

TRAVEL HOTSPOTS

IDAHO'S NEWEST PARADISE

With copious snowfall, challenging trails, world-class amenities and chic accommodations, **Tamarack** is fast becoming the ski destination of choice for those in the know

BY JACQUELYNN D. POWERS



Although it has been open for just three years, **Tamarack**, one of the newest ski resorts in the country, has been garnering attention for its impressive snowfall (300 inches a year), challenging trails (39 runs), incredible amenities (such as a first-class spa and gourmet grocery) and chic and comfortable accommodations (from hotel suites to estate homes). Located in Idaho's Payette River Mountains about 95 miles north of Boise, Tamarack is still an unspoiled, natural vacation destination. It lacks pretension, heaving crowds and trendy PR girls in Gucci ski boots. The land—more than 3,600 acres—is mainly undeveloped and pristine. Happily, the resort's development plans, which are under way, are tasteful and in scale for this awesome piece of scenery.

While Idaho is primarily known for Sun Valley, where moguls, politicians and established movie stars winter (think Warren Buffett, John Kerry, Arnold Schwarzenegger and Candice Bergen), Tamarack is giving its neighboring ski resort some serious competition. Already, Young Hollywood—including Jason Biggs, Brody Jenner, Matt Leinart, Ryan Phillippe, Eric Dane, Jason Lewis, Hilary Duff, Jessica Biel

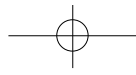
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Tamarack has started to siphon celebrity A-listers away from better-known resorts with its charm and winter-wonderland lifestyle, exemplified by homes and buildings such as this chalet and custom log home, above left.

and Stacy Keibler—has “discovered” Tamarack.

There is also a bit of a rivalry, as Tamarack boosters claim it receives 100 more inches of snow per year than Sun Valley. This up-and-coming hotspot is also incredibly high-tech, with the latest innovations in the ski industry, including a 400-foot-long superpipe, which makes snowboarders salivate. Tamarack's summit is 7,700 feet (its base elevation is 4,900 feet), and there are 1,100 skiable acres. Most significantly, the slopes are reserved for a maximum of 2,000 skiers a day. That means no lines at



PHOTOGRAPHS BY SHERRI HARKIN

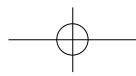
The slopes are reserved for a maximum of 2,000 skiers a day. That means no lines at any of the seven ski lifts.

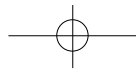
any of the seven ski lifts.

Skiing is not the only pastime at Tamarack, however. There's also snowshoeing, sledding and snowmobiling. During my recent holiday there, I tried out all three winter-wonderland activities and can report that snowshoeing is the most arduous of the trio, with specialized footgear that has evolved from the days of those funny-looking tennis-racket shoes. This modern pursuit requires cardiovascular endurance and a great tolerance to the cold (it was 11 degrees). However, it's

breathtaking to trek off trails and walk on virgin snow. The half-day experience included a knowledgeable guide, lunch and snowshoe rental. Sledding is, by far, a more leisurely hobby. Our group went, via a horse-driven sleigh, to the middle of a forest, where gregarious elk quickly surrounded us. They were attracted to the bales of hay we were sitting on, which made for some intense moments as the elk literally nibbled the straw *thisclose* to our derrières (I kept hoping the elk weren't too hungry).

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TAMARACK



Clockwise from above: Big-name celebrities are quickly discovering Tamarack's charms, including fashion-model-turned-actor Jason Lewis, above and right, pictured at the Fairmont; Arizona Cardinals quarterback Matt Leinart; and University of Southern California basketball star Brynn Cameron, Leinart's girlfriend.



Probably my most memorable experience was our snowmobiling excursion. This all-day outing began with a 45-minute bus ride, which deposited us in an area designated for the snowmobile set. After suiting up in full gear (including heavy helmets and snowsuits), we formed a caravan of snowmobiles. It was like joining a biker gang—only on the snow and far more hip—and the scenery we passed, albeit at 30 miles per hour, was awe-inspiring. Our final destination was a natural hot spring called **Burgdorf**, near the **Payette National Forest**. This quaint community dates back to the 1860s and features genuine hot springs, as well as a cluster of original wood cabins (sans electricity, of course). Amazingly, we all slipped into our bathing suits and braved the single-digit weather for a dip in the steaming water. Braver souls, myself included, took a dip in the so-called "lobster pot," which is a blistering 113 degrees. Part of the tradition is to roll around in the snow after your time in the lobster pot, but I declined. Instead, our guides prepared a gourmet meal in one of the cabins, and then it was

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back to the snowmobile races.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY SHERRI HARKIN.

