



MAMMOTH mountain highs

— BY CRAIG TANSLEY —

It is the closest major North American ski resort area to Australia, offers year-round sunshine and plentiful snow, and comes with abundant après trimmings. Mammoth Lakes, it's your time to shine.

While Australian skiers and boarders have spent the past decade trampling down the doors to North American ski resort meccas Whistler, Aspen and Vail, the destination with the biggest name of all has remained largely off the radar.

But that's all about to change.

Mammoth Mountain, the closest major North American ski resort to Australia, is just a

70-minute flight from Los Angeles International Airport followed by a 15-minute shuttle ride to the gondola – which is about four hours less than what it takes to get to Vail or Whistler. And as its name suggests, Mammoth Mountain is massive – there are more than 1,400 hectares of world-class ski terrain at your disposal, with California's highest lift-serviced peak and nearly a kilometre of vertical descent. Mammoth also

has one of the longest ski seasons in North America, offering skiing and boarding from November to June – some years have seen the season extend from October through August. Perhaps Mammoth Mountain’s greatest asset, however, is that all this snow comes bathed in a Californian glow; the mountain experiences some 300 days of sunshine in an average year, although more than 10 metres of fresh snow still manages to fall in a typical season.

Mammoth Mountain looks good, too, with its Californian log cabins and stylish mountain village. Major refurbishments throughout the 1990s and 2000s by the same company who created Whistler has made Mammoth Mountain a destination with European-style pizzazz – think, cobblestone streets and outdoor fireplaces on a pedestrian mall where skiers lounge drinking cocktails after a day on the slopes. And given its placement on the edge of a caldera with geologically active hot springs, you’ll also find plenty of public pools for an après-ski soak.

Mammoth even has movie stars; as LA’s favoured ski destination, the mountain attracts Hollywood’s elite, and many stars own homes here.

Despite its glittering future, Mammoth comes from humble beginnings. It all began 60 years ago when its first owner hooked up a rope to a Ford Model-A truck engine and towed a bunch of skiers up the mountain. It kept its working-class roots until the 1980s. But since then, Mammoth Mountain has fast become one of North America’s highest-regarded ski resorts. Read on to learn more about this slice of American ski paradise.

THE SNOW

Mammoth Mountain is one of the world’s best destinations for skiers and snowboarders of all abilities. With such a breadth of terrain, there are very few crowds at lift lines and skiers and boarders have plenty of space to get creative. The fact that Mammoth’s main market is weekend skiers from southern California means that weekday visitors can practically be guaranteed the mountain largely to themselves.

There are 28 chairlifts and gondolas taking skiers across to 150 ski trails. And then there are the off-piste runs, which offer intermediates to experts the best skiing in California. There are runs on Mammoth Mountain that descend nearly five kilometres through cut pine forest. And for snowboarders there are a staggering nine terrain parks occupying an area of 40 hectares and catering to all levels of experience. There are also three half-pipes, if you’re game, including the Super-Pipe – the largest of its kind in the world.

Cross-country fans will be happy to hear that there are also 31 kilometres of trails along Mammoth’s tree-lined Lakes Basin, not to mention snowshoeing trails plus snowmobiling and snow-cat tours to take you high into the Sierra Nevada Mountains.

THE ENTERTAINMENT

There is plenty to do both on Mammoth and in its surrounds. Arguably the best way to spend an afternoon off the slopes is on a lounge on one of the many sundecks that mountain restaurants and bars love so much. Head to The Mill for signature pulled-pork sandwiches, deck chairs and margaritas.

While Mammoth’s blue-collar roots are not forgotten at watering holes such as the Clocktower Cellar Pub and the Lakanuki – the world’s only mountain tiki bar – there’s also a good selection of intimate wine bars on offer. In a similar vein, Dry Creek Bar in the Mammoth Mountain Inn comes with chandeliers decorating the ceiling and floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking the Super Half-Pipe. You can also take luxury snow cats out across the Sierra backcountry to atmospheric snow lodges for meals. But perhaps the best option in Mammoth Mountain is a dinner at the Lakefront Restaurant at the 90-year-old, heritage-listed Tamarack Lodge.

There are numerous dining and entertainment options on the mountain and in Mammoth’s village, but that’s only the

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PEAK PERFORMANCE

Clockwise from above: Mammoth Mountain is part of California’s East Sierra Mountains; the village firepit at Mammoth Mountain; there are nine terrain parks at Mammoth Mountain to test your mettle; Mammoth Mountain offers more than just thrills for skiers and snowboarders.

