Beach, mountain, concert – and no need for a car

By Susan Wood

Summer in South Tahoe transforms this small town to a major tourist destination. The traffic has visibly picked up in August, reminiscent of the days when the population would swell to more than 100,000 – more than three times its standard rate.

For that, it was good to see a "No Vacancy" sign flash outside The Station House Inn on Park Avenue, an ideal launching pad to the outdoor concert series in the Harveys parking lot. It was perfect to be able to walk to the Miranda Lambert concert on Friday.

Lakeside Beach is one of the few in Tahoe with a lifeguard. Photos/Kathryn Reed

To make a weekend out of it, a seven-minute walk provides access to the Heavenly Mountain Resort gondola and the Lakeside Beach going the other direction.

Heavenly just expanded its summer activities at the adventure

park, including tubing. From there, the hiking trails have extended to the highest point of the ski resort at the top of Sky Express. The views off the California Trail ridge are nothing less than Heavenly. Read more about this on Aug. 28 on *Lake Tahoe News*.

With the Best Western Station House Inn stay, R&R has also been expanded to recreation, relaxation and rejuvenation. Moreover, the location brings a quiet reprieve to the hustle and bustle of Highway 50. The 99 rooms – which start at $109 on weekdays and $169 on weekends – are common with tired décor by most standards.

Nonetheless, the motel provides a good bang-for-the-buck bargain with a complimentary full breakfast staged at the dinner house named after a combination of the Willorford family's original owners who owned LewMarNel's and the Station House Inn. (Recommended: the blueberry pancakes are worth ordering with a generous helping of fruit cooked in the batter. The eggs with potatoes hit the spot when you're hungry.) The wait staff is professional, courteous, responsive and friendly.

"It's good for my golf game," waiter Brad said of the job. He's worked there 15 of the 35 years he's resided in Tahoe. Even though only two of the 97 parties the restaurant served that morning were not staying at the motel, the restaurant stays busy. After breakfast, the ever-hungry may order lunch and drinks like a $6 mojito by the pool just below the restaurant. The smoker sends the smell of charcoal hovering over the patio. Pure summer.

For evening starters, the tiny bar inside LewMarNel's opens at 4:30pm – where Terry and Susan Canale of Ione awaited their night out to see Miranda Lambert with their daughter Marcie, a Tahoe local. The Canales said they always stay at the Station House Inn because of the value – meaning the breakfast and proximity to the beach.

“We come here every year to see a concert,” Terry Canale said.

“And it’s a really nice get away in the winter,” his wife added. She likes to thaw out with the cheese fondue at LewMarNel’s for dinner.

To some, the warmth in winter may be more of the draw to the American and cheddar cheese fondue than the taste. This opener to a dinner meal at LewMarNel’s set the stage for an overpriced, oversalted trip into the 1980s as shown by old reviews on the wall. Kae and I can easily pass on a second visit. We both received a month’s worth of sodium on my broccoli and her oily $17 pasta primavera, the only vegetarian option on the menu. Sadly, my petite filet mignon was OK, but worth maybe half of its $34 price tag.

Restaurant aside, the grounds and location of the Station House Inn property make up for dinner inadequacies. Serenity beckons a guest from the room just steps away from the pool and hot tub patio.

Plus, the motel offers sun bathers easy access to a restricted beach next to the Lakeside Marina. If you’re not into power boating, the beach is filled with activities including kayaks to rent. A children’s play area and swing set flank both sides of the beach, and a volleyball court welcomes the big kids.

Others just wanting to kick back may rent umbrellas to hang out at the beach, which is monitored by lifeguards until 5pm. They announce their departure and welcome beachgoers to stay, albeit safely at the shore.

If you go:

Lakeside Marina, beach and restaurant are located at the end of Park Avenue in South Lake Tahoe next to Stateline. It’s free for hotel guests, with a fee for others.

The Best Western Station House Inn sits halfway between the

marina and Heavenly Village on Highway 50.

The Heavenly Gondola runs from 10am-5pm, seven days a week.

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