

Average U.S. hotel prices increased 5% in 2014

By Hospitality Net

Americans paid an average of \$137 per night for hotel accommodations in the U.S. during 2014 – an increase of 5 percent compared to 2013.

The findings from the biannual Hotels.com Hotel Price Index support a positive outlook on the U.S. travel industry, as price increases were felt across most of the 50 most popular domestic destinations.

“While U.S. hotel prices exceeded the global increase of 3 percent, travelers were not deterred from exploring top destinations and up-and-coming alike,” said Neha Parikh, vice president and general manager, Hotels.com North America. “Growing consumer confidence and lower gas prices contributed to a number of U.S. destinations reporting record visitor numbers in 2014.”

While the U.S. experienced a rise in hotel prices nationally, more than half of the top 50 domestic destinations remained under the national average price paid of \$137. Four top destinations remained under the \$100 mark, including 29th ranked Reno, which was the most affordable Top 50 destination in 2014 as the average price remained at \$83 per night.

Read the whole story

Daylight saving time returns Sunday

It's almost time to spring forward an hour.

Daylight saving time begins March 8 at 2am.

This means to start with it will be a little lighter at night and darker in the morning. It also means losing an hour of sleep on the first day.

4 U.S. men in top 15 in downhill

By USSA

KVITFJELL, Norway – In the penultimate Audi FIS Ski World Cup downhill of the season, the men were thirsty for results – looking to tighten the race for the overall downhill globe. Hannes Reichelt of Austria had a nearly perfect run on the Kvitfjell track and took the win, while the Americans stacked four racers in the top 15. Travis Ganong (Squaw Valley) was the top American downhiller of the day, finishing in sixth place.

The conditions were strange in Kvitfjell, with fog and high winds rolling through the sunny morning in Norway causing the start to be lowered to the super G start. It's a low-altitude resort – the base is about 600 feet above sea level – and the snow warmed up quickly. The track, slick and fast at the top of the course, quickly degraded as the racers made their way down the hill. But even with the varying conditions and

lowered start, racers were still hitting 90 mph at the bottom of the course.

Reichelt nailed the line on the Kvitfjell track and came through the finish 0.30 seconds ahead of the pack. Reichelt was looking for the win ahead of Kjetil Jansrud, attempting to steal the downhill globe from the famed Norwegian downhiller. So far so good for Reichelt, as Jansrud couldn't pull it off at Kvitfjell – a track he grew up skiing on – finishing seventh. Canadian Manuel Osborne-Paradis surprised the crowd and took second place—his only podium and top-10 result since Lake Louise at the beginning of the season. Werner Heel of Italy was third, after holding the lead for 20 races.

Not fazed by the snow, Ganong threw down a blazing fast run – making up time at the bottom and finishing in sixth place, even after hurting his knee in the training run.

“Yesterday in the training run I was eighth, but in the middle section, I caught an edge and hyperextended my right knee,” said Ganong after the run. “It was really, really sore last night. I woke up this morning and was really sore and was a little worried. But I got some treatment and got some ibuprofen and taping. It still hurt today, but I was able to ski through it.”

As his teammates have been saying for the last couple of weeks, Marco Sullivan (Squaw Valley) has figured something out in his skiing. With a fast top that would have placed him in the top five, he lost a little on the bottom and finished in 12.

“Personally, I wish [the season] would keep going!” said Sullivan. “I’m just heating up. I’ve had some good results the past three weeks. For some reason this year, I don’t want it to end.”

With a similarly fast top section, Andrew Weibrecht (Lake Placid, N.Y.) also had a solid run, finishing in a three-way

tie with Sullivan and Austrian Vincent Kreichmayr. Jared Goldberg (Holladay, Utah) was 15, just a tenth behind Sullivan and Weibrecht – his best result in a World Cup downhill this season.

Steven Nyman (Sundance, Utah) was the favored American skier after winning Friday's training run, but the lowered start did not favor the classic downhiller. Nyman got caught up in the soft snow at the bottom to finish in 25. Wiley Maple (Aspen) finished just out of the points in 31 and Bryce Bennett (Squaw Valley) was 50.

Fake snow may save Calif. ski industry

By Evelyn Spence, BloombergBusiness

Most skiers at Heavenly in Lake Tahoe never even notice the snowmaking pump house, which is just a shed next to the day lodge at the base of the mountain. You can't hear the hum of the pumps and motors until you're inside. The whole operation is designed to be unobtrusive: A day on the hill should be exhilarating, free of any reminder that the resort company is engaged in an all-out battle with the weather.

