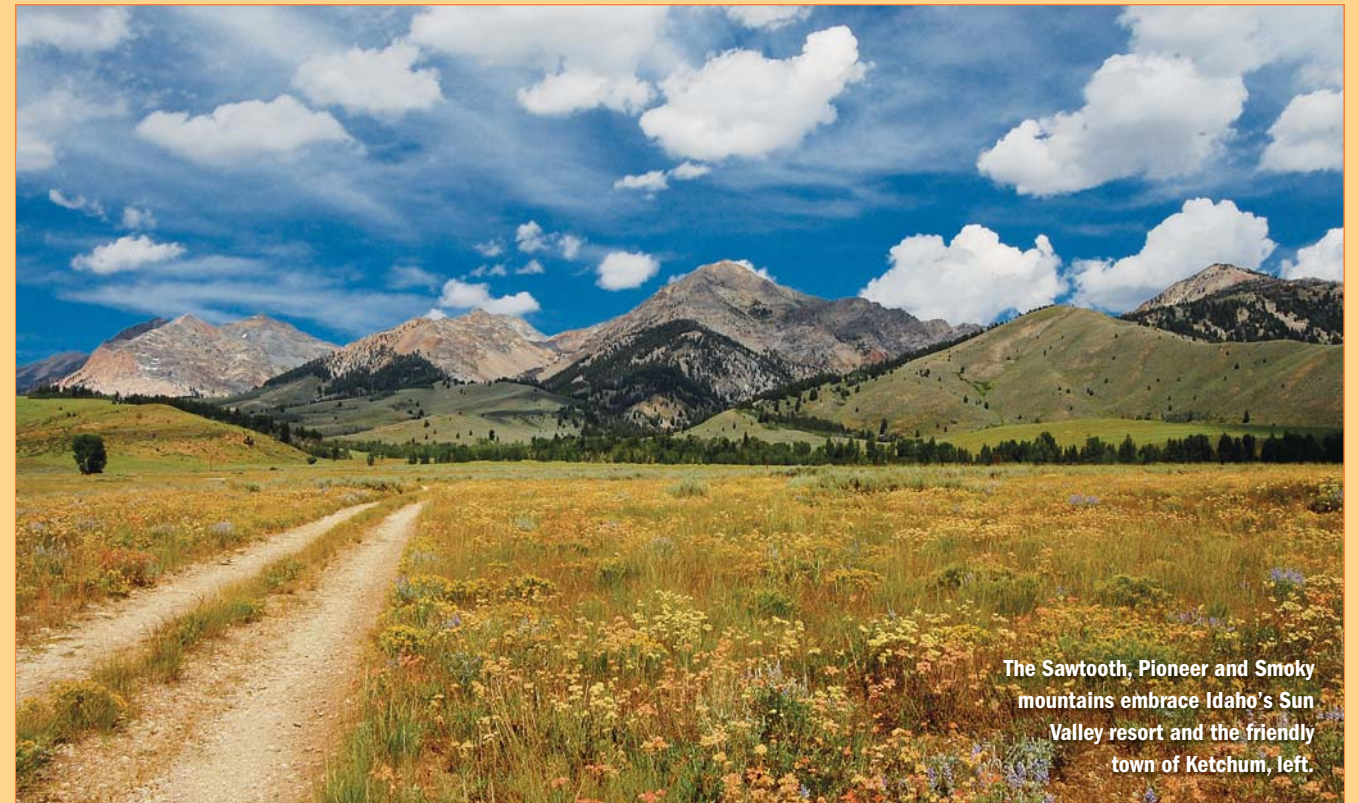


SUMMER SUN AND HAPPY TRAILS IN
IDAHO'S ANSWER TO AUSTRIA

By Emily Fagan • Photography by Emily and Mark Fagan

America's ALPS



The Sawtooth, Pioneer and Smoky mountains embrace Idaho's Sun Valley resort and the friendly town of Ketchum, left.



Just their name, the Sawtooth Mountains, has always evoked images of rugged and towering snowcapped peaks slicing the crisp blue horizon with a forbidding air. So it was a great surprise when we pulled into Ketchum, Idaho, for the first time and found ourselves caught up in the warm embrace of a vibrant, dynamic and friendly town.

The café tables scattered along every street were filled with a happy mix of visitors and residents relaxing in the sparkling mountain air. An active outdoor summer community, the Ketchum area always has something going on, whether it's a musician strumming his guitar in the town center, a farmer's market, the Sawtooth Century bike ride, the Sun Valley Road Rally sports-car race or a free outdoor concert by the Sun Valley Symphony. The month we spent inhaling the fragrant, revitalizing essence of this town went by in the blink of an eye.

Ketchum's original roots are in silver mining. Founded in 1880 by David Ketchum, the town quickly boomed, only to fall on hard times with the crash of the silver market in the 1890s. A visit to the Ore Wagon Museum paints a vivid picture of the town in its mining heyday.

Something about these mountains gives people enormous energy, though, for the town quickly became a sheep-herding mecca. By 1920 Ketchum was second in worldwide sheep exports only to Sydney, Australia. All of this is difficult to imagine while standing in the town center today, surrounded by trendy shops, tempting bistros and quirky artists' sculptures, all set against a backdrop of graceful mountains carved with ski runs.