Opposite page: There are three half-pipes at Mammoth Mountain for daredevils.

Opening spread: Experts seeking steep and deep terrain will find it at Mammoth Mountain.

start of it; Mammoth Mountain is connected to the town of Mammoth Lakes with a population of 8,000 that's home to blocks of restaurants offering food from all over the world, numerous shopping options, cinemas, an arts centre, galleries, an ice rink and a theatre with weekly performances.

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THE ACCOMMODATION

The beauty of Mammoth Mountain is the range of accommodation options offered here. Places like the Mammoth Mountain Inn offer some of the cheapest ski-in, ski-out accommodation in North America, but there's also enough five-star luxury options to keep rock stars like Mammoth regular Gwen Stefani happy.

There is accommodation on the mountain itself, or you can stay in the ski-in, ski-out luxury of The Village Lodge, metres away from the best dining and entertainment options on Mammoth Mountain. At Tamarack Lodge, a snow cat transports you from the rustic lodge to your historic one-, two- or three-bedroom cabin restored to look exactly as it did when it was built in 1924.

Visitors can also rent out exclusive private homes with alfresco jacuzzis and floor-to-ceiling windows, or check in to the member-owned Tallus Club, where you'll have almost 500 square metres of living space and unobstructed views to the mountain summit. •

Photographs courtesy of Mammoth Mountain.

INTO THE WHITE

Clockwise from top: With more than 10 metres of snow a season, Mammoth Mountain offers some of North America's best powder snow; the village at Mammoth Mountain was designed by the same company that created Whistler's village.



travel facts

GETTING THERE

Qantas, United Airlines, Delta Air Lines and Virgin Australia fly from Australia to Los Angeles

- Delta Air Lines. delta.com

- Qantas. 131-313; qantas.com

- United Airlines. 131-777; unitedairlines.com.au

- Virgin Australia. 136-789; virginaustralia.com

Alaskan Airlines flies from LA to Mammoth-Yosemite Airport. alaskanairlines.com.au

GETTING AROUND

Skimax Holidays can help you organise your next trip to Mammoth Lakes. 1300-136-997; skimax.com.au

WHEN TO GO

The Mammoth Mountain ski season generally lasts from November through June.

WHERE TO STAY

- Tallus Club. mammothmountain.com

- Tamarack Lodge. tamaracklodge.com

- The Village Lodge. thevillagelodgemammoth.com

FURTHER INFORMATION

For information on skiing and snowboarding options, including lessons, equipment hire, lift tickets and more, contact Mammoth Lakes Tourism: visitmammoth.com, or Mammoth Mountain: mammothmountain.com

SKI MAMMOTH MOUNTAIN with Skimax



► **Mammoth Mountain Inn**
from **\$870*** pp twin share

**BONUS! STAY 7, PAY 6
+ COMPLIMENTARY
AIRPORT TRANSFERS^**

Includes:

- 7 nights twin share in Standard Hotel Room at Mammoth Mountain Inn
- 6 day Ski Pass

► **The Village Lodge**
from **\$1299*** pp quad share

**BONUS! STAY 7, PAY 6
+ COMPLIMENTARY
AIRPORT TRANSFERS^**

Includes:

- 7 nights quad share in Two Bedroom Apartment at The Village Lodge
- 6 day Ski Pass

► **The Westin Monache Resort**
from **\$1475*** pp twin share

**BONUS! STAY THE 8TH NIGHT
FOR FREE + COMPLIMENTARY
AIRPORT TRANSFERS^**

Includes:

- 7 nights twin share in Studio Room at Mammoth Mountain Inn
- 6 day Ski Pass

Call **SKIMAX** 1300 136 997 email skimax@skimax.com.au visit skimax.com.au or see your local travel agent



*Conditions apply. Surcharges may apply during peak periods and school holidays. Valid for travel 5 January – 13 February 2014. Airport transfers are from Mammoth lakes airport to Mammoth Mountain. 8th night free promotion at The Westin Monache Resort is subject to availability, resort fees will apply. Prices are subject to availability and may change at any time due to currency fluctuations. A credit card fee of minimum 1.5% will apply. Airfares are not included. For full terms and conditions contact Skimax or visit www.skimax.com.au. Lic No. 2TA4787. Photo courtesy of Mammoth Mountain.

