

Sugar Bowl – laid back charm, rugged terrain

By Kathryn Reed

NORDEN – Old. It's what Sugar Bowl is all about. And, yet, it feels so incredibly modern.

Disney isn't just the name of a chairlift at this resort tucked off Interstate 80. It's the last name of one of the founders – as in Walt Disney. Near the top of that lift are remnants from California's first chairlift that was built in 1939.

Going into the Sugar Bowl Lodge black and white photos are everywhere you look. One even shows a woman decades ago as part of the ski patrol.



Workers start at day break to get Sugar Bowl ready.
Photos/Kathryn Reed

The lodge is a mix of rustic and contemporary. The upstairs rooms are not fancy, but they have what a skier needs – comfortable bed, hot shower and view of the mountain to get you going, and plenty of space to put the trappings of a winter getaway. Downstairs are the lockers for skis and boots.

It didn't matter that the wireless didn't extend upstairs.

Working in front of the roaring fire in a comfortable chair or on the couch made it feel less like work. This lounge area is only for hotel guests or homeowners.

The exclusivity of it makes us feel a bit like it's our living room – with a few friends over for the weekend. No TV made it even more relaxing. Games are being played, books being read, people sipping Mt. Vernon wines on Saturday night (throughout the season different vintners sponsor tastings), some people are having a meal.

The dining room is adjacent the lounge. And it's not typical ski resort fare. This is fine dining. We weren't super hungry, so one night Sue and I opted for appetizers as our meal. I had the Baked Polenta and Brussel Sprouts: Gratineed with Blue cheese and toasted pine nuts finished with white truffle oil (\$11) and a cup of the special mushroom soup (\$5). Both were outrageously good. Sue had the French Onion Soup: Flavored with Port wine, and fresh thyme with a French bread crouton and Gruyere cheese (\$9) and Pan Seared Diver Scallops: Garnished with Pancetta crumbles on a butternut squash mash with a beurre noisette, (\$12). Both were so rich and yummy that she didn't even look at the dessert menu.

On the other side of the lounge is the Belt Room Bar. I highly recommend the mixed green salad (\$9) and jalapeno fries (\$6) – best to share the fries. Sue barely spoke between bites of her cheeseburger (\$11.50).

It requires a gondola ride to get to the lodge. During the season it runs 24 hours a day to accommodate guests and residents. When the resort closes, access is through the Judah parking area.

Both routes are the main ways to access the mountain.

Sugar Bowl calls itself the only snowbound village in the United States. It is definitely ski-in, ski-out.

Sugar Bowl's future

The foundation has been poured for the Sugar Bowl Ski Academy that will house 70 athletes. It will be the only ski-in, ski-out academy on the West Coast. Some of those skiers and boarders have the Olympics as a goal.

With Daron Rahlves calling Sugar Bowl home and often seen on the slopes, they know this resort has what it takes to make an Olympian.

The academy building is part of the \$7 million in improvements the resort plans to make in the next few years.

Crows Peak is a new lift that will likely go in the ground this summer. This will give riders a bit more vertical in the Disney area.

A sport house is in the design phase. It will be a fitness and aquatic center for hotel guests, academy students and homeowners. It will include weights, sauna and a lap pool.

The Summit Chair near the top of Mt. Judah opened in 2009. This lift accesses the backcountry. With it the resort opened a backcountry center to take people into the remote terrain and teach them how to ride it safely – including avalanche rescue training.

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