That little pump house is, in fact, Heavenly's weather center, where every day a crew of 38 decides exactly how much snow it can manufacture and when and where to do it. There are maps on the wall and three white boards that help them plan out the day. Four computers constantly monitor the temperature, humidity, air pressure, and water flow of Heavenly's 66 fully automated fan guns.

"I usually have four or five weather websites up at the same time. It's the major part of my job," says Barrett Burghard, senior manager of snow surfaces for Heavenly. "We will make snow 24-7, if it's cold enough."

Next to one of the computers sits a book the color of sunset: "The Teaching of Buddha". Burghard has legitimate need for stress management. For the second year in a row, snowfall has been abysmal. Statewide, the snowpack was 25 percent of the historical average—"dismally meager," according to the California Department of Water Resources. January was the driest on record. By mid-February, almost every hill in Tahoe had received less than 50 percent of its average snowfall.

Less snow means fewer skiers, and that means decreasing revenue for the state's \$1.3 billion ski industry. As of last season, skier visits – the industry's metric of days skied per person – were down 28 percent from the 2010-11 season. Smaller resorts at lower elevations couldn't survive: Badger Pass, which is in Yosemite National Park, and Dodge Ridge, which is just outside it, opened in December, then closed a month later. China Peak followed in mid-February.

"This has been what I'm now calling the 'cruelest' winter I've ever seen," China Peak Chief Executive Officer Tim Cohee wrote in an open letter on Facebook. "We have not only dealt with no snow, but also with incredibly marginal snowmaking conditions. ... In nearly four decades I have never worked for a resort that closed mid winter; now I have."

Heavenly is in a different position. It's owned by Vail Resorts, a \$3.1 billion, Colorado-based resort company that has equipped Heavenly with some of the most sophisticated and expensive snowmaking equipment in the U.S. The snowmaking staff manages more than 200 air water guns, boom guns, and Super PoleCat fan guns that blow piles of crystals – sometimes a thousand hours a season – for a grooming team of 20 to transform into skiable trails. With 30,000 feet of pipes and

hoses, the system can cover 73 percent of the resort's 4,800 acres. In ideal conditions, snowmakers can fabricate winter at the rate of a foot of snow over 43 acres in just 12 hours. Even so, last year Vail reported a 28 percent drop in skier visits at its California resorts, and the company warned investors that its financial results would be worse than anticipated.

Read the whole story

Opinion: Preparing for the inevitable wildfire

By Chris Anthony

With the looming expectation of another year of drought, our communities face another challenging year of wildfire threat.

January finished as one of the driest Januaries on record, and while the recent storms were welcomed, they did little to increase snowpack throughout the state. As a result, fire agencies are preparing for another long fire season.

"The drought has set the stage for another busy fire season," said Michael Brown, fire chief for North Lake Tahoe Fire Protection District. "All the federal, state and local fire agencies are working together to protect the people, property and unique natural resources within the Lake Tahoe Basin."

In 2014, there were over 1,000 more wildfires in California than the previous year. In fact, fire season never really ended.

The fuels that burn in wildfires, such as grass, brush and

trees, remained extremely dry and susceptible to ignition all year. This year is looking to be no different. As an example, the Round Fire, which started on Feb. 6 just north of the town of Bishop, quickly consumed 7,000 acres and destroyed 40 structures.

"A fire of this significance in the month of February should raise our awareness and lead to positive actions to prepare our communities for fire," said Tim Alameda, fire chief for Meeks Bay Fire Protection District.

Depending on where we live in the United States, natural destructive forces abound, whether they are hurricanes, tornados, earthquakes, floods or fire. It is certainly no secret that we live in an environment where large damaging and costly wildfires occur on a routine basis. While the odds may not seem to be in our favor, our communities can adapt to the threat of wildfire and we can diminish the risks to our livelihood.

"A fire adapted community is one in which the community places a high priority on the common vulnerability to destruction by wildfire," said Elwood Miller of the University of Nevada Cooperative Extension. "The adapted community is one that includes the perspective of wildfire threat, and the high probability of serious loss, as a routine way of viewing and characterizing the community. As a result we change our behavior and implement measures to mitigate the threat."

"We can't do this alone," said Fire Chief Michael Schwartz of the North Tahoe Fire Protection District. "Motivated residents who work with their neighbors and local fire department to prepare their communities for fire is the key to a successful outcome when wildfire strikes."

