

# Northstar – off the charts good



Near empty slopes at Northstar seem to flow onto the inversion covering Lake Tahoe. Photo/Kathryn Reed

**By Susan Wood**

TRUCKEE – *Pssst* – here’s the best-kept secret for those who have been living under a rock – midweek skiing is nothing like the weekend.

Midweek riding offers a world all its own for those either lucky enough to be retired or crazy enough to call in sick to work. Then, there are those who work odd hours or swing shifts and others who want to celebrate the slopes to themselves. The experience is surprisingly a mixed bag of motivations.

Wednesday at Northstar was no exception.

“It’s eclectic – all types. You can see everything from retirees to ski teams to locals to visitors wanting a different experience,” Northstar spokeswoman Marcie Bradley

told *Lake Tahoe News*. “(Midweek is) serene and quiet.”



A crew prepares the terrain park that is now open.  
Photo/Kathryn Reed

She's right. Only three boards and four sets of skis were resting in the racks by midday at the routinely-busy Zephyr Lodge.

Compulsive skiers and boarders wanting the assurance of technology to tell them what lift lines are uncrowded may check a feature on their Epic Mix pass that allows them to check the length of time to get on the slopes. Vail introduced the feature last year.

Eric Behrens of Healdsburg, who's been skiing at Northstar since he was 10, doesn't need to check. He knew what to expect midweek, that's why he was there.

The 41-year-old skier was celebrating his 10-year anniversary with his wife at Northstar. He came up midweek, and had a room at the Ritz-Carlton Lake Tahoe, which is tucked in about a

third of the way up the slopes.

“Nobody’s here. There’s no line,” Behrens said, while riding up the Comstock Express chairlift. He’s semi-retired, so his schedule is somewhat flexible.

One snowboarder from Redwood City didn’t care he was supposed to be at work. The 59-year-old, who plans to retire at 61, called in sick to his job in San Francisco to go skiing with no lines. He boasted of the bold decision.

Northstar has much to brag about. Besides its reputation for being family friendly, customer-service oriented, amenity-filled and professionally astute about what it’s doing, the Truckee ski resort has the operation down like a fine-tuned instrument.



Slow times at Zephyr Lodge. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Despite the bare ground at lake level, the big guns of snowmaking operate top to bottom skiing, with wide runs that can make you claustrophobic anywhere else.

The ski resort boasts 58 inches of snowfall even before Christmas. Since it's been quite cold, the snowmaking has been working around the clock on some days. And there's something to be said for that. Northstar has some of the **best snowmaking capacity** in the nation. With apologies to natural-snow snobs, it appears the man-made variety holds up better on warm days. Northstar is able to cover half its mountain with its chemical mix.

The runs off East Ridge on one side of the summit and West Ridge on the other are fully covered. Sketchy runs with obstacles like the black diamond trails of Rendezvous and Dutchman are well marked with warnings. The view off the ridges is outstanding, and the terrain is worry-free, and at midweek, it's like the wide-open road.

Skiers and boarders seeking a greater red-carpet experience may add on the Platinum Piste service, a trail combining the resort's signature grooming on a trail designed exclusively for them. Early birds may sign up for First Tracks, which opens its runs to them before the lifts turn for the masses.

The resort on Friday opened its Pinball terrain park under the Vista Express chairlift. This is one of nine lifts the resort is turning to serve 30 trails.

Northstar should start to see an uptick in people hitting the slopes for the holidays. If you're one of those who couldn't get away any sooner or later, there is an advantage to the exhilaration of coming out when the resort is bustling with activity.



No waiting in line during midweek skiing at Northstar.  
Photo/Kathryn Reed

**Events include:**

- Noel Nights, Dec. 22, features a winter wonderland with horse-drawn sleigh rides.
- Breakfast with Santa, is just that on Dec. 24.
- New Year's Eve Fire & Ice, Dec. 31, rings in 2018 with a fireworks show.
- Her Mountain Retreat, Jan. 6-7; Feb. 3-4, provides an all-women getaway on the slopes.
- Mountain Table Dinner, Jan. 12, Feb. 2, Feb. 16 and March 9, allows for a night dining excursion at the Zephyr Lodge.
- Spring It On, April 7-8, celebrates the warm-weather season at the resort with a favorite – the pond-skim event.
- Snowshoe tours for families are scheduled for Dec. 24, Jan. 1, Jan. 14, Feb. 18. Stargazers can take part on Dec. 21, 23, 27; Jan. 13; Feb. 17; March 10; April 14. Twilight enthusiasts may seize the event Dec. 16, 23, 30; Jan. 6, 20, 27; Feb. 3, 17, 24; March 3, 4.