

ladies at LAKE TAHOE

A hike along the Tahoe Rim Trail is invigorating, and it affords exceptional views.



National Geographic Creative/Getty Images

Get in touch with
Mother Nature
during a glorious
vacation amid
soaring snow-
capped peaks,
pristine forest, and
the prettiest blue
water you ever saw.

don't worry:
Cocktails and
shopping are on
the agenda, too.

BY KARA WILLIAMS

Family vacations are fun, and romantic escapes are a necessity (ask any married couple). But sometimes a girls-only trip is just the ticket for recharging your run-down batteries. I'm a *huge* fan of getting out of town with my best friends, and have learned from many pleasurable experiences that a few nights of girl talk, red wine, some awe-inspiring scenery, and lots of outdoor activity will have me ready to return to "real life" feeling fully refreshed and rejuvenated.

Lake Tahoe, straddling the Nevada-California border, is one destination where it's a cinch to combine all of the above. For starters, it's easier than you think to get there. From the Reno-Tahoe International Airport, it's just a 45- to 50-minute drive to North Lake Tahoe and its many communities and mountain villages, such as Northstar-at-Tahoe ski resort, Incline Village, and Tahoe Vista. The southern shore, home to the towns of South Lake Tahoe and Stateline, as well as multiple sprawling casinos, is only about 45 minutes farther. And since the Reno airport sees some 140 arrivals and departures every day — including nonstops from major cities in the west such as Dallas, Denver, Los Angeles, Phoenix, Portland, and San Diego — it's quite possible to catch a flight, rent a car, and dip your toes in the chilly deep, blue water in a matter of hours.

Of course, Northern California residents benefit hugely from their close proximity to the area. From San Francisco, you and the girls can hop in your vehicle and be throwing down cards at a south shore blackjack table within four hours. And Sacramento to the north side's Incline Village is just a little more than two. Road trip anyone?

Book your Tahoe escape for the autumn months, and you'll witness nature at her best. Anita Mahaffey, who calls Lake Tahoe "one of my favorite places on earth," traveled to North Lake Tahoe with her San Diego women's hiking group in late September. "It's a great time for a Tahoe trip," she says. "No summer crowds and beautiful weather." Says Jenn Boyd, who makes her home on the south side of the lake, "Tahoe's foliage changes into magnificent golds and oranges. Combined with views of the lake and Sierras, it's breathtaking. Definitely



A challenging workout, kayaking is also a great way to see the lake.

most locals' favorite time of year."

Even in the supposed "off-season" months between summer and winter, Lake Tahoe offers plenty to do for visitors with varied interests. While some in your group might want to photograph the gorgeous fall colors during daily nature walks, others may want to hit as many golf balls as possible. And what would a ladies' leave of absence be without some shopping and dining? Here then are some suggestions — both north- and south-side specific — for your own trip to Lake Tahoe.

Get Moving

Given Lake Tahoe's proximity to national forests, state parks, wilderness areas, and back-country terrain, hiking trails near Lake Tahoe are plentiful. In fact, the 165-mile Tahoe Rim Trail connects peaks all around the lake. Just remember, whether you're on an easy nature walk or a lengthy, challenging trail, Lake Tahoe sits at about 6,225 feet above sea level. You'll want to bring

along plenty of water to stay hydrated, and sunscreen to protect against harmful rays — even on a cool, cloudy day.

NORTH: For a great workout — and a daylong adventure — consider the popular, but rugged, 5-mile trail to pretty Marlette Lake, and the 6 miles to Mount Rose, one of the highest peaks in the area.

SOUTH: Traipsing around the edge of Lake Tahoe is great fun, and it makes for excellent photo opportunities. Walk from the Taylor Creek Visitor Center to the Tallac Historic Site for a glimpse of what life was like for the rich folks who vacationed here a century ago. Also nearby: Emerald Bay State Park, with the trail to the famous and fascinating Vikingsholm estate.

Get High

Sure, you can hike up the mountains of the local ski areas, but the easier route is via gondola. Scenic rides offer you the best bird's-eye vistas without losing your breath.



