Cool Off in Big Bear

By: Kathy Strong

Lakeside biking trails offer a great workout.

The nicest things about Big Bear this time of year are that it is dependably cooler than the desert below (about 78 degrees during the day and a snug 45 degrees at night), tranquil, low-key, and close to nature at every turn.The skiers are nowhere to be found, the skies are blue, and the lake is glistening. A leisurely drive from the valley floor takes you up to an elevation of 6,750 feet to the petite village of Big Bear City with quaint handicraft – from hiking to boating.

State Route 18 leads to the high mountain resorts of the Inland Empire and is aptly named Rim of the World Highway, twisting high above the valley floor with unparalleled vistas of all below. Connecting Highway 38 leads to the north shore, home to several fine Bed and Breakfast inns, a few lakefront bistros and the Big Bear Discovery Center. The center is a state-of-the-art visitor center and education facility which houses special nature exhibits and interesting programs. Special summer happenings include nature walks, canoe tours and a Gold Mountain Mining Adventure tour that transports visitors to the nearby Gold Mountain Mine.

Summer recreation gets a literal “lift” when Snow Summit converts its East Mountain Express chairlift into the Scenic Sky Chair. The ride up and down on the chair offers breathtaking views of Big Bear Lake and the surrounding San Bernardino National Forest, as well as providing access to some amazing hiking trails. The 15 minute trip transports cross-country mountain bikers, hikers and sightseers to the summit elevation at 8,200 feet. Located here is the View Haus, Big Bear’s most scenic restaurant.Visitors can grab lunch, a snack or beverage while taking in the beauty of San Gorgonio, Southern California’s highest mountain peak.

The Inn at Fawnskin

Although Big Bear can be a day trip, it is more relaxing to spend a night.The greatest choices, and by the far the most unique, are the area’s Bed and Breakfast offerings.The establishments almost all include delectable homemade breakfasts and afternoon snacks or happy hours.The settings are mostly snug log cabin renditions set within tall forested areas, with all the comforts of a luxury hotel — from soothing Jacuzzi® tubs to down comforters. After a day of hiking, exploring or shopping, it is almost like going home.A favorite inn located on the quiet north shore is The Inn at Fawnskin with four unique suites,TV/VCR/DVD and CD player, some Jacuzzi tubs and gas log fireplaces.

If you stay in one of the inns, you may want to skip lunch and go out for a special dinner. The area gets raves for their newest dining spot, The Mandoline Bistro, at 40701 Village Drive. Mandoline’s serves both lunch and dinner, and has a Sushi Bar and a Loft Bar, which features jazz musicians each Friday and Saturday evening.

How to Get There: Take the I-10 west; merge onto the CA-30 west toward Highland and the CA-330. Merge onto the CA-330 north toward mountain resorts. CA-330 becomes CA-18 which is the “Rim of the World Highway.” Turn right on CA-18 which is Big Bear Boulevard. The 85-mile trip takes about one and one-half to two hours. Where to Stay: The Inn at Fawnskin P.O. Box 378, 880 Canyon Road Fawnskin (north shore), CA, 92333 909-866-3200 or 888-329-6754 www.fawnskininn.com Northwoods Resort and Conference Center 40650 Village Drive Big Bear Lake, CA, 92315 800-866-3121 www.northwoodsresort.com Visitor Information: Big Bear Lake Resort Association 800-424-4232 www.bigbear.com Big Bear Chamber of Commerce 909-866-4607 www.bigbearchamber.com Big Bear Discovery Center 909-866-3437

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