Skiing first came to Ketchum as a necessity for miners, sheepherders and townsfolk as winter transportation. The Ski and Heritage Museum has some wonderful examples of old homemade skis.

The town made its indelible impression on the world of skiing during the Depression, however, when Averell Harriman, chairman of the Union Pacific Railroad, sought to build

a winter resort destination on his railroad line. He hired Felix Schaffgotsch, an Austrian count, to ride the railroad from end to end and select the best location. After rejecting every town and ready to give up, Schaffgotsch made one last stop in Ketchum. He fell in love with the place, as it reminded him of his homeland in the Austrian Alps. Just 11 months later, in December 1936, Sun Valley opened to great fanfare.

Harriman was a public-relations whiz. He put his new resort firmly on the map by inviting all the celebrities of the

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day to visit. During our visit we watched the utterly charming 1941 movie *Sun Valley Serenade*, starring three-time Olympic figure-skating champion Sonja Henie. Shown daily for free at the Opera House, the film is a delight. Milton Berle and Glen Miller's band play supporting roles, and hearing Glen

Miller play "In the Mood" and "Chattanooga Choo Choo" on his trombone is a treat. The movie shows Sun Valley as it once was, complete with winter tourists arriving by train and transferring to horse-drawn sleds to take them to the resort.

Today, the Sun Valley Lodge offers a glimpse into that glorious past, from its elegant front doors to the inviting, crackling fireplace. We were enchanted, drawn especially to the walls lined with photographs of every VIP imagina-

ble, grinning on the ski slopes. Harriman himself is pictured with all the great movie stars, politicians, artists and writers of his time.

The Ketchum visitor center provides a terrific list of 50 Fun Free Things to Do in town, and we eagerly ticked our way down that list. Taking a drive north along the Sawtooth

A paved bike path wends through Sun Valley and Ketchum with some steep climbs but utterly spectacular views.

Scenic Highway, we listened to an audio-tour CD that described, milepost by milepost, the history of what we were seeing out the car window and recommended stops along the way. The majestic Sawtooths can also be seen by mountain bike or on foot along the 18-mile Harriman Trail with many trailheads along Route 75. This trail meanders beside the Big Wood River from Ketchum north to Galena Lodge. On summer weekends Galena Lodge offers live music and delicious burgers on the patio.

A paved bike path wends through Sun Valley and Ketchum with some steep climbs but utterly spectacular views, then heads south out of town toward the small towns of Hailey and Bellevue. This path offers cyclists 30 miles of stunning, traffic-free scenery. After glancing at the eye-popping real-estate prices in Ketchum and Sun Valley, we were surprised to learn that nearby Hailey had been a town of wealthy merchants at the time that Ketchum was a grim and dirty town of mines and miners.

Sun Valley still retains the essence of being a resort on the outskirts of Ketchum. The Sun Valley Lodge is at the heart of the resort, with many places to explore around it. The outdoor ice-skating rink operates all summer long, and visitors can sit in the shaded stands and watch the skaters practice. We watched a young girl working on her spins with her coach and enjoyed seeing him take a spin around the rink himself a little later. Once a week there's an ice show featuring current and past champions. You can get a taste of the regal Sun Valley experience by buying a ticket that includes rink-side dining as well.

For a free night's entertainment, we reveled in three of the almost daily August performances by the Sun Valley Symphony at their new multi-million dollar outdoor pavilion. The pavilion is designed like a tent, with the roof not quite stretching to the ground, allowing the summer air to circulate freely. The music is also piped outside so casual listeners can picnic on blankets in the grass. While listening to Brahms' dark and brooding first piano concerto one evening, a summer storm started to brew outside. Suddenly, a gust of wind rushed through the auditorium, sweeping program notes and ladies' hats down the aisles. It made for a great dramatic

moment at the climax of the piece.

In the late afternoon, before each concert, there's a brief free lecture about the music to be played. You can also watch the final rehearsals before each evening's performance. One Saturday afternoon, we sat outside the pavilion in the grass to enjoy a children's program. Little girls, still dressed up as fairy princesses from the morning's Doll Parade in town, charmed us with their antics as we listened to *Peter and the Wolf*.

Not highbrow at all, the symphony is very accessible. One evening we heard Rogers and Hammerstein songs and later found ourselves in town surrounded by the white-ruffled tuxedo shirts, black pants and shiny shoes of many of the musicians as they mingled with friends and family at the coffee shops and bistros. We chatted with a viola player, while her two kids clung to her, and we made our beer selection in the grocery store alongside one of the trumpet players.

This kind of warm, easygoing charm fills the summer air in Ketchum and Sun Valley. It's a wonderful place to spend a few days, a month or even longer. ●



Biking rivals skiing in the hills and valleys near Ketchum. Below and left, August visitors make the most of the alpine setting with the Sun Valley Summer Symphony.



For More Information

Sun Valley/Ketchum Chamber and Visitors Bureau
www.visitsunvalley.com

Good Sam Parks
Idaho has 29 Good Sam Parks. To find them, consult the *2010 Trailer Life RV Parks and Campgrounds Directory* or www.goodsamclub.com (click on Travel Tools, then click on Find a Campground.)

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