

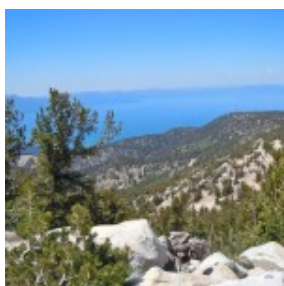
Heavenly Mountain proves it's not just a one-season resort

By Kathryn Reed

I kept feeling like I was going backward even though I wasn't. And I was a bit disoriented, not to mention I felt small.

Such are the hazards of hiking up Skyline Trail at Heavenly Mountain Resort in the summer. Going to the top of Sky Chair via foot instead of the lift means going in the opposite direction I normally ski the trail. I knew where I was (because I could see Lake Tahoe), but at the same time I felt like I didn't know where I was. And the signs everywhere – they are so tall when there aren't several feet of snow on the ground. I had to crane my neck to read them – making me feel super short.

Heavenly has opened more hiking trails that are easily accessed from the gondola in the village near Stateline.



Hiking at Heavenly provides stunning views of the Lake Tahoe Basin. Photos/Kathryn Reed

I never get tired of that ride.

If only the windows let in more air. It was a bit stifling last weekend. I understand all the precautions to prevent people from flicking a cigarette out so there isn't a repeat of 2002 when more than 600 acres burned because of a smoker on the gondola, but it was uncomfortable.

When I'm skiing I don't take the time to get out at the midway station. But on this leisurely Saturday it was great to see that 360-degree view of the Lake Tahoe Basin from 9,123 feet. Signs point to the various sites – Emerald Bay, Cave Rock, Mount Tallac.

It's like a kids' playground at the top – and not just little kids.

Christine and Daniel Rock barely had time to answer a couple questions before dashing off to take the conveyer belt to the top of the tubing hill. This is what the Bay Area resident wanted to do to celebrate her 53rd birthday.

Instead of snow, the hill looks more like artificial turf. A Heavenly employee said this is just the second hill like this in the world.

For Susy Corriea, she was enjoying sitting in the shade watching her 10-year-old son, Brayden, scamper up the climbing wall.

Plenty of people were parked in the Adirondack chairs in front of the Tamarack Lodge that opened last ski season. It allows the resort to have a year-round on-mountain dining facility.

Before we kickback in one of the chairs we take the Tamarack Lift (\$8).

While we knew we wanted to follow the map we had gotten in village that said we could hike to the top of Sky Express, for those who didn't think about it or are not familiar with ski

areas, they would be apt to follow the “ski” sign for Sky Express. That takes people to the “lift line” – not the top.

In other words, better signage for hikers is needed.

This 1.92-mile roundtrip is listed as “most difficult” by Heavenly because of its steepness. I’d say anyone who is used to this elevation and who is in good shape can make it without difficulty.

Of course, the end of the trail is at 10,040 feet. Bring water. The trail is exposed.

The nice thing about it in summer is it’s not crowded with people stopping at the gorgeous views of Lake Tahoe and the surrounding area. I’ll admit, though, I stopped more on that hike to gaze and take photos than I do in an entire ski season.

It’s always so weird to see a ski resort without snow – to know in three months I could be skiing above those rocks and logs; to know that dirt trail will be a wall of white.

More information about the Heavenly Gondola is online. Various ticket prices exist. And the activities at the top are individually priced.

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