



Bounteous Bend

Sunshine and snow, rivers and forests, climbing, biking and mountaineering—what's not to like about **Oregon's** playground?

by MARK R. JOHNSON

WHEN RESIDENTS OF THIS REMOTE OREGON TOWN TRAVEL and mention where we're from, we often get blank stares. That's just the way we like it. The fewer people who know about this little outdoor Xanadu, the smaller the crowds in our year-round pedaling, paddling, hiking, skiing and climbing playground. Geography, and consequently climate, has blessed Bend. Resting roughly in the center of Oregon on the eastern, and drier, side of the

Cascade Range, Bend enjoys about 250 sunny days a year. There's high desert to the east; the snow-capped Cascades to the west; fast-flowing rivers and placid lakes; and millions of acres of forest, wilderness and parkland all around. Through much of the 1800s, the place named "Farewell Bend" was little more than a ford on the Deschutes River that westward-bound pioneers navigated toward with the help of Pilot Butte, which today looms over town. Not everyone said farewell, though, and soon Bend became a timber town with several of the world's largest

SEAN ARABIA/ARABIA IMAGERY (2)

Whether riding the Fall Creek Trail or fishing Little Lava Lake, you're rarely out from under Mount Bachelor's eye when you're in Bend.

pine sawmills. But since the demise of the mills in the 1980s, Bend has reinvented itself as a place where people are able to work and play from the same address.

Bend's 50,000 or so inhabitants include llama ranchers and stockbrokers, smoke jumpers and Web-site designers. Though a recent influx of residents has brought strip malls and

sarled traffic, the pioneer character of the place remains.

An extended summer weekend is a terrific way to sample the best of the region. The sight of fresh mud on a pair of knobbies and snow melting off skis—on the same roof rack—exemplifies the advantage of prime proximity.

DAY ONE: WET YOUR WHISTLE

Today's your water day. Boaters and anglers will find that the Bend area—which encompasses six rivers and 150 lakes—is an aqueous paradise. Stoke your fire with the savory eggs Benedict at the Victorian Café (541-382-6411) or carbo load with a bagel sandwich at Big-O-Bagels (541-383-2446).

Whitewater kayakers find the play spot at downtown's First Street Rapids a great introduction to the Deschutes. Once you've got your pins under you, head upriver to Big Eddy, a three-mile run of Class III and IV rapids between Aspen Day Use Area and Lava Island Falls that's accessible from the Cascade Lakes Highway via Forest Service Road 41. Rafters ride much of this section; for guided trips, contact Sun Country Tours (800-770-2161) or the Inn of the Sev-

enth Mountain (800-452-6810). On the Metolius River, some 40 miles northwest, a 17-mile ribbon of kayakable Class IIs and IIIs stretches from Lower Bridge Campground to Lake Billy Chinook.

The canoeing around Bend is good too. Enthusiasts can paddle 18 placid miles of the Deschutes from Big River Campground to just above Benham Falls or enjoy Sparks Lake, 600 acres of glassy water reflecting the mountains. The Bend Outdoor Center (541-389-7191) and the Powder House (541-389-6234) both rent kayaks and canoes.

Anglers will want to try their luck on Little Lava Lake, a source of the Deschutes and home to beautiful rainbows. Hosmer Lake is open for fly-fishing only—if you're casting for brook trout or stocked Atlantic salmon, it's the place to go. The Numb-Butt Fly Company (888-248-8309) sells gear and offers guided float trips.

All that water, oddly enough, will help you develop a powerful thirst and probably an appetite. Appease both with a roasted-garlic hamburger and a pint of the excellent stout at the Deschutes Brewery & Public House (541-382-9242)—hey, they don't call this place Bend for nothing. If you feel like picnicking in downtown's Drake Park, get Baja Norte's (541-385-0611) killer burrito to go.

DAY TWO: TIME TO GET ROLLING

Work that beer off today by taking advantage of the fabulous road and mountain biking around Bend. But first prepare for your ride with a cruise over to Café Paradiso (541-385-5931) for coffee and a muffin or to the Original Pancake House (541-317-0380) for a stack of syrup-drenched hotcakes.

The Deschutes River Trail is a quintessential Bend mountain bike ride, a moderately challenging track that undulates for 15 miles along the banks of the river before ending at Benham Falls. Park at Meadow Camp, six miles from town off the Cascade Lakes Highway.

Phil's Loop (Route 24.5), an off-road classic that takes riders into hill country, starts just 2.5 miles from town. A challenging 16-mile mixture of single-track paths and dirt roads, it cuts through tower-

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ing groves of ponderosa pines. To find the trailhead, go west out of town on Skyliner Road, turn left on the first paved road you come to, then right on the first dirt road.

Up for more of a challenge? Head 23 miles south of town to Newberry National Volcanic Monument's Crater Rim Trail, a 21-mile loop around the caldera of an active volcano. The trail offers great vistas, including one of a massive obsidian flow and Paulina and East lakes. Come prepared: Lava rock feasts on tires and tubes. For more bike trails around Bend, log on to www.fs.fed.us/r6/deschutes and click on "recreation."

For a guided trip, check out Oregon Bike Adventures (877-590-2453) for its High

Cascade Lakes tour or High Cascade Descent (800-296-0562) for the "Paulina Plunge," which drops 2,500 feet over a six-mile descent.