For cold-weather haters, Tamarack is a year-round retreat, with a wide variety of summertime activities. The resort is situated on the shores of **Lake Cascade**, which offers water-skiing, wake-boarding and fishing opportunities. Lake Cascade, which was created in 1949 for hydroelectric-power and irrigation purposes, boasts 86 miles of shoreline. Here, guests can rent pontoon boats, fishing boats, kayaks, Hobie



TAMARACK



Stars such as actor Jason Biggs, left, with a friend, are showing up in increasing numbers to enjoy Tamarack's winter sports offerings, such as snowmobiling, above.

Cats and sailboats. From May to October, there are also guided, full-day white-water rafting trips along the Payette River. Golfers will want to spend their free time at Osprey Meadows, an 18-hole championship course designed by Robert Trent Jones, Jr., which was rated one of the top-10 new golf courses by *Golf* magazine and is also open from May to October. There's also hiking, mountain biking and zipline tours, which allow adventure seekers to soar above the trees.

While Tamarack's infrastructure is still being built, some wonderful amenities are already in place. For upscale dining, there is **Morels Restaurant**, which is open for breakfast, lunch and dinner. Evening entrees include local venison, salmon and elk (although, hopefully, not the ones with whom we were socializing during the sleigh ride). There's also the buffet-style **Canoe Grill** for breakfast and lunch; and **Seven Devil's Pub**, where the fare is hearty and the drinks are potent. I was addicted to the hot chocolate spiked with Kahlúa. At **Crane Creek Market**, guests can purchase organic products, prepared meals, wine, fruit and cheese. The **Sports Dome** features gear rental and valet (whether it be for skis or mountain bikes), a retail store and coffee bar. A mid-mountain restaurant (it will be open by next ski season) and the **Village at Tamarack**, which will mix specialty boutiques (not chain stores) with dining venues (think sushi, crepes and fondue), are currently being built. The Village is slated for completion in 2008.

Lodging offers several options: **The Lodge at Osprey Meadows** is a traditional hotel with an amazing spa, boutique, pool, hot tub and restaurant. Its **Santé Spa** features massages (Swedish, hot-stone,

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aromatherapy), body treatments (salt glow, sunless tanning and aroma detox) and beauty treatments (facials, waxing, makeup application, manicures and pedicures). The Lodge at Osprey Meadows also features bigger suites (up to three bedrooms) with full kitchens and dining areas. There are also adorable cottages, town homes, chalets and impressive estate homes for rent, all of which boast ski-lodge-chic décor, fireplaces and fully equipped kitchens. These houses, some of which are megamansions, are perfect for families, big groups and high rollers and can accommodate from four to 12 guests.

New on the scene is **Fairmont**, which is a joint venture between married tennis stars Andre Agassi and Steffi Graf (via their Agassi Graf Development) and Bayview Financial (a Miami-based company). This deluxe condo/hotel is located at the base village of

Tamarack and will include a 17,000-square-foot spa, three restaurants, a grand ballroom, 24-hour concierge service, swimming pool, fitness center, valet parking and six boutiques. Agassi and Graf are very connected with this project and have been involved with the décor, finishes, vibe and marketing. Accordingly, this partnership and the project's association with Fairmont hotels—which is synonymous with luxury in markets such as London, Acapulco, Dubai and Hawaii—is expected to result in a stunning final product. Units will feature fireplaces, private balconies, spacious bathrooms, upscale kitchenettes and 42-inch high-definition televisions. When it debuts in early 2010, there will be 225 condos (69 of which are private residences), ranging from studios to three-bedroom units and penthouse suites. Sales have begun, with prices starting at \$750,000 and topping out at \$5 million. A second phase, exclusively of Fairmont offerings, is also being constructed midmountain.

Of course, with this burgeoning development and recent celebrity interest, it won't be long before Tamarack is the next Aspen—hopefully minus the attitude. There is something about being in Idaho, however, that is immediately calming. Maybe it is the change in climate, altitude and environment. Egos are checked at Boise Airport, from which guests can then drive two hours to Tamarack, which is located near the town of Donnelly, or fly privately to McCall Municipal Airport, which is 20 minutes away from the resort. Yes, Tamarack is difficult to get to, but all great destinations require some effort. 🏔️

For more information, visit tamarackidaho.com and fairmonttamarack.com.