{ Tahoe's Family Tree }

Bringing the whole family to Tahoe? Many of the autumn activities I recommend for a girls' retreat also work with children — especially lake cruises, gondola rides, and the tamer hiking trails.

If you're looking for other family-friendly activities down south, though, you might consider a scenic hot air balloon ride with **Lake Tahoe Balloons**. Or, if aerial sight-seeing sounds fun, but you'd like a little more horsepower, a HeliTahoe whirlybird tour of Emerald Bay should do the trick.

On the north side, consider bowling at Bowl Incline in Incline Village, playing at the KidZone Museum in Truckee, or renting road bikes to cycle the miles of paved paths along the lake.

NORTH: Three lifts at Northstar-at-Tahoe are open on the weekends, Friday to Sunday, just after Labor Day through mid-October. The enclosed gondola will get you halfway up the mountain, and then you can continue aboard the Vista Express or the Tahoe Zephyr Express chair for spectacular scenery and several hiking trails.

SOUTH: The Heavenly gondola typically remains open into early October. Stop midway at the massive observation deck, then hop back on and finish the 2.4-mile ride to the new Tamarack

Lodge, where you can have a tasty snack and refreshing beverage.

Get Wet

Sure it's fun to gaze at "Big Blue" from land, but one of the best ways to truly experience the lake is to get in it. Well, only the heartiest — of the heartiest — would want to be in the downright cold water on a crisp autumn day, but cruising around on top of it is a different story.

NORTH: The Tahoe Adventure Company offers several scheduled

group kayak tours, and all of them are appropriate for beginners.

SOUTH: No need to exert yourself down south, where you can board the *M.S. Dixie II* or *Tahoe Queen*, two paddle wheelers utilized for scenic sightseeing cruises. Entertaining tour guides share the history and geology of the lake, while you snap photos of pretty Emerald Bay.

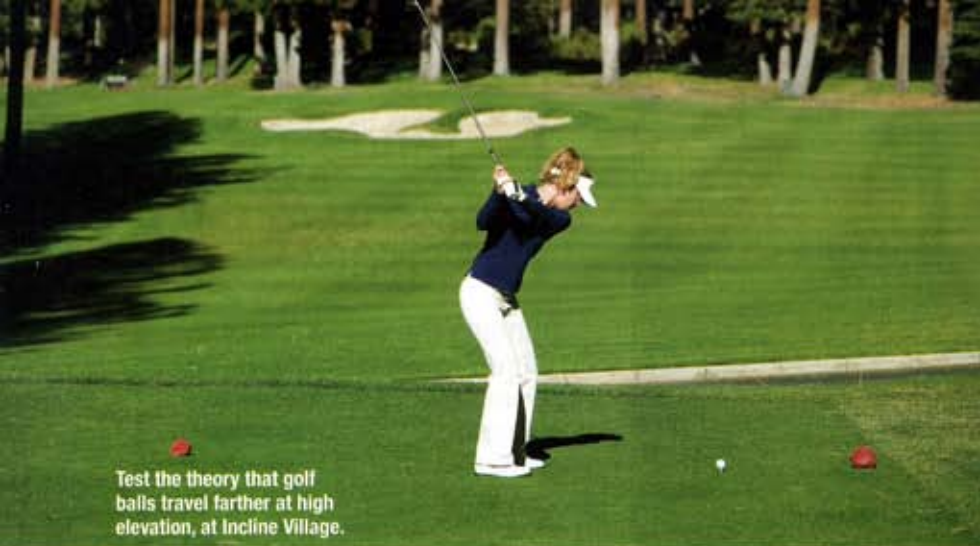
Get Golfing

Golf balls supposedly travel farther at high elevation. See if your game improves at one of the 18-hole courses that typically remain open into October.

NORTH: Incline Village is known for both the Mountain Course, which was designed by Robert Trent Jones Jr., and is set amid countless pine trees with "no artificial landscaping," as well as the challenging Championship Course, designed by the senior Jones. Long hitters will have an advantage at the Championship Course, but be careful with that driver: Water hazards abound.

