

Cedar House hotel is more than a place to sleep

By Kathryn Reed

TRUCKEE – It's the perfect trifecta – food, adventure and lodging.

The Cedar House Sport Hotel offers all of this to guests, making for an uncomplicated stay and a new twist on an all-inclusive resort. It's more than the average dining experience, more than the average outdoor adventure, and more than the average hotel.

Opened in 2006 by Patty and Jeff Baird, the Cedar House is about a mile from downtown Truckee. Inspired by their time spent in European sport hotels, they wanted to replicate that experience. With the acquisition last month of adventure company Tahoe Trips & Trails, the Bairds are able to be that all-in-one property they dreamed of creating.



The Cedar House Sport Hotel in Truckee has it all.

Photos/Kathryn Reed

While people don't have to stay at the hotel to partake in one

of the adventures, especially since trips are all over the West, the hotel does make for a perfect launching pad to the outdoors.

Some trips are guided hikes, some combine food and the outdoors. And if a suggestion of where to go is what you want, that's free for the asking.

Kayaking and river trips are available this time of year, with cross country skiing and snowshoeing available in winter. This barely touches on what's available.

Patty Baird says the three main reasons to acquire the travel company were so they could market to the adventure traveler, attract corporate businesses interested in team building, and to offer guided hikes into the wilderness. The U.S. Forest Service limits the number of permits allowed for businesses like this, with the Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit not allowing any. The Cedar House goes into the Tahoe National Forest, which Truckee is next to.

But adventure is relative. Across the street from the hotel is a regional park that offers disc golf, and within walking distance is a golf course. Northstar-at-Tahoe, Alpine Meadows and Squaw Valley are a quick drive for skiers.

Getting outside

A week ago Sue and I spent a night at the property – now wishing our get-away was longer. We designed our mountain biking adventure, but left most of the culinary experience up to Chef Jacob Burton.

With hitting snow on the Pole Creek trail (about 7 miles south of Truckee off Highway 89), maybe we should have asked the experts where to go. Nonetheless, our ride through the woods got our heart rate up as we kept going uphill. We found the route in Ken Castle's "Tahoe" guidebook.

It's definitely a scenic area we'll get back to.

Not wanting to have too much for lunch, but wanting to act like we were on vacation – if just for a day – we drove to the River Ranch at the base of Alpine Meadows. The patio there is one of the best on the water eating experiences in the whole Lake Tahoe area.

The Truckee River is roaring by, the sun is shining and the drinks are flowing. Sue's complaint about her CoCo Mai Tai was too much alcohol. I would have ordered another Tiki Torch if I wasn't driving and heading to taste wine as the next stop.

Oh, and the \$2.95 basket of fries is tasty.

Next stop was the Truckee River Winery – which boasts of being the highest and coldest winery in the country. Russ Jones has been making wine since the 1980s, with the tasting room open for about 18 months.

The winery is walking distance from the Cedar House. Stella, the restaurant at the hotel, sells Truckee River Winery wines and the winery sells Stella's yummy breads.

The grapes are from throughout Northern and Central California, with all the winemaking and bottling done in Truckee.

We now have some bottles to drink this summer.

Eating at Stella

While Stella – the restaurant on site – is designed for hotel guests, locals often are found at one of the indoor or outdoor tables. It's open for dinner Wednesday through Sunday from 5:30-9:30pm.

Burton is of the belief that what's on the menu should reflect what's in season. So, you may have liked one dish this month, but in the fall it may not be on the menu based on the

ingredients not being in season.

“Everything is completely inspired by the ingredients,” Burton says, showing the garden that has just started now that the snow has stopped falling. “Our concept is unique. I don’t like to stick to a single cuisine. I don’t like to label it.”

Burton is into sharing his love for food. Recipes are online, including videos, and a place to ask questions about cooking.

The name Stella means star in Italian. The Bairds chose it for this reason as well as a restaurant by that name was on the property years ago.

Paul, our waiter, starts us off with slices of fresh made rosemary-olive and sourdough breads. I could have easily filled up on bread.

Sue’s tomato bisque has her barely able to set her spoon down, while my salad is refreshing.

Using what’s in season was clearly what Burton had in mind by making a bolognaise out of Bing cherries.

“They look like meatballs to us,” Burton said.

Before that night I didn’t like cooked cherries. Now, at least for this dish, I’m a convert. Oh my goodness, I wish I didn’t clean my plate so I could have had leftovers. To top it off, the fettuccine was clearly homemade. But the noodles were thin and delicate, adding a texture not often found in pasta dishes.

Sue enjoyed her halibut, raving about how flaky and tender it was.

For dessert we shared, though I think I had more than half, of the goat cheese cheesecake. I’ve only had cream cheese cheesecakes before, so this lemony concoction was quite a pleasurable experience.

The lodging experience

Walking across the parking lot, we ascend the stairs to our room. First, though, we take in the ambiance of the cedar exterior of the hotel lighted at night. We really do feel like we're in Tahoe with all the wood and unobtrusive lighting.

Cedar House is a green hotel, and while that is what got it headlines five years ago, Baird admits it's not a primary reason people choose the hotel.

"Green is totally incidental for bookings. People like it, but it's not a driving force why people book," Baird said. "But it helps us with our message."

It also helps with lower utility bills.

From our spacious second-story balcony we look over the living roof on the main building. Water drains from the roof to gutters that supply water for landscaping.

The room is contemporary, but not austere. Simple things like instead of wasting space with a closet, a rack of sorts in the corner allows guests to hang clothes. Instead of an uncomfortable backboard to lean against in bed, the back doesn't require a pillow.

Things guests won't readily notice are solar tinted windows, no incandescent lighting is used, and the hot water system is tankless. This barely touches on the green features of the hotel.

A filling, yummy buffet breakfast back at Stella is part of an overnight stay. Dogs are allowed in most rooms, a bar is in the main area near comfy seating and a fireplace, and a hot tub is out back.

Cedar House Sport Hotel is the perfect get-away – my only complaint is it was too short.

Partial list of events:

July 16: The Forgotten Feast with Hank Shaw, author of "Hunt, Gather, Cook: Finding the Forgotten Feast," is a celebration of wild plants and mushrooms, game and seafood. It begins with cocktails and a book signing by Shaw at 5:30pm and is followed by a five-course tasting menu inspired by Shaw's book.

July 17-21 and Aug. 7-11: The Active Gourmand Tour is a four-day adventure for hikers who love to cook.

July 23 and Aug. 20: Cooking demonstrations on both days. Summer canapés and appetizers on July 23 features the basic composition of bite sized hors d'oeuvres, garnish and plating with four wines from California. Composed salads on Aug. 20 in an opportunity to learn to mix flavorful vinaigrettes and select specialty greens.

Aug. 18-21: A photography and hiking adventure.

For more information:

The hotel

Activities

Culinary experiences

Telephone: (530) 582.5655

Getting there:

From South Lake Tahoe, take Highway 89 along the West Shore. Pass Squaw Valley. Before hitting Truckee, turn right on West River Road. Turn right on Bridge Street, this turns into Brockway Road. Hotel is on the right at 10918 Brockway. Or, take Highway 50 west up Spooner Summit, turn left on Highway 28. In Kings Beach, turn right on Highway 267. Turn left on Brockway Road. Hotel will be on the left.

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