

HOME DINING RECREATION TRAVEL COMMUNITY HEALTH SHOPPING

805 LIVING

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'TIS THE
Season

By Mallory McCreary



Dreaming of a White Christmas?

Travel to Montana for the “Last Best Christmas Vacation” six-day/five-night package (December 22-29; all-inclusive from \$ \$7,376 for two adults and two children) at The Resort at Paws Up. Guests celebrate in the comfort of rental vacation homes without any of the hassle: Rates include three meals and a half-day adventure activity (horseback riding, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, snowmobiling, snow tubing) daily. The package also includes a Christmas tree in the home (pre-decorated or with the trimmings ready for guests to hang), a personal family visit from Santa, nightly ice-skating, sleigh rides, holiday movies, a gingerbread house-building contest, cookie decorating, stockings, and a Christmas Eve kids’ party.

Vacation homes combine rustic decor (leather, timber, iron, pinecones) with luxury amenities like heated granite-tiled bathroom floors, outdoor hot tubs, satellite TVs, and Internet access; most have fireplaces. Two on-site restaurants offer casual fare for breakfast, lunch, and gourmet-eclectic dinners with Montana-raised meats such as pheasant, elk, bison, trout, and rattlesnake.

With only 28 vacation homes on the property and more than a hundred miles of outdoor adventure trails, guests are able to enjoy the solitude of nature while celebrating the season. Paws Up is located 30 minutes east of Missoula in western Montana; direct flights are available from LAX on the inexpensive carrier Allegiant (www.allegiantair.com).

Can’t make Christmas? Special rates (from \$465) last through February 21. 800-473-0601; www.pawsup.com



Saddle up for a white Christmas at Montana’s Resort at Paws Up, with activities such as horseback riding, snow tubing, and sleigh rides.

50 Feels Good

The Central Coast’s Boutique Hotel Collection is celebrating anyone born in 1959 or earlier (age 50 or older) with a “Nifty 50” package. Now through February 11 (holiday blackouts apply), Sycamore Mineral Springs Resort in Avila Beach (www.sycamore-springs.com), Apple Farm Inn in San Luis Obispo (www.applefarm.com), the Inn at Morro Bay (www.innatmorrobay.com), and SeaVenture Resort (www.seaventure.com) and The Cliffs Resort in Pismo Beach (www.cliffsresort.com) are offering 50 percent off a premium guestroom, dinner entrée, and select gift shop items. Contact each property individually for more information.

For the KIDDIES

Where else can you see a 30-foot Christmas tree made entirely of Lego bricks? Or a life-size Lego Santa in his sleigh pulled by Lego reindeer? “Holly Jolly Holidays” (through December 31) at Legoland (www.legoland.com) in Carlsbad includes a tree lighting every night at 5:30 (until December 24) and fireworks at closing time. On New Year’s Eve, Legoland hosts a Lego “Brick Drop” (instead of “ball drop”) at 6 p.m. (that’s 12 a.m. KST: Kid Standard Time) to ring in 2010.

Make it an event with a stay at La Costa Resort & Spa with the “Holidays Traditions” package (from \$239), which includes accommodations and a \$50 bonus resort credit. In addition to golf, spa services, day and night kids’ activities, and sports clinics, there will be seasonal events like making gingerbread houses and other crafts, Fireside Storytelling with Mrs. Claus, stockings delivered to wee ones on Christmas Eve by Santa’s elves, and kids-only New Year’s Eve parties. 800-854-5000; www.lacosta.com



Perched mid-slope at Northstar-at-Tahoe, the new Ritz-Carlton Highlands at Lake Tahoe offers ski-in/ski-out mountain luxury.

Paso Robles Presents

December is the perfect time to enjoy the intimacy of a small, cozy inn, where personalized experience trumps large-scale amenities. The 16-room Hotel Cheval in Paso Robles is offering these special December packages (holiday blackout dates may apply):

- **“Holiday Spa Escape”** includes one night’s accommodations and a 60-minute in-room couple’s massage (\$385 per couple Sundays through Thursdays).
- **“Wrap Yourself in Luxury”** offers two nights’ lodging, two Hotel Cheval spa robes, and 20 percent off the exclusive Hotel Cheval jewelry collection just in time for holiday shopping (\$425 per couple Sundays through Thursdays). The collection includes one-of-a-kind sterling silver English medals, gold, pearls, and semiprecious stones hand-wired by a local designer.

Hotel Cheval’s rooms are comfortable and stylish with individual character; many offer soaking tubs or fireplaces or patios or sun decks. Drinks and light nibbles are served in the property’s French-inspired Pony Club; and a tour around the park in a horse-drawn carriage under a starry winter sky—led by the property’s mascot, Chester—is a must. 866-522-6999; www.hotelcheval.com



Paso Robles’ Hotel Cheval is a boutique hotel perfectly situated for enjoying the town’s restaurants and wine-tasting rooms.



VANCE FOX

SKI SEASON

North Lake Tahoe ski resorts are hosting the “10th Annual Learn to Ski and Board Weekend” (December 12–13), where an all-day beginner lift ticket, group lesson, and gear rental costs just \$25 at nine participating resorts (888-434-1262). With a deal like that, you can afford to stay in luxury at the area’s first new property in decades: The Ritz-Carlton Highlands, Lake Tahoe opens its doors on December 9. The “Sneak Peak Ski Package” (from \$349 per night; December 9–18 and January 4–April 11) includes a three-night stay, two three-day lift tickets, valet parking, and resort fee.

Rooms have fireplaces, floor-to-ceiling windows with mountain views, and marble bathrooms with dual sinks, separate showers, and soaking tubs. The on-site Manzanita restaurant serves French-inspired and mountain-influenced California cuisine; the property also boasts a 17,000-square-foot spa and fitness area (including an outdoor lap pool); and a slopeside ski valet.

The ski-in/ski-out resort is located mid-mountain in the Northstar-at-Tahoe ski area and is a 15-minute drive from Lake Tahoe and Truckee. Squaw Valley is 20 minutes away and many other ski resorts (Heavenly, Alpine Meadows, Sugar Bowl, Diamond Peak) populate the area. But you don’t need to drive at all: take the inter-mountain gondola from the hotel to the Village-at-Northstar, where there’s outdoor ice-skating, restaurants, bars, and shopping. 800-241-3333; www.ritzcarlton.com/laketahoe ■

Hot Tip

Visit www.yountville.com for information on Napa Valley’s “Moveable Feast” program, good now through February 28. Snag great discounts on lodging (starting at \$165 a night), food (how about a three-course prix-fixe lunch for \$55 per couple or one-dollar oysters?), and wine tasting (50 percent off).