

Early storms spur eager skiers to book rooms in Tahoe

By Rob Sabo, Northern Nevada Business Weekly

An increase in early-season bookings for winter ski vacations has hoteliers and property managers in the Lake Tahoe region – who have struggled the past few years to fill rooms at profitable rates – optimistic about the upcoming ski season.

And a rise in bookings from international clients gives even further hope that tourism may be returning to the region.



Snow started falling early Nov. 7 at Kirkwood.

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Don Cauley, general manager of Vacation Station at Incline Village, says bookings are tracking up 10 to 15 percent this year compared to 2009. Reservations for the company's 100 cabins, condominiums and rental homes at Incline Village dipped between 35 and 40 percent beginning in 2008. Occupancy is running higher, Cauley notes, but profits still are down because of lower room rates.

"We are giving up revenues in order to get people to come back," Cauley says. "We are recovering somewhat, but we are nowhere near where we were two or three years ago."

Reservations for ski vacations also are on the rise at Resort at Squaw Creek. Les Pederson, director of sales and marketing, says December bookings are up 23 percent over 2009, while first quarter 2011 bookings are up 40 percent.

“That is encouraging,” Pederson says. “Eventually snow will really get into the equation – this time of year we start to do the snow dance. But so far, so good.”

Bill Cottrill, director of sales and marketing for Embassy Suites Lake Tahoe, located a stone’s throw from the Heavenly Mountain Resort gondola, says bookings spiked with the arrival of snow in mid-October. Snowstorms typically result in a flurry of reservations, he says, and bookings tapered off with last week’s warm weather.

“The pickup we got for the first quarter was amazing,” Cottrill says. “There is a certain level of calls we handle, and when you throw a snow or rainstorm in there that will impact the wintertime. It brings a spike in phone calls. But as soon as it gets back to sunny weather, calls dip back down to a typical pace.”

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