

Creative hot drinks make cold winter days bearable

By Kathryn Reed

While spring is a week away based on the calendar, one can never really depend on that to know what the weather will be like in Lake Tahoe. That's also why it seems like hot drinks are something that can be enjoyed about 10 months out of the year here.

I spent the past few months with friends trying different hot libations in the basin. We know we just scratched the service, so please add your top choices as a comment.



Riva Grill
wins for best
glasses for
winter drinks.

Photo/LTN

We've learned that adding room temperature alcohol to the main hot liquid just cools the whole drink down. Bartenders need to have the coffee, cocoa, cider – whatever – hotter than it's normally served at straight so it is still a hot drink by the time customers start drinking.

From the Z Bar inside the Zephyr Lodge at Northstar came my favorite winter drink of the season because it didn't involve coffee or hot cocoa. African Winter is dark rum, hot African

tea, peach liqueur, lemon, and orange bitters. It was hot and refreshing at the same time. Cost – \$12.

Also at Northstar, this time from the bar by the ice rink, Sue and I liked the Snow Plow over the Dirty Snowman. For \$9, you get Baileys, Malibu, dark crème de cacao and hot chocolate. Careful, though, because it goes down fast.

Sue's favorite drink hailed from the Fresh Ketch in South Lake Tahoe. It's something bartender Sean whipped up for \$7.50. It had butterscotch schnapps, rum, and hot buttered mix.

I thought it was like drinking a butterscotch candy. Sue thought it had a vanilla taste. She tends to favor sweet drinks – and this was one of those.

At the Ketch I had the Ketch Toddy (\$10.50). This is Dewar's White Label, honey, cinnamon, star anise, ginger and fresh orange zest. I'm the one who can do scotch and whiskey. Sue made a face and handed it back to me.

Even though Sue is not a big fan of tequila (she pronounces it *to-kill-ya*), the Mood Swing she ordered at the Beacon on the South Shore was tasty. The \$8.50 drink has Cazadores Reposada, dark crème do cacao, Defrost Cinnamon Schnapps, hot chocolate and whipped cream.

The cinnamon schnapps puts it in the something "unique" and "let's have a second round" categories.

The Hot Bubba (\$9) sounded good, but I was wishing I had ordered the Mood Swing. Too much coffee in this one.

Then there are places where the bartender is of no use. We asked the guy at Zephyr Cove Lodge what fun hot drinks he could make. He paused, then said he could make an Irish coffee. We passed.

Five of us at Brook's Sports Bar at Edgewood were ready to do research one afternoon this month. The waitress had no fun hot

drinks to offer us. (We stuck with beer.)

While the two hot drinks on the menu at Pacific Crest in Truckee were passable, the ambiance at the bar is what would get us to go back. It's fun.

I would recommend the Bourbon Furnace (\$8) – Buffalo Trace Bourbon and hot cider. Sue took one sip and passed it to me. So much for sharing.

She liked the Almond Joy (\$8) – saying it was like drinking a chocolate bar. The sweetness is what had me passing it back to her. The hot cocoa drink has two kinds of rum and Amaretto.

One place we won't be ordering hot drinks from again is Stateline Brewery. The names are cute, the concoctions are unique and the price (\$6-\$8) reasonable. The execution, though, put this experience at the bottom of the list for me, Sue, Brenda and Roni.

As Brenda put it, "It seems like they are unprepared for people who order hot drinks."

The bartender didn't know how to make all the drinks and all came to the table without whipped cream. The server added the topping after the fact – which didn't work. Presentation is a big deal – especially with hot drinks.

It's mid-February and we are taking in the Unbuckle Apres Ski Party at the Tamarack Lodge at Heavenly. Half-price drinks are touted. We paid \$23 for two hot cocoas with Frangelico and Grand Marnier. *Ouch*. Another for the "not going to do that again" category.

However, later in the month we are back at Heavenly, this time at the Umbrella Bar that is now at Snow Beach. This time, two cocktails \$17.92 – plus, they are bigger and tastier. And Angela the bartender is much better at customer service.

She even warned us the drinks were hot. Which they were.

Sue had the Hot Sailor Cider, which has Sailor Jerry spiced rum and hot apple cider. My Hot Apple Pie (with whipped cream) was the same, except it has tuaca, too. We both liked mine a little bit better.

It was hard to decide which hot cocktail to order at Riva Grill. Original choices, flavor and value for the price would have us going back to this restaurant at the Ski Run Marina.

I had the Hot White Russian. It's very much like the cold version. It has Kahlua, Absolute vodka, steamy cream and a Mexican chocolate shake. The steamed milk is certainly something I had not had in a hot spiked drink before.

Sue had the Stabbin' Cabin – rum, Irish cream and amaretto. Something on the menu mentioned it would be hard to find the door after two. Sue agreed just after one.

Riva definitely serves its drinks in the best looking glasses. The handles make it so you don't burn yourself holding the drinks – which are served hot. Each drink was \$9.95.

Over at the West Bowl at Sierra-at-Tahoe I let Jason tell me what I should drink. It's his version of an Irish coffee, only hot chocolate is the main ingredient. The Jameson whiskey, Bailey's and whipped cream were delightful. With tax, the bill came to \$8.39.

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Note: On March 15 read about hot places for having a winter drink in Lake Tahoe.