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Houseboating Getaways on beautiful Lake Shasta

THE GETAWAY GURU



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Now stay with me on this one, because I'm about to let you in on one of my top outdoor getaway secrets: fall-season houseboating on Lake Shasta. Why? First, because you can save more than \$1000 off summer rental rates. Second, it's still plenty warm both above and below the water. And third, that lake is all yours, because very few people know that fall-season houseboating one of the most affordable, fun, relaxing, and romantic getaways in California.

THE HOUSEBOAT CAPITAL OF THE WORLD

There's a reason why they call Lake Shasta the "Houseboat Capital of the World." As the largest fresh-water reservoir in California, it's the perfect introduction to the pleasures of houseboating, and one of the most enjoyable ways friends and family can spend time together. To fully appreciate Lake Shasta's 370 miles of shoreline, you need to explore it by boat, and even if you've never driven a boat in your life there's nothing to worry about: You're going too slow to do much damage, and the banks are mostly soft mud anyway.

My friends and I went on a houseboat trip on Lake Shasta in September last year and we all agreed it was the highlight of our summer. We rented an Escapade model that had a slide (wicked fun), hot tub, and a rooftop deck that was big enough to dance on (and we did—every night we held a moonlit dance party on the roof). The houseboats are fully loaded with full kitchens and utensils (tip: bring a good knife if you like to cook), showers, private bedrooms, and everything else you need for a relaxing weekend on



the lake. You just need to bring food, drinks, bedding, and personal items. You can rent houseboats from several companies around the lake, but I highly recommend the super-friendly and very professional crew at Jones Valley Resort (877/468-7326; www.houseboats.com). As soon as we arrived the staff greeted us at the parking lot, carried all of our luggage from the car to the boat (and we had a lot of stuff), and gave us a detailed tour of the boat and how to operate it. And yes, they lug all your luggage back to your car as well—what service!

You can also rent a ski boat or wave runner and tow it behind the houseboat—we used our Sea Ray for bass fishing, wake boarding, visiting Shasta Caverns, and just tooling around.

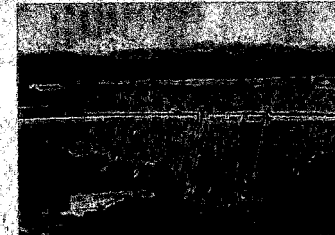
LAKE SHASTA CAVERNS

One of the highlights of our trip was a guided tour of the crystal-studded stalagmites and stalactites within Lake Shasta Caverns (800/795-2283; www.lakeshastacaverns.com). The stalactites and stalagmites in these caves are massive, and 60-foot-wide curtains of them adorn the great Cathedral Room. Even getting there was fun, because you can dock your ski boat nearby (or park your houseboat on the shoreline), walk up to the staging area, then climb onto a bus for scenic ride up to the caverns. The caverns are open every day year-round.

And anglers take note: Lake Shasta is one of the top spots in the state for bass and trout fishing. We hired a guide, Arnold Fantelli, who met us at our houseboat in the morning with a thermos full of

coffee—what service! We hopped from our houseboat to his bass boat, sped off to his secret fishing spot, and he had us catching bass for hours. All we needed to bring was sunscreen and lunch—he provided everything else, and we learned a lot of new fishing techniques. For more information about hiring a fishing guide, call Phil's Propeller Shop at 800/462-3917 and ask Tony or Phil to set you up.

And while you're tooling around the lake, keep your eye on the sky for a glimpse of the mighty bald eagle, the largest bird of prey in North America. Lake Shasta is currently the home of at least 18 pairs of the endangered bird—the largest nesting population of bald eagles in California.



DAM THAT'S BIG!

Also, be sure to set aside a few hours during your trip to visit the Shasta Dam and Power Plant. Shasta is the second-largest and second-tallest concrete dam in the United States. In fact, it contains enough concrete to build a

3-foot-wide sidewalk around the world, and has an overflow spillway that is three times higher than Niagara Falls. It's one of the most impressive civil engineering feats in the nation.

The free hour-long dam tour here is outstanding. It kicks off with a speedy elevator ride into the chilly bowels of the 15-million-ton, 602-foot-high structure—definitely not recommended for claustrophobes. Dam tours are scheduled every day; call 530/275-4463 for tour information. Tip: Google "shasta dam tour pdf" for a great introduction to your tour.

For more information about houseboat rentals and fun things to do in the Lake Shasta region, log on to these three websites: houseboats.com, shastacascade.com, and visitredding.com. And for more fun and affordable getaways ideas throughout California, visit LocalGetaways.com, where you can find hundreds of other local travel tips and the best local travel deals around.



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