of rideable terrain and 1025 metres of vertical – the longest run is 6.4 kilometres – there's lots of it to explore. It's reportedly the second-biggest single mountain resort in the US.

It may not have the big gondolas of its southern cousins, but its operations and facilities are as modern and efficient as any across the nation.

It's a bit hard to get your head around Mount Bachelor when looking at the trail map, but it's as simple as this: catch the main West Village chair to Pine Marten Lodge at mid-mountain, keep traversing to the Sunrise Express lift and pick up the Summit Express to the top. Now you're on top of a volcano, or a stratovolcano, which gives it that perfect cone shape.

There are groomed runs below you, bowls either side and ungroomed expert runs behind. If you take the back-side plunge, make sure you hook up with the traverse that takes you back to the front side, or it's a long run home on the bottom catchline.

The resort has one of the longest seasons in the US, starting in November and ending as late as May. In the northern spring it's not unheard of to ski in the morning and play golf in the afternoon at one of the 28



Clockwise from above: Timberline Lodge on Mount Hood, which featured in the movie *The Shining*; Bachelor's Pine Marten mid-mountain lodge, the highest restaurant in Oregon; Crater Lake is a further reminder of volcanic activity; vertiginous slopes.



There are groomed runs below you, bowls either side and ungroomed expert runs behind.

championship golf courses in the area.

The only thing missing on the mountain is accommodation, which you won't find in Oregon – with the exception of the famous Timberline Lodge on Mount Hood, because all the resorts are in national forests. But it's not a hardship to stay in town and sample Bend's highly awarded wining, dining, brewing, shopping and cultural options. The town of 80,000 people is similar to Colorado's Aspen without the designer labels and prices.

If you want to stay slightly closer to the mountain, you can bed down at the nearby massive Sunriver Resort and village – about 20 minutes away – and enjoy its

myriad outdoor activities: hiking, biking, horse-riding, rafting, kayaking and caving, depending on the time of year. There's also indoor tennis and swimming if the snow is coming down.

Despite being the biggest ski area in Oregon, Mount Bachelor is far enough away from Portland – 40 minutes by plane or four hours by car – to handle any crowds.

Portlandians usually head east to the Mount Hood area, another volcanic set-up, which can be reached in 90 minutes from the city, or slightly longer if you've got time to tour the spectacular Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area and its extraordinary number of waterfalls.

The two major resorts here are Timberline and Mount Hood Meadows. They sit above the fertile and beautiful Hood River Valley and couldn't be more different despite sitting either side of Mount Hood itself, yet another dormant volcano and, at 3424 metres, Oregon's tallest peak.

When you arrive at Timberline Lodge you step back into history. It was built out of solid Oregon timber in 1937 as one of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's make-

work projects during the Great Depression. Despite being expanded over the years, the hotel still feels like it belongs in the old *Twin Peaks* TV series, even down to the retro Bakelite phones in the rooms. More accurately, you might remember it from the horror movie, *The Shining*.

The Lodge is a grand family-holiday type of operation and plays host to modern ski operations that take in plenty of green and blue runs among the trees. There's skiing above the tree line under the wispy peaks of Mount Hood and the top field is so high you can ski it in summer on its own towline.

Not far away as the crow flies, but about 30 minutes by car, is the mountain's premier ski resort and Portland's snow backyard, Mount Hood Meadows. It's of a deceptive size, at more than 1000 hectares; its highest lift is perched at 2225 metres. There are also some serious back-country offerings in Heather Canyon, plus a large multifunctioning day lodge and night skiing. Because of its location under Mount Hood, it gets plenty of snow (more than 10 metres), and offers a variety of trails and special areas for beginners. Be aware that weekend snow days catch the traffic as Portlandians chase the powder.

Nearest accommodation is in the small village/resort area named Government Camp that services nearby Mount Hood Skibowl, famous for its night skiing. Originally, Timberline Lodge construction workers lived here while it was being built.

So the question is, why come to Oregon when there are so many big-name resorts in the US? It's a personal choice, but you do get more than just a ski holiday. You to get to see Portland, a city reborn into a young, active and aware community with a taste for all the things Australians hold sacred – good food, wine, coffee, beer and good times.



Hit the road and you will see incredible, wonderful natural sites that have inspired Americans for centuries: mountain passes, thundering waterfalls, high desert plains and rugged coastlines ... and some pretty good snow riding thrown in.

And then, by US (and Australian) standards it's cheap. There's no retail tax across the state, and that goes for the snowfields too, where a day ticket will cost between \$60 and \$90, about half the comparable price in Colorado. **L&L**

The writer was a guest of Travel Oregon. More at traveloregon.com or skioregon.com.

Timberline's Lodge is a grand family-holiday type of operation.

On the craft ale trail

Portland, Oregon, is known as the City of Roses. It's also been called Stumptown for its timber heritage and Bridgetown for its river crossings – and now it's known as Beervana for its love affair with beer.

That's because there's a lot of breweries, or more correctly beer pubs in Oregon. At last count the state hosts more than 250 breweries with 84 in the greater Portland area alone. Nearly 20 per cent of all the beer drunk in Portland is craft beer, the largest market share in the US. In many cases craft breweries have become destinations in themselves, serving good food, offering live music and a good vibe.

Some are the size of warehouses; others so small they're basically three men and a fermenting tank. They never make the same brew twice, "that would be boring".

So it wasn't unusual to find myself in a brewery two hours after landing at Portland International. I could justify it because I'd ridden there on a bike courtesy of Portland Bike Tours, who assured me jokingly that after a few beers if I fell off in the rain I wouldn't feel anything. So off we went,

zigzagging across the many bridges that cross the Willamette River on the south side of the city and the latest area to feel the weight of the hipster regeneration.

Calling in at Baerlic Brewing and the adventure-themed Base Camp Brewing I discovered that the main topic of conversation is the beers themselves. You can

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order small flights of beers to test four or six at a time. It's a certain way to make friends.

It is all about the quest for the perfect pale ale, red ale, creamy ale, sour ale, saison, pilsner, lager, porter and stout, before moving on to the orange shandy, or an aged ale matured in bourbon barrels. Have more than one of the latter and you won't remember where you left your bike. Most craft beers start about 6 per cent alcohol content and go up. Under-

standably the legal drink/drive limit is .08. In the main part of the city, including the trendy Pearl District, you'll find the big names of craft brewing including the original BridgePort, Wider, Full Sail, Fat Head and an extension of the original Deschutes Brewery from Bend in central Oregon.

It's hard to understand Portland's fascination with beer. There is a craft beer revolution in Australia but nothing like this. This is the city that's boast sports companies including Nike, Columbia, and Adidas as employers and embraces the outdoor lifestyle unlike any other city on earth. So what's with the beer thing?

Of course the liquor licensing laws have been freed up and it rains a lot so you can't be outdoors all the time. In central Oregon I spotted another answer in yet another brewery. Upon the blackboard was a pale ale called "the beer my father never ordered". So maybe it's a generational thing!

Even when I returned my bike I was congratulated on not falling off by being offered a lager from the shop's own keg. Just go with the flow – it's a Portlandia thing. **RJ**



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