A fire adapted community can survive a wildfire with little or no assistance from firefighters. These communities are characterized by homes that are modified to reduce the chance

of ignition and where vegetation and flammable items have been reduced around a home to provide good defensible space. A fire adapted community is buffered by fuel breaks where flammable vegetation has been modified to slow the spread of flames and provide a zone where firefighters can aggressively fight a fire.

“When wildfire comes, fire adapted communities reduce the potential for loss of human life and injury, minimize damage to homes and infrastructure and reduce firefighting costs,” added Miller. “For more information on Fire Adapted Communities, I encourage everyone visit our website.”

Chris Anthony is a division chief with CalFire. He is writing on behalf of the Tahoe Fire & Fuels Team.

Anderson wins fourth Burton slopestyle

By Gerhard Gross, Transworld Snowboarding

After winning the Dew Tour slopestyle and taking second at both X Games and the Burton European Open, Jamie Anderson of Meyers wrapped up the last major competition of the season with a first at the Burton US Open in Vail today.

But while Spencer O’Brien slid around a backside 900 on her final run, the only landed 900 for the women, and Anna Gasser put down both a Cab 720 frontside grab and a frontside 720 mute in her first two runs, it wasn’t enough to unseat Anderson who was the only rider to cut around to the side of the first jump feature to hit the quarterpipe transition takeoff. Even though she didn’t get a grab on her backside 540

on that feature, it was a risky move that scored well with the judges.

Anderson's full first run included a ridiculously stylish Cab 270 to tailside, switch boardslide to regular, and boardslide 270 on the rails. Rolling into the first jump feature, Anderson worked the tricky takeoff on the quarterpipe transition to get a backside 540, before landing a Cab 720 nose grab off the second jump and finishing with a massive switch backside 540. The run earned her a 90.95, which would hold up for the rest of the event. The win marks the fourth Burton US Open slopestyle title Anderson has claimed.

Read the whole story

Court upholds ban on high-capacity gun magazines

By Lydia O'Connor, Huffington Post

Signaling a major win for gun control advocates, a California court ruled Wednesday that a city's ban on high-capacity gun magazines is both constitutional and in the best interest of a city trying to curb gun violence.

The 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals upheld a ruling that the Sunnyvale, California, city ordinance, which prohibits the possession of ammunition magazines capable of holding more than 10 rounds, does not violate the Second Amendment. The lawsuit was brought forward by the National Rifle Association and other gun groups.

"The Second Amendment right is 'not a right to keep and carry

any weapon whatsoever in any manner whatsoever and for whatever purpose,'" Judge Michael Daly Hawkins wrote for the unanimous three-judge panel.

Read the whole story

Sandoval signs prevailing wage bill

By Associated Press

A bill that will suspend Nevada's prevailing wage rules on school construction projects was signed into law by Gov. Brian Sandoval on Friday.

Senate Bill 119 will extend school construction bonds beyond the term approved by voters as a way to ease overcrowding, but also ends rules that are essentially a minimum wage for contractors.

It was opposed by Democrats who said it would harm middle-class contractors. Some conservatives opposed the bill because they see the bond rollover as a tax increase.

The governor issued the following statement after signing SB119, companion legislation to SB207, Schools for the New Nevada, Building for our Future: "Children across Nevada need more schools now, and our education system has limited resources to build them. This narrowly tailored, extraordinary measure will allow school districts to stretch these limited resources as far as possible to meet an immediate need."

LTCC students join march on Capitol



College students on March 5 protest in Sacramento.
Photo/Jessica Nicole

By Ben Deci, Fox-40

Higher education students, including those from Lake Tahoe Community College, and staff marched on the Capitol Building Thursday to express their frustrations with Gov. Jerry Brown and UC President Janet Napolitano.

Brown is threatening to cut \$120 million in funding to the University of California system if there are tuition increases and more out-of-state students admitted, but Napolitano promises to do both of those things unless the state can come up with a \$219 million bump to those schools.

As the UC and CSUS systems are deciding how to serve students, who gets in and who's left out next fall, Brown and Napolitano have formed a committee of two – a closed door negotiation to hammer out a deal for next year.

Read the whole story

Calif. bill would protect civilians recording police

By Patrick McGreevy, Los Angeles Times

From the LAPD beating of Rodney King 24 years ago to last year's death of Eric Garner after a scuffle with New York police officers, bystanders who recorded the incidents on video have allowed the public to see at least some of what happened.

One California state senator wants to protect citizens who properly record the actions of officers in public from arrest or interference by the police. State Sen. Ricardo Lara, D-Bell Gardens, has introduced legislation that would clarify that a civilian who makes an audio or video recording of a police officer, while the officer is in a public place, is not violating the law.

Read the whole story