The *Tahoe Queen* plies the lake.





Test the theory that golf balls travel farther at high elevation, at Incline Village.

SOUTH: *Golf Digest* named Edgewood Tahoe among “America’s Top Golf Courses.” The surroundings, complete with the invigorating aroma of the local pine trees, are divine, and many of the tee boxes afford great views of Lake Tahoe.

Get Shopping

Like many resort areas, Tahoe has plenty of places that will be happy to take your cash in exchange for a souvenir or two. Art galleries, clothing boutiques, and gift shops are fun spots to while away time.

NORTH: In Tahoe City, check out the Boatworks Mall at water’s edge, or stroll through the Cobblestone Center, a Bavarian-inspired shopping experience.

SOUTH: Outlet lovers will enjoy the Factory Stores at the Y. For higher-end goods, browse The Shops at Heavenly Village.

Get Good Eats

From down-home diners and casual sandwich shops to upscale restaurants, Lake Tahoe truly offers an amazing array of eating options. I’m always a fan of saving a bit of money by picking up breakfast and picnic-lunch fixings at the local grocery store or gourmet food

shop, then splurging on a few fabulous evening meals.

NORTH: Wolfdale’s in Tahoe City offers guests an eclectic range of entrees, including grilled elk chops, Asian-braised buffalo short ribs, Thai curry seafood stew, and mushroom ravioli. Top off any night at Northstar’s The Chocolate Bar, which has more than 20 concoctions on the dessert menu and to-die-for chocolate martinis.



One of the post-meal indulgences (or meal substitutes) at The Chocolate Bar.

SOUTH: Cafe Fiore in South Lake Tahoe is a tiny, romantic restaurant — just seven tables; but if you like Italian food and fine wine, your group shouldn’t hesitate to book a reservation — as far in advance as possible! 19 Kitchen-Bar, a sleek restaurant with a sophisticated vibe on the 19th floor of Harvey’s, is a

grand place to end your trip on a high note, raising a glass to toast a fun-filled, outdoorsy, adventure-packed vacation in Lake Tahoe. ■

Colorado-based freelance writer Kara Williams covers girlfriend getaways, family trips, and romantic escapes at her blog, TheVacationGals.com.



fastFACTS

RESORT DIRECTORY: IntervalWorld.com or pages 126 to 128 and 131

CLIMATE: Fall days are typically quite pleasant. The average high temperature ranges from 79°F in September to 49°F in November. No matter the month, be prepared for much cooler nights.

DON'T MISS: Your chance to double down on a good time. With all the beautiful scenery around, it's easy to forget how fun it is to cozy up to a blackjack or craps table and get your gambling fix.

INTERVAL TRAVEL: IntervalWorld.com

RENTAL CAR: Recommended

CONTACT: [Tahoe Rim Trail](http://TahoeRimTrail.com), tahoerimtrail.org; [Northstar-at-Tahoe](http://Northstar-at-Tahoe.com), northstarattahoe.com; [Heavenly](http://Heavenly.com), skiheavenly.com; [Mountain Course](http://MountainCourse.com) and [Championship Course](http://ChampionshipCourse.com), golfincline.com; [Edgewood Tahoe](http://EdgewoodTahoe.com), edgewoodtahoe.com; [Tahoe Adventure Company](http://TahoeAdventureCompany.com), tahoeadventurecompany.com; *M.S. Dixie II* or *Tahoe Queen*, zephyrcove.com; [Wolfdale's](http://Wolfdale.com), wolfdales.com; [The Chocolate Bar](http://TheChocolateBar.com), thechocbar.com; [Cafe Fiore](http://CafeFiore.com), cafeiore.com; [19 Kitchen-Bar](http://19Kitchen-Bar.com), harveystahoe.com; [Lake Tahoe Balloons](http://LakeTahoeBalloons.com), laketahoeballoons.com; [HeliTahoe](http://HeliTahoe.com), helitahoe.com; [KidZone Museum](http://KidZoneMuseum.com), kidzonemuseum.org

VISITOR INFORMATION:

Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority

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tahoessouth.com

gotahoenorth.com

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