



bumpy trails, which eventually lead to the road we use to walk back to the gondola on which we sit, exhausted, and decide to do it all again.

While Heavenly has a fair bit of traversing on piste, perhaps making it more suitable to skiers than snowboarders, it also offers lots of nice, long, wide runs which you can own, as well as good in-bounds tree skiing in good snow.

But, as anywhere, it pays to be careful.

Sonny Bono died when he hit a tree while skiing here in 1998.

As well as the stunning views, Heavenly's biggest selling points are its size, good customer service and accessible location.

After a few days skiing, we decide to take a day off to explore the surrounding area.

We pass the remnants of old rustic buildings of a former mining town, Gold Hill, on the way to Virginia City, which was one of the boomtowns of the late 19th century.

Mark Twain started his journalism career in this area, and Virginia City now has a museum in his name.

The town also offers quirky shop-fronts such as the Bucket of Blood Saloon and a souvenir shop which sells candy in wine barrels, road signs, and John Wayne tins.

After Virginia City we head to Nevada's oldest saloon, Genoa Bar, for a Genoa pale ale.

Built in 1853, the bar's patrons over the years have included the actor



Clark Gable, president Theodore Roosevelt, country music singers such as Willie Nelson and Johnny Cash and, of course, Twain.

The walls are covered in deer heads, old snowshoes, American flags and black and white photos.

When we arrive, two regulars named Dave and Jim are at the bar.

Dave, who is wearing a Harley Davidson T-shirt and a baseball cap, tells me he is a hunter whose Scottish grandfather migrated here and married a Native American woman.

He regales us with stories about the two rattlesnakes he has been bitten by in his life, and riding his Harley Davidson along Route 66.

"Bar closed! Bar closed!" he cries jokingly when another man walks in, before introducing us to the 84-year-old they say still bales hay every day.

Suzy and I think he looks more like he is 60. It must be the mountain air.

The writer travelled with assistance from Vail Resorts and United Airlines

Essentials

Getting there: V Australia (www.vaustralia.com.au, 13 82 87) and Qantas (www.qantas.com.au, 13 13 13) fly to Los Angeles from Brisbane. United Airlines (www.unitedairlines.com.au, 13 17 77) flies a direct daily service from Sydney and Melbourne to Los Angeles. From there you can connect with Horizon Air (horizonair.com) to Reno.



Skiing there: People who want to combine a trip to Heavenly with other resorts can purchase an Epic Pass for US\$649 (\$627) which also gives access to ski at Vail, Beaver Creek, Breckenridge, Keystone and Arapahoe Basin for an entire season. See www.epicpass.com

Staying there: South Lake Tahoe has a large choice of lodging options. You can choose to stay in the casino area, Nevada base, California base or the Heavenly Village gondola base.

More: www.skiheavenly.com

covered in snow, we continue down and eventually reach a section of black, burnt-out trees.

Their charcoal exterior is a stark contrast to the bright white blanket of snow.

Using two green water tanks in the

distance as markers to make sure we are heading in the right direction, we ski on to the bottom section which is nicknamed "bobsled" thanks to its many natural twists and turns.

We are forced to jump the odd tree branch and skirt around rocks on the



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