

# escape

IT'S a safety hazard having a ski resort with such an incredible view.

As I am skiing down a gentle top-to-bottom run, I find I am spending more time staring sideways at the deep blue lake below than watching where I am going, or looking out for other skiers.

The lake, quite frankly, is huge.

Set against the soft blue sky, pure white snow and green pine trees, it spreads from one side of the valley across the horizon to the other.

As we continue down the mountain the colours come to life even more, with the water around the rim a striking turquoise beside a dark yellow sand beach.

Nestled among the forest are several buildings – the casinos which distinguish the Nevada side of Heavenly from the California side.

It's possible to ski between each state several times in one day.

I'm there visiting my friend Suzy, who moved to the area several years ago after falling in love with an American, Tom, she met working at a nearby ski resort.

As we ski down a track through a small canyon, the only sounds I can hear are the wind beneath my helmet and the swishing of skis on the snow.

Later that afternoon, we take a drive to the beach we saw in the distance from the top of the mountain, and go for a stroll along the pine cone-dotted sand in our ski boots.

People are walking their dogs along the shore, silhouetted in the receding sun in front of the white lines of ski runs cut into the forest.

We drive around the lake's eastern shore to see the massive, multimillion-dollar wood and stone mansions in Incline Village, where comedian Robin Williams has a home.

Heavenly is located in the Sierra Nevada mountain range.

The closest airport is Reno, which I knew little about before arriving other than the fact Johnny Cash sang a song about shooting a man there just to watch him die.

While Heavenly is crowded in some areas, in others you feel like you have the mountain all to yourself.

If you look for it, you will also find some challenging terrain.

"This is why I came skiing in America," I think as I approach the bottom of a steep, protected chute known as Ernies, causing a mini-avalanche as I go.



## Up and away to a magic ride

There are only a few places on earth where you can be forgiven for thinking you are in heaven. This is one, writes Angela Saurine

After lunch, snow begins to fall. It gets thicker as the afternoon goes on.

The ground cover gets softer and softer until it feels like gliding on silk.

The snow continues throughout the night and the next day Tom leads us to an area called Firebreak, which

got its name from a controlled burn which ripped through the mountain in the 1990s.

Entry is through a gate covered with red signs advising about such things as avalanches and cliffs. "WARNING – YOU CAN DIE," it screams.

We traverse across the mountain before coming to a clearing in the trees.

Below us sits hundreds of hectares of terrain with about 20cm of untracked snow on top. Here I feel I understand how the resort got its name.

Typically, the snow in California isn't as dry as it is in, say, Colorado, but this is pretty good and not too deep for those more used to handling Australian conditions.

Dodging tree stumps and fallen branches which lie horizontally



**TOP OF THE WORLD:** Skiing the slopes around Heavenly Resort near South Lake Tahoe (main and above) ; the old mining town of Gold Hill (top right); and the Heavenly gondola.