

GO Away



Get Away to the Sierras

By Lynn Machon

In our monthly "Go Getaway" feature, we like to highlight unique travel destinations that are within an hour's drive of Roseville — perfect for a long weekend getaway.

This month, we looked at the beautiful region between here and Lake Tahoe, the Sierra upcountry. We discovered that you don't have to go far to get a unique mountain experience, complete with fresh air, towering pines, hiking trails, lakes and rivers.

Two main areas — Royal Gorge off Highway 80 and Desolation Wilderness up Highway 50 are ideally situated in the heart of the Sierras, but are pleasantly void of urbanized crowds or traffic. These special treasures present great opportunities to get away to the mountains for outdoor fun, exploration and relaxation.

Royal Gorge in the Summer

Royal Gorge, located in Soda Springs off Interstate 80, is world-renown as the largest cross country ski resort in North America (www.royalgorge.com).

Wildly popular during the winter months, it boasts over 9000 acres of tracks and trails for outdoor fun on skis, snowshoes and sleds. But a secret many people may not know is that once the snow melts and the crowds leave, the select spot becomes a perfect mountain resort hideaway.

For overnight accommodations in Royal Gorge, Ice Lakes Lodge is a great venue during summer and fall months. Just off the Soda Springs/Norden exit, Ice Lakes Lodge is tucked away on the beautiful west shoreline of Serene Lakes, offering privacy and tranquility for couples and families alike. The good-sized lake and beautiful sandy beach allow for days full of swimming, water recreation, picnics and relaxation.

The lodge itself is open over the summer Thursday through Monday and features 26 lake and mountain view rooms, a full restaurant and bar, and a beautiful deck overlooking the water. There's a guest lounge with a huge, cozy fireplace and even a game room for kids. Many weddings are held here, with the lake as a breathtaking and picturesque backdrop.

Eight miles down the road, the Rainbow Lodge may be closed for lodging during the summer, but remains open as a restaurant and bar option for light meals and dinner specials four days a week, Friday through Monday.

While the Royal Gorge ski resort hibernates for the summer, Ice Lakes Lodge guests still may use the vast area for summer hiking and mountain biking. However, no campfires or motorized vehicles are allowed on the private land.

If you're looking to pack even more activities into your long weekend getaway schedule, nearby Truckee and Tahoe City provide whitewater rafting, biking trails and fast-paced entertainment and dining options as well.

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Eldorado National Forest and Desolation Wilderness

Heading over to Highway 50 and east toward Tahoe, the Desolation Wilderness area provides another nice mountain getaway option during the summer.

Located in the Eldorado National Forest (www.fs.fed.us/f5/eldorado), the 100 square mile preserved wilderness area is home to more than 100 small glacial lakes, waterfalls and endless hiking trails. It's a fantastic spot for day hikes and sightseeing. Permits are required for most day use, and can be picked up at local ranger stations or often times at trailheads.

In the vicinity of Desolation Wilderness, Strawberry Lodge, 17 miles shy of Tahoe is a nice place for overnight stays. Once a stop for the old Pony Express, the Strawberry Lodge enjoys a colorful history dating back to 1858. Today, after several owners and many renovations, the lodge sits proudly on the banks of the rushing American River, welcoming visitors today as it did decades ago (www.strawberry-lodge.com).

With a fabulous location at the base of the mountains, the lodge's 44 guest rooms offer views of either the mountains or the river, queen or king sized beds, and most have private baths. Guests wanting a little more of an intimate weekend, can rent a secluded, on premise river cabin at a reasonable rate.

Strawberry Lodge's onsite amenities, such as a full service dining room and bar, allow you to spend less time driving around and more time relaxing and simply experiencing mountain life.

A favorite local activity is rock climbing or hiking at the nearby Lovers Leap recreational area. In addition to the famous "lovers leap" namesake 600 foot cliff, the region offers

other granite challenges with names like as Bears Reach and Corrugated Corner as well as miles of hiking trails. Professional guides are available for guided tours or lessons for both beginners and experienced climbers.

As another activity option for outdoor enthusiasts, the nearby South Fork of the American River provides some of the area's best whitewater rafting and kayaking between Strawberry and Kyburz.

Just east of Strawberry, the gorgeous Horsetail Falls, seen from Highway 50, is a convenient and scenic spot for a great little day hike. While the terrain is rugged and can be a challenging at times, the roar of the falls and views from the top are unmatched.

If you feel like camping instead of lodging for your mountain getaway, the surrounding Eldorado National Forest seems to have something for everyone.



There are numerous drive-in, hike-in and horse-in campgrounds throughout the region, most with piped water, toilets, barbeque grills and picnic tables. The plentiful lakes are filled with trout, and equestrian trails and bike trails carve gently through the forest. Off-road vehicles are even allowed on designated routes and trails.

For those who would prefer the solid feel of a cabin floor beneath their feet, there are four rental cabins within the forest, which house anywhere from 6 to 20 people. Reservations for both campgrounds and cabins can be made at www.recreation.gov.

As you plan your next getaway, lace up your hiking boots and get ready to enjoy the simple pleasures of nature. It's nice to know you don't have to drive all the way to Tahoe to find great destinations for mountain fun and relaxation.



Photo courtesy of the Strawberry Lodge

