

FEATURES

Fall for Lake Tahoe's secret season: Autumn



Photo shows Eagle Lake, a small alpine lake above Lake Tahoe near Tahoe City.



Photo shows the sun rise over South Lake Tahoe near Tahoe City.



Jessica Brackett, of South Tahoe Standup Paddle, carries a paddle board along the shore of Lake Tahoe.



Lilyana Allen, of Guam, uses a telescope to view Lake Tahoe from an observation platform at the Heavenly Mountain Resort during a family visit to South Lake Tahoe.



Boats ride at anchor in South Lake Tahoe as the morning sun turns the hills around the lake pink near Tahoe City.



A pair of paddle boarders ply the waters of Lake Tahoe near Tahoe City.

Fringed by snow or gleaming cobalt blue under sunny skies, Lake Tahoe is a favorite in summer and winter. But there's a third side to Tahoe: fall.

As crowds thin out, the region seems to take a breath as it prepares for the seasonal switchover from camping and sailing to ski runs and cozy chalet evenings. Trails are roomier, rates cheaper and the lake waters are beautiful but bracing. All this and leaf-peeping, too.

Here are some suggestions:

The basics

Lake Tahoe is about 22 miles long (35 km) and 12 miles wide (19 km) at its widest point and straddles the California-Nevada state line. You can drive all the way around the lake most of the year although part of California Highway 89 along Emerald Bay Road may be closed in winter. Very broadly, the lake is divided up into North Lake Tahoe, reachable by Interstate 80, and South Lake Tahoe (the name of a city as well as an area), reachable by Highway 50. Tahoe City is partway down the lake on the west (California) side.

The east (Nevada) side of the lake is generally less developed, except for casinos in the north and south corners. On the southwest border, the city of South Lake Tahoe, California, abuts Stateline, Nevada, which is home to a number of casinos. To the north, casinos can be found in Incline Village and Crystal Bay, Nevada.

Lodging ranges from mid-century style motels to rentals-by-owner to upscale hotels such as the Ritz-Carlton, part of the Northstar California Resort near Truckee, and the new Lodge at Edgewood Tahoe in Stateline. Temperatures usually stay mild through September and even into October, although expect cooler temperatures as winter nears. Resorts and outdoor outfitters shut down summer activities as the weather turns.

Leaf peep

Lake Tahoe is surrounded by pines so it's mostly green. But there are aspen groves that turn russet and gold in the fall. Most trails sport some fall color come mid-September, including the Eagle Lake trail. Another recommended spot is Page Meadow, near Tahoe City, which has a number of trails. To get there, drive 2 miles (3.2 km) south of Tahoe City on Highway 89, turn on Pineland Drive, and then turn on Forest Service Road 15N60 or 16N48. At the north end, a good place to try is the Tunnel Creek trail in Incline Village.

On the calendar

Two events celebrate food and wine this fall. On the northern side, the Lake Tahoe Autumn Food and Wine Festival takes place in Northstar, Sept 8-10, with more than 20 events including dinners, wine tastings, outdoor activities and cooking classes. Ticket prices vary; full weekend, \$270. On Sept 16, Sample the Sierra in South Lake Tahoe pairs offerings from more than 20 restaurants. Locally made art, jewelry and crafts will also be featured at the festival marketplace; Bijou Community Park, 1201 Al Tahoe Blvd, \$40.

Three Oktoberfests are planned:

In the north, the Village at Squaw Valley, Sept 23, \$20 entry. Tahoe City's Annual Oktoberfest, Sept 30, live music, local vendors, no admission fee.

In the south, Camp Richardson Resort, Oktoberfest, Oct 7-8, pumpkin patch, yodeling contests, no admission fee.

Also Oct 7-8, Taylor Creek Visitor Center, north of South Lake Tahoe on Highway 89, marks the annual migration of Kokanee salmon with a family event featuring treasure hunts, crafts and more.



Photo shows Eagle Lake, a small alpine lake above Lake Tahoe.

Hike/bike

Along the west shore of Lake Tahoe, the short hike up to Eagle Falls or the longer trek to Eagle Lake - about a mile (1.6 km), moderately steep - is always popular. Visiting in fall (as well as going earlier or later in the day) increases your chances of getting a parking spot in the small lot. To get there take Highway 89 north about 8 miles (13 km) from South Lake Tahoe and look for parking (\$5) on the left.

Mountain biking is popular whenever conditions permit, but it's especially relished in the fall, when crisp weather and empty trails make for good riding. Outfitters renting in the fall, weather depending, include Tahoe Adventure Company in Tahoe Vista, at the northern end of the lake (530-913-9212), and Flume Trail Mountain Bikes in Incline Village (775-298-2501). To take advantage of chair lift assist, the Northstar California Bike Park is open until approximately Oct 1. Downhill trails and lessons are available. In the south, the family friendly, paved, Camp Richardson Bike Path passes several beaches. A convenient starting point is Anderson's Bike Rentals, 645 Emerald Bay Rd. (877-720-2121).