Road bikers will hear a lot about the epic 87-mile Cascade Lakes Highway loop. It's a good ride, but it's crowded. Consider instead the 22-mile McKenzie Pass Highway, west of the town of Sisters, a pioneer wagon route (though blessedly too curvy for contemporary trailers) through the Cascades. For bike rentals, equipment and maps, check with Hutch's (541-382-7618) or Sunnyside Sports (541-382-8018).

Come mealtime, stroll downtown to Toomie's (541-388-5590) for a dish of pad thai or grab a few slices of New York-style pie at Pizza Mondo (541-330-9093).

DAY THREE: HOOF IT

More than three million acres of forest surround Bend, including three national forests and six wilderness areas—perhaps the reason you see more hiking boots than shoes in town. Start off on the right foot with an omelet at the quirky West Side Bakery and Café (541-382-3426) or sample the scrumptious baked goods at DiLusso's (541-383-8155).

You'll need a Northwest Forest Pass to park at trailheads (\$5 per day, \$30 per year, available at any outdoor shop), and it's worth the investment. Tumalo Falls, a spectacular 97-foot waterfall, sits at the far end of one of the area's most scenic valleys. It marks the starting point for several great hiking paths, including the 3.5-mile North Fork Trail, which passes tumbling rapids and fields of wildflowers on its way to the turnaround at Happy Valley. The falls are 12 miles west of Bend, on Skyliner Road.

For a classic day hike, take the Cascade Lakes Highway to the Green Lakes Trailhead in Three Sisters Wilderness. An 11.5-mile loop follows the Fall Creek Trail through giant hemlocks and firs, tops out above treeline beneath the craggy towers of volcanic Broken Top and takes you to the spectacular Green Lakes basin before returning along the Soda Creek Trail.

If you've got a mountain climb in mind, 10,358-foot South Sister is a strenuous though nontechnical hike; starting at the Devil's Lake Trailhead, it's a 12- to 16-hour round-trip with 5,000 feet of elevation gain. The snowpack generally lingers into July; get updated trail information from the Bend-Fort Rock Ranger District of Deschutes National Forest (541-388-5664; www.fs.fed.us/r6/deschutes).

On Mount Bachelor (800-987-9968)—usually open for skiing into July—sightseers can ride the summit chairlift through Labor Day for a view from Washington to California. Some of the surrounding peaks—Middle and North Sister, Mounts Washington and Jefferson—are climbs that require mountaineering experience. For gear, check out Mountain Supply (800-794-0688); Timberline Mountain Guides (800-464-7704) offers trips.

The high desert is full of geological quirks, including Smith Rock State Park (800-551-6949), which sits like a volcanic citadel 27 miles north of Bend. Explore some of its 641 acres on the steep, four-mile Misery Ridge loop trail, from which you can see the infamous Monkey Face and climbers scaling its open-mouthed profile. First Ascent Climbing School (800-325-

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Getting There

Horizon Airlines (800-547-9308) and United Express/SkyWest (800-241-6522) fly into Redmond's Roberts Field, 16 miles north of Bend. There are daily flights from San Francisco, Seattle and Portland. Bend is a three-hour drive southeast of Portland on US 26 and US 97.

Where to Stay

Under the stars or under the roof of a resort, bedding down in Bend is easy. Perched on the banks of the

Deschutes, the Bend Riverside Motel (800-284-2363) has minisuites with river views for \$79 a night. The spacious condos at Mount Bachelor Village (800-452-9846) start at \$105. The Lara House (800-766-4064), a comfortable downtown B&B, will run you \$95. Or for something completely different, plunk down \$27 and camp in a yurt at Tumalo State Park (800-452-5687). For more options, consult the Bend Chamber of Commerce (800-905-2363; www.visitbend.org).

Events

The Cascade Cycling Classic is a

series of road races that culminates in a downtown criterium, one of the area's best spectator-sport events (call the Chamber of Commerce for information). Munch & Music, a free music series, brings the sounds of reggae and rock to the green fields of Drake Park on summer Thursday afternoons. Bend's Summer Festival (July 8-9) floods the downtown area with art, food and music.

For More Information

Log on to www.covisitors.com or the Chamber of Commerce site for additional planning and travel tips. —M.J.

5462) and Vertical Ventures (541-389-7937) both offer one-on-one and group instruction.

If you prefer exploring on horseback, saddle up for a scenic trail ride into the backcountry. Guided rides and instruction are available at Black Butte Stables (800-743-3035).

Rehash the day's adventures over grilled Pacific salmon at the Marz Bistro (541-389-2025) or a plate of creamy tortellini carbonara at Giuseppe's (541-389-8899).

AND DON'T FORGET...

Although Bend's environs fuel the body and soul, there's also plenty here to nourish the mind. The High Desert Museum (541-382-4754) captures the region's natural and cultural spirit with animal presentations and life-sized dioramas. Lava Lands Visitor Center (541-593-2421) is a geological interpretive station on the brim of an immense lava flow. Or take the self-guided Heritage Walk (541-

382-3221), a downtown stroll with illuminating glimpses into Bend's past.

When it's time to leave the wonders of my hometown behind, you'll have a new appreciation for the meaning of the city's original name. I bet you'll have a hard time saying farewell. ♦

Freelance writer Mark R. Johnson feels pretty darn lucky to call Bend home.



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