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## BEND, OR *Central Oregon Offers a Flurry of Fun*

BY KIM COOPER FINDLING



THE HOME ON THE RANGE GINGERBREAD HOUSE BUILDING CONTEST IS A SIGNATURE EVENT IN SISTERS' COWBOY CHRISTMAS CELEBRATION AND RAISES MONEY FOR HABITAT FOR HUMANITY.

FOR THE AMBITIOUS RESIDENTS of Central Oregon, winter does not liken to hibernation. Oregon's heartland located between the base of the Cascade Range and the expansive high desert spreads out around the upscale city of Bend, epitomizing loveliness and outdoor opportunities. In the summer locals pursue a frenzied excess of biking, hiking, golf and boating. When the snow flies, those endeavors simply segue into a similarly hyperactive pursuit of skiing, snowshoeing and sledding. Even those who prefer recreation that's a tad less sweaty find plenty to coax them out of the homestead during the coldest season. From a visit with an elf to a lazy afternoon at the spa, there's much to do indoors.

Visitors to the region tend to catch a bit of this busy-fever, too. Read on for a smattering of ideas to keep you and yours entertained in Central Oregon this winter.

### ***A Sleepover with Santa and the Gang***

Imagine having tea with a teddy bear, taking an old-fashioned horse-drawn sleigh ride, watching the workings of a ventriloquist, enjoying a family Christmas concert and gazing at dozens of sparkly Christmas trees, all during one glorious getaway weekend. With guestrooms starting at \$109 per night and most activities costing nothing, the annual Holiday Traditions celebration at Sunriver Resort (15 miles south of Bend on U.S. 97) is magic for every family member. More than 150 events take place between Thanksgiving and New Year's Day — most are open to non-resort guests, as well. But only those staying at Sunriver can take advantage of every kid's holiday dream — a bedtime tuck-in by an authentic elf.

### ***Perfect Your Swing***

Strange but true — during Central Oregon's miraculous winters, you can ski in the morning and golf in the afternoon. **Eagle Crest Resort** west of Sisters and **Crooked River Ranch** north of Redmond both offer year-round golf courses — assuming the snow doesn't get carried away and bury the greens, that is.



### ***Westward Ho–Ho–Ho***

Even cowboys climb off their horses to celebrate the holidays, and the friendly Wild West town of Sisters is the perfect place to kick up the spurs and savor the season. A Thanksgiving weekend tree lighting and Christmas parade launch the tiny town's A Cowboy Christmas, which culminates with a fireworks display at **Hoodoo Ski Area** on New Year's Eve. Don't miss Home on the Range, a gingerbread structure exhibit that makes grandma's home-baked house look puny. The presentation is located at **Black Butte Ranch's** main lodge eight miles west of Sisters on U.S. 20.

### ***Frosty the Brewman***

Central Oregon is famous for its beer for good reason — no less than six craft brewers work magic with barley and hops in the region. Slopes too windy? Shopping legs all tuckered out? Hunker down at a local brew house and sip a seasonal winter ale — or make an afternoon of it and tour all six —

**Bend Brewing Co.** (1019 N.W. Brooks St.);

**Cascade Lakes Brewing Co.** (1441 S.W. Chandler Ave. Suite 100);

**Deschutes Brewery** (1044 Bond St.);

**McMenamins Old St. Francis School** (700 N.W. Bond St.);

**Silver Moon Brewery** (24 N.W. Greenwood Ave.);

**Wildfire Brewing** (642 N.W. Franklin Ave.).

You'll be hard-pressed to choose a favorite.

### ***Visit the North Pole***

Who knew that Santa's reindeer were headquartered two miles west of Redmond, Oregon? Operation Santa Claus Reindeer Ranch (4355 W. Hwy. 126) is home to more than 30 reindeer and is open to visitors every day of the year. At Christmastime, you might even catch a glimpse of Santa on the premises — if he's not too busy in his workshop, that is.

### ***Break a Sweat***

Just a hop, skip and glide up Century Drive west of Bend are two places to experience fabulous — and free (snow-park permit required) — cross country skiing. Rent yourself some gear at **Sunnyside Sports** (930 N.W. Newport Ave.) and head to **Virginia Meissner** (Mile Post 14, Century Dr.) or **Swampy Lakes** (M.P. 17, Century Dr.) Snow Parks, where trail maps guide you and your skis through a winter wonderland of pine and hemlock forest. A bit further up the road, Mt. Bachelor Resort offers fee-only cross country skiing trails, as well as 10 lifts to carry you to some fine downhill ski runs.

If skiing isn't your passion, satisfy your inner kid (or your real one) by ice-skating at **Sunriver** or the **Seventh Mountain Resort**. Or take advantage of the daily free, naturalist-guided snowshoe tours at Mt. Bachelor, where you can learn about the winter ecology and geology of Central Oregon. Snowshoes are even provided!

### ***Just Say Spaaaaah***

Every icy winter morning begins best with a hot cup of joe. But at Sunriver's **Sage Springs Spa**, the coffee isn't to drink. Instead, guests can enjoy the Body Coffee Pure Bliss Experience, which uses products made from ground coffee and sea salt to exfoliate and smooth the skin. Cold-weather pampering is also available in Bend at **Jinsei Spa** (118 N.W. Newport Ave.), where the Goodbye Winter Skin deluxe facial acts as a secret weapon against the cold, drying winter elements, or at **Rain Dance Massage** (777 N.W. Wall St.) by way of a warming hot stone massage.

### ***Follow That Dog!***

Sample the thrill of Alaska's famous Iditarod Great Sled Race at Mt. Bachelor, where local dog sledding company **Trail of Dreams** offers rides. Adventurous souls can take a quick hour-long tour or venture deep into the Cascades in a comfy canine-powered sled. Kids especially will enjoy the option to participate in the care, watering and feeding of the dogs.

### ***Fa-La-La-La Feasting***

The greasy spoons of Central Oregon's timber-based past are long gone. The steady influx of residents to the area in recent years has included some of the best chefs on the West Coast. Savor some excellent, (albeit not- necessarily-wintery) culinary

creations at Bend's new sushi bar, **Deep** (821 N.W. Wall St.); the Cajun phenomenon, **Zydeco** (1085 S.E. Third St.); or the award-winning **The Blacksmith** (211 N.W. Greenwood Ave.). In Sisters, don't miss the new sensation, **Jen's Garden** (403 East Hood Ave.).

This winter, elevate your holiday spirit with a vacation to Central Oregon. Just don't be surprised if you find yourself pursuing the region's truly most arduous activity — keeping up with the locals.

Go to [VisitCentralOregon.com](http://VisitCentralOregon.com) for more information.

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