Sun/swim

The Tahoe shoreline includes scores of tiny pocket beaches as well as publicly accessible stretches of sand. King's Beach at the north end of the lake is large, sandy and set in the small town of the same name. Parking \$5 during off-peak season. On the south shore, Baldwin Beach is quiet, excellent for picnicking and reachable via the Camp Richardson bike path. Parking \$8. Operated through mid-October. — AP

Some things to know about music lessons for children

Encourage your child to learn a new instrument

Andolina Collado didn't know where to start when her young daughter asked for violin lessons. An immigrant from the Dominican Republic who works as a home health aide, she asked everyone she saw carrying an instrument in her Manhattan neighborhood if they knew of affordable lessons. Finally, one man pointed her to a church where Whin Music Project offers sliding scale tuition based on income.

Her daughter Army thrived in violin and soon wanted to learn piano. Whin teachers pointed her to the MusicLink Foundation, which pairs motivated students from low-income families around the country with music teachers willing to give lessons at a discount. At age eight, Army wrote to MusicLink to ask if somebody who spoke Spanish could contact her mother. Julie Wegener, New York City coordinator for MusicLink, was so moved she decided on the spot to teach Army herself. Collado isn't the only parent who has watched instrument-toting strangers and wondered how to enter that world.

Private lessons are beyond the reach of many families and even music programs at public schools can come at a price. Students in elementary, middle and high school can expect to pay at least \$300 in instrument rental or related

costs, according to the "Backpack Index," an annual study of the cost of school supplies and fees conducted by Huntington Bank and the organization Communities in Schools. Even for families with means, there are tricky questions. Who wants to invest several hundred dollars in a guitar that might end up in the closet? But then how do you know if you have a Mozart in the family? Before plunging into music lessons, it helps to explore the landscape.

Have realistic expectations

It's extremely unlikely your child is the next Yo-Yo Ma, but that's no reason not to put him in lessons. Your child's first piano class could be the first step to a scholarship at Juilliard or the start of a lifelong hobby. Ask yourself if you're ok with either possibility because chances are the going will get tough after the novelty wears off.

Go in for the long-haul. Anthony Mazzochi, associate director of the John J Cali School of Music at Montclair State University, suggests giving it a go for two years or so before contemplating quitting. He suggests prioritizing daily practice like math homework. With the big picture in mind, a few struggles over practice won't seem like signs your investment is going down the drain.

Involve your child in the decision

It helps if you don't just drop an unsuspecting 6-year-old in piano lessons. Let your child explore different instruments first. Try the library or local park for free concerts and sing-a-longs. Mazzochi, who runs the website www.music-parentsguide.com, suggests watching YouTube videos of master performances. He advises searching for music stores that offer "petting sessions" for children to hold and try out instruments.

Take the time to find a good teacher

A good place to start is the Music Teacher National Association, which has a "Find-A-Teacher" search function and tips on what to look for, says Sue Wege, director of coordinators for MusicLink. Try to get a trial lesson and interview. The MTNA site offers a list of questions to ask, including whether the teacher offers performance opportunities that can be important for motivating children. Look for teachers who are plugged into the music scene and provide fun opportunities for children. In addition to recitals at her studio, Wegener takes her students to play pianos that the group "Sing for Hope" places outdoors throughout New York City in June. She sent Army's name to Piano Explorer Magazine, which prints the names of kids who achieve more than 100 days of practice. Army long surpassed that goal and is now close to 600. In February, she performed at the inauguration of New York State Sen. Marisol Alcantara.

Rent or buy, used or new?

There are pitfalls when it comes buying used or cheap instruments. A good rule of thumb is to consult with your child's music teacher before turning to Craig's List. George Shelby, a Los Angeles musician who tours with Phil Collins and created the Yamaha-sponsored website www.musicalinstrumentchoices.com, recommends sticking with reputable music stores for rentals and used instruments. While that might be pricier than going online, the instrument will come with a quality guarantee.

It is possible to find quality instruments on sites like eBay but Shelby urges buyers to bring a technician to check it out. Many dealers also offer rent-to-buy options. Let your child know he gets to keep the instrument if he practices every day.



Julie Wegener, center, a music teacher with the MusicLink Foundation, her student Army Paulino Collado, left, and Army's mom, Andolina Collado, as they finish a music session.

Research, reach out, speak up

On the fence about private lessons? There's no rush. Find out how good your school's program is. Ask how often classes meet. Check out The National Association of Music Merchant's website for a list of school districts with the best music programs. It might be enough to supplement that program with lessons every other week. Group lessons are also a more affordable option, or seeking a graduate student who teaches at a discount.

Plan for the costs of a school music program

Because of fees, music is one of the three areas - along with sports and field trips - where low-income students get left out, according to Dale Erquiaga, president and CEO of Communities in Schools. He urges families to ask school officials about fee waivers or seek out a community coordinator for help. Reach out to parents of older children about hand-me-down instruments, unexpected costs and money-saving tips. "Some people are embarrassed to ask," said Collado. "I'm not embarrassed." — AP



Army Paulino Collado plays the piano as her music teacher, Julie Wegener, background left, and mom, Andolina Collado, listen, in New York. — AP photos



Julie Wegener, left, New York City coordinator for MusicLink, her student Army Paulino Collado, right, and Army's mom, Andolina Collado, confer after Army's music lesson, in New York.