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Mountaintop resort offers many amenities

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WINTHROP, WASH. — When it opened in 1968, Sun Mountain was the culmination of local resident Jack Barron's desire to share the countryside he loved with others. Situated midway between Seattle and Spokane, it occupies a 3,000-foot high mountaintop with spectacular 360-degree views of the Methow Valley below and the rugged mountain peaks of the North Cascades National Park above.

THE BASICS: In 1987, the property was purchased by the Haub brothers from Germany. They renovated the resort and opened the new lodge in 1990.

Today, the resort enjoys the reputation as one of the premier destination resorts in the northwest. It is the recipient of numerous awards, including the AAA Four Diamond Award (yearly since 1994) and the Wine Spectator Award of Excellence.

THE UNIQUE: One of the tree trunks used for the lobby fireplace might be large enough to supply the lumber needed to build an average house.

The resort is the recipient of a very large collection of animal heads once owned by a local guide. He asked lodge owners to buy and display the collection shortly before his death. Judging by the size and variety of game on display, the fellow must have had little time to do anything other than hunt.

ACTIVITIES: The resort takes full advantage of the outdoor setting with 30 miles of hiking trails and 40 miles of mountain biking trails. Horseback riding is offered at the resort stable. A fishing pond and tennis courts are on lodge property along with workout and game rooms. Fly fishing, river rafting, canoeing and golf are nearby options. Two pools and three hot tubs are perched on the ridgeline and provide outstanding mountain views.

Winter activities include the second largest cross-country ski and snowshoe

trail system in America, with 125 miles of groomed trails that begin at the front door of the lodge. Add in an ice skating rink, horse drawn sleigh rides and a sledding hill. A ski lift at the Loup Loup Ski Bowl is about 25 miles away, but the resort arranges to transport you by helicopter if money is not an issue.

A mile from the lodge is 120-acre Patterson Lake, offering kayaks, rowboats, paddleboats and canoes.

After the resort activities have worn you out, the full-service Sun Mountain Lodge Spa awaits.

THE ROOMS: The lodge has 45 rooms, while 52 others are in the Gardner and Mount Robinsons buildings. All have views of the Methow Valley or Mount Gardner and the North Cascades mountain range. Bed accommodations vary widely from one king bed to a room with a queen with two day beds.

Resort rooms feature peeled log furniture; most have a gas or wood fireplace, wet bar and private patio. Rooms in the Mount Robinson building are for couples only and include a jetted whirlpool tub and a sitting area with a desk and modem.

For families, the lodge offers one, two and three bedroom cabins on the shores of Patterson Lake. All have private verandas overlooking the lake.

THE GUESTS: Travelers arrive from every state and from all over the world.

THE FOOD: The resort restaurant open for all meals is simply known as the Dining Room. Northwest regional ingredients are featured including naturally grown herbs and vegetables from nearby Sunny M Farm, tenderloin of Washington state beef and mushrooms foraged from the Cascade Mountains that surround the lodge.

The Wolf Creek Bar & Grill offers lighter, less expensive fare and features a wraparound deck with fantastic views of the Methow Valley.

Sun Mountain Lodge's wine cellar features more than 5,000 bottles and 450

labels of mostly Northwest and California wines. Designed to mirror the classic cave cellars of Europe, it features stone and ironwork as well as a large cherry wood dining table with seating for 14.

From spring through fall, cowboy camp dinners and buckaroo breakfasts are served at an old homestead. Guests can arrive by horseback or in a horse-drawn wagon.

THE HIGH POINTS: Guests who want to experience more of the area will find plenty to do at the base of the mountain in this tiny town. Business owners joined to create a main street lined with boardwalk sidewalks and storefronts reminiscent of the late 1880s when the town was founded. A Friday night "Hoot, Holler, Yodel and Sing" is free, but guests must bring their own stick (BYOS) to roast marshmallows.

THE LOW POINTS: Sun Mountain advertises that all rooms are "television free." As a result, guests are forced to make choices such as enjoying the numerous activities available or relaxing in one of the outdoor hot tubs.

THE BOTTOM LINE: Room rates vary between \$160 and \$320 Oct. 21 through June 14, and \$195 to \$390 during the summer. Suites range from \$360 to \$775. Patterson Lake cabins are \$230 to \$310 for the winter, spring and fall dates. Summer rates range from \$300 to \$380. Suite cabins range from \$320 to \$780.

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