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Cover story

## **Escape to Big Bear: San Diego's Mountain Get-Away**

by Ondine Brooks Kuraoka

Just three hours north of San Diego, Big Bear Mountain offers year-round fun. Summers at Big Bear are gorgeous, and provide outdoor activities for the whole family.

Though Big Bear gets its share of hot days, the average daytime temperature in summer is about 80 degrees, with nights often dropping to a lovely 45 degrees. When you're feeling like a slug in the humid summer heat of San Diego, head for the dry, cooler climate of the San Bernardino Mountains for an easy weekend getaway.

### **A Weekend of Discovery**

Plan to visit the Discovery Center ([www.bigbeardiscoverycenter.com](http://www.bigbeardiscoverycenter.com)) during your stay. In partnership with the U.S. Forest Service, the non-profit San Bernardino National Forest Association manages the center, which offers tours, educational programs, forest service permits, camping information, and maps. The Center's store, Adventure Outpost, is a trove of books, toys, games and unique gifts. Check out the Time Tree, which was living before the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth Rock.

Take the Discovery Center's Canoe Cruise and catch a glimpse of great blue herons, beavers and ducklings. Or do some exploring with the crew of the "Mountain Mining Adventure" or the "Holcomb Valley Gold Rush Adventure" and learn about Southern California's largest gold rush.

For kids who like a good hike and a dizzying view, huff on up to the Butler Peak Fire Lookout, with or without a tour. Families can also pan for gold on Saturdays and enjoy outside evening concerts the first Friday of the month for a nominal fee. Hour-long nature walks on the weekend are free, as are bird walks, held on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Saturday of the month. Catch the last wildflower walk of the season, also free, on July 24<sup>th</sup>. Don't miss the Campfire Program in the amphitheater on Fridays and Saturdays from 8 to 9 p.m. Hot chocolate and popcorn under the stars!

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### **Slide Your Cares Away**

For memorable excitement, the Alpine Slide is sure to be a hit with kids. There are waterslides, go-carts and miniature golf, too. Children ages 2 to 6 are free with adult admission. 909-866-4626. [www.alpineslidebigbear.com](http://www.alpineslidebigbear.com). Bear Mountain Golf Course also offers miniature golf. [www.bigbearinfo.com/golf.html](http://www.bigbearinfo.com/golf.html). 909-585-8002.

### **Glide Up, Ride Down**

Biking trails for all skill levels can be found at Big Bear. For a gentle outing, enjoy Big Bear Lake's views along the North Shore Path or the Alpine Pedal Path. For an intermediate ride, glide high above the treetops in the Snow Summit Scenic Sky Chair and rollercoaster down along the Grandview Loop bike trail. Find lots of information on bike paths at [www.bigbearinfo.com](http://www.bigbearinfo.com); go to "Recreation."

### **Mountain-top Feasts**

Or just take it easy and indulge in lunch with a glorious view after your Sky Chair ride. Choices include the Summit Inn, at the base of the mountain, Bear Bottom Lodge, located in the base area at Chair 2, The Summit Haus, at the top of Chair 2, or The View Haus, at the summit on Chair 1, which offers a more upscale menu than the others.

### **23 Miles of Shoreline**

Families can have a relaxing afternoon swimming or renting a paddle or pontoon boat on Big Bear Lake, which is surrounded by pine and oak forests. For the more adventurous, sailboats, powerboats and jet skis are also available. There are many marinas along the lake's 23 miles of shoreline. The lake is 8 miles long and one mile across at its widest point. Surprise the kids and take the Pirate Ship/Time Bandit Lake Tour at Holloway's Marina, 909-878-4040. [www.800bigbear.com/timebandit.html](http://www.800bigbear.com/timebandit.html)

### **Trout, Bass, and Catfish!**

Catch some trout, bass or catfish! Get your fishing licenses and supplies from any of the marinas or sporting goods stores such as Skyline Ski & Sports, 909-866-3500.

Or head over to Alpine Trout Lakes, "Where Kids Catch Fish!" For a fee of \$7 the whole family can fish, no license required and no limit. For a small charge you can have your trout cleaned. They can even freeze and hold your trout until you leave Big Bear at no charge. Or cook and eat your trout on the premises. 909-866-4532.

### **Camping, too!**

Camping information can be obtained from the U.S. Forest Service, 877-444-6777.

### **Lots to Do For Everyone**

The United States Adaptive Recreation Center offers water sports and camping activities for adults and children with disabilities. 909-584-0269. [www.usarc.org](http://www.usarc.org).

### **Study the Sun**

The Big Bear Solar Observatory is one of only six solar observatories in the world. Big Bear is an ideal location for solar study because it has over 300 sunny days a year. Open Saturdays from 4-6 p.m. [www.bbso.njit.edu](http://www.bbso.njit.edu).

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### **Way Back When**

The Big Bear Historical Museum is open weekends also, featuring tools used by Native Americans, early settlers, cattle ranchers and miners. Step back in time when you see an authentic, furnished log cabin from 1875. 909-585-8100. [www.bigbearhistory.org](http://www.bigbearhistory.org).

### **Two Zoos and Stables, Too!**

The Moonridge Animal Park, 43285 Goldmine Drive, Big Bear City. This mountain zoo has adopted native bears, wolves, mountain lions, bison and bald eagles. 909-584-1299. [www.moonridgezoo.org](http://www.moonridgezoo.org).

Baldwin Lake Stables and Petting Zoo, East Shay Rd., Big Bear City. Petting zoo with approximately 75 animals: llamas, variety of goats, sheep, potbelly pigs, fallow deer, chickens, ducks, rabbits, peafowl, chinchilla, miniature horse, hamsters, guinea pigs and geese. Also, horses and ponies. 909-585-0284. [www.baldwinlakestables.com](http://www.baldwinlakestables.com)

### **Music on the Mountain**

The Community Arts Theater Society (CATS) presents “Music Man” this summer. Family-oriented entertainment. [www.bigbeartheater.org](http://www.bigbeartheater.org).

### **Pillows, Pets and a Playground**

Pine Knot Guest Ranch is a 2 1/2 acre, pet friendly facility within walking distance of the Village, and hiking trails. Children can enjoy feeding carrots to the bunnies and llamas in the barn. 800-866-3446. [www.pineknotguestranch.com](http://www.pineknotguestranch.com).

The Stage Coach Lodge is 1/2 mile from the marina and the Village, close to horseback riding, and has a playground and a game room. 800-756-9871. [www.stagecoachlodge.com](http://www.stagecoachlodge.com)

### **Your Cubs Will Love The Munching Bear**

Good eats abound at Big Bear, but come to the Munching Bear Family restaurant and you won't be disappointed. Built in the 50's, the owner, Don Sullmer, cooks the food himself. His wife is from Hawaii and there are several Hawaiian-style meals, as well as a selection of burgers, steak, chicken and pasta dishes, and a salad bar. Prime Rib and Seafood are the House Specialties. Start your meal with the Honey Chili Prawns or Garlic & Parmesan Cheese Fries. There is also a Kids Menu! 909-866-7556.

### **Grab a Cup and Reconnect**

Internet Access:

Brewed Awakening Coffee Co., Big Bear City. 909-584-8910.

Pine Nut Coffee House, Big Bear Lake. 909-866-3537.

Whet your appetite for a summertime foray to the San Bernardino Mountains by checking out [www.BigBear.com](http://www.BigBear.com), the official web site for the Big Bear Lake Resort Association. The association's Visitor Center is located at 630 Bartlett Road in the Village. The center offers information on lodging, restaurants, and recreation, as well as street maps, hiking and biking maps.

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