


WASHINGTON

Schuss Away From It All

 Sleeping Lady, a mountain resort near Leavenworth, gets everything right in a very Pacific Northwest way, from its rustic-luxe log beds and heated towel racks to its rain forest-friendly fair-trade coffee. But the best reason to shack up at the eastern Cascades resort is its proximity to off-the-radar skiing. Just out the door on a forested valley floor are 16 miles of groomed XC trails paralleling Icicle Creek and a dormant golf course along the Wenatchee River; up the road is one of the state's most challenging backcountry tours, on Mount Cashmere (guide recommended; \$180; mountainschool.net). And then there's the Leavenworth Ski Hill, where two—count 'em, two—groomed trails are lighted three nights a week and accessed via rope tow (\$10; skileavenworth.com). And if you've got a bit of Eddie the Eagle in you, the hill offers a ski jump, with coaches on hand to talk you through your first flight.

CALIFORNIA
Paddle Mavericks


 The very big wave (up to 50 feet) at Mavericks off Pillar Point in Half Moon Bay is a Very Big Deal when it builds in December, culminating in an annual surf competition that's confirmed only 24 hours in advance (check mavericksurf.com for updates). When the word goes out, the world descends (front-row seats are on boat tours). But winter brings plenty of calm days too—ideal for crossing the Fitzgerald Marine Reserve with Half Moon Bay Kayak Co. On a four-hour paddle across the sleeping giant, you'll see harbor porpoises, sea lions, and the occasional humpback whale (\$100; hmbkayak.com). The new and very green Oceano Hotel is your base camp for either experience (doubles from \$509; oceanohalfmoonbay.com).

CALIFORNIA
Wait for the Big One

 The San Andreas Fault may keep Southern Californians plenty nervous, but few outsiders realize that it's "not a hole in the ground like the one Lois Lane fell into in *Superman*," says Mary Dungans of Desert Adventures. Instead, the fault, as it skirts the desert near Palm Springs, is a tortured landscape of steep mountains, deep canyons, weird uplifts, and dense palm oases. It's all made clear on a half-day Desert Adventures tour of the company's private thousand-acre ranch (\$129; red-jeep.com). The winter months are also a great time to explore the trails in nearby Joshua Tree National Park—for instance,

the mountainous, 6.2-mile loop to the ghostly ruins of Lost Horse Mine (\$15; nps.gov/jotr).

OREGON
Hide Out on Mount Hood

 A hidden alternative to hulking Mount Hood and its mega ski operation, three cozy huts sit within Mount Hood National Forest southeast of the big mountain. Each sleeps eight and is furnished with lanterns, sleeping bags, propane heating, and a modest kitchen (\$150 by advance reservation only; cascadehuts.com). The cabins are spaced several miles apart at Barlow Creek, Barlow Butte, and White River. Ski or snowshoe a few miles through old-growth Douglas fir forests on marked trails to any one of the three from U.S. 26 and Oregon 35; or, if you're feeling ambitious, make the longer trip from hut to hut.




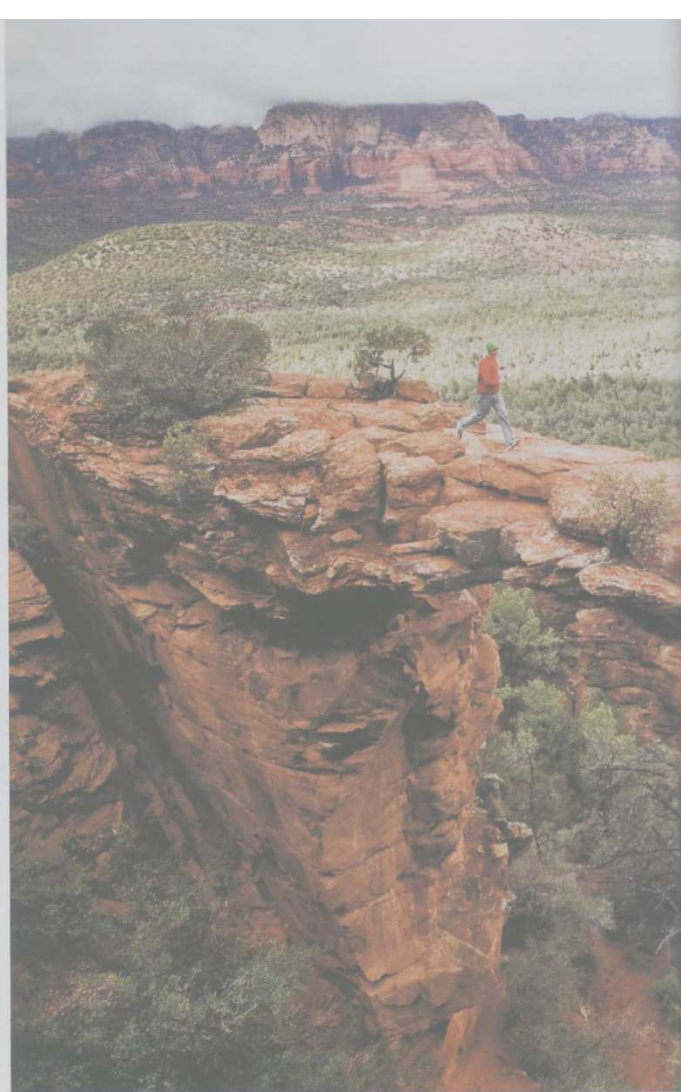
A Dr. Seussian star of Joshua Tree N.P.

MOUNTAIN

ARIZONA

Reach a Higher Plane

 "I guarantee our outing will be the highlight of your visit," says Dennis Andres, who modestly calls himself "Mr. Sedona." As a hiking guide and guidebook author, he earns the title leading clients on challenging routes through the sandstone beauty that surrounds this high-desert capital of western mysticism (\$350; sedonaprivateguides.com). The author of *What Is a Vortex?* even speaks the local New Age dialect fluently. So a hike with Andres up, say, Bear Mountain (five miles, 1,803 feet of elevation gain) or a 4.6-mile secret loop past seven sacred pools is more than a scenic jaunt; he says it's an energizing experience that can include the option of a meditation session, "ideal for both the skeptic and the spiritualist." In a town rife with supernaturally expensive places to sleep and eat, Sky Ranch Lodge stands out for humble prices and great views (doubles from \$80; skyranchlodge.com), and the nearby Cowboy Club serves up heavenly prickly pear cactus fries.



PHOTOGRAPHS, FROM LEFT: IAN SHIVE/GETTY IMAGES; STEVEN MCBRIDE PHOTOGRAPHY; DAVE AMIS