

JANUARY+FEBRUARY 2006



# Via

The AAA Traveler's Companion

## Great Winter Getaways

**Santa Barbara, Calif.** 30 **Utah's Sundance Film Festival** 26  
**Ashland** 16 **Idaho's Silver Valley** 20  
**PLUS Portland's Cultural District** 18  
**The Space Needle** 49

Stroll hand in hand  
through Santa Barbara's  
Chase Palm Park.



# Ashland

Spend a few days in this southern Oregon arts hub and you'll come away convinced: Parting *is* sweet sorrow. **BY MICHAEL McRAE**





*At Out of the Blue: vintage mab-jongg tiles, agate spheres, and betel nuts.*

Jamie North, conjure up outstanding Dungeness crab cakes, wood-grilled rib-eye steak with angel-hair pommes frites, and North's unbelievably satisfying warm chocolate truffle cake with homemade coffee ice cream. If all you need is a quick lunch, Allyson's, on East Main Street less than a block from the Shakespeare fest's complex of theaters, is a gourmet deli tucked into a high-end cookware shop.

Next door is Out of the Blue, perhaps the most unusual shop in Ashland. Owner Kathleen Kuzmitz travels the world collecting rare beads, tribal masks, fabrics, geological specimens, and such extraordinary furniture as an antique Nigerian birthing chair. For my wife's 20th anniversary gift, Kuzmitz strung together a necklace of vintage gold beads from India, one of them studded with rubies.

Like Kuzmitz, my wife and I travel internationally for our work, and it's always a relief when our homeward flights skim the crest of Mount Ashland and drop into the valley. Some years after moving here, I wrote a book about the hidden valley in the Tibetan Himalayas that inspired the legend of Shangri-La. Circumstances prevented me from reaching that spot, and a Buddhist friend attributed my failure to bad karma. Actually, I like to think it's because I'd already attained my earthly paradise. ♦

MICHAEL McRAE is a contributing editor for *National Geographic Adventure* and author of *The Siege of Shangri-La*.

## If you're going . . .

Pick up AAA's *Oregon & Washington TourBook* and map. For more information, contact the **Ashland Chamber of Commerce** at (541) 482-3486 or visit [www.ashlandchamber.com](http://www.ashlandchamber.com). Area code is 541 unless noted.

### TO DO AND SEE

**Oregon Shakespeare Festival** See "Plays to see in 2006" on the facing page. **First Friday Art Walk** A walking tour of downtown galleries on the first Friday of each month, some serving wine and hors d'oeuvres. (877) 752-6278. **Lithia Park Woodland Trail** Guidebooks are \$2 at the chamber of commerce office, 110 E. Main St., 482-3486. **Mt. Ashland Ski Area** Twenty-three trails. 482-2897, [www.mtashland.com](http://www.mtashland.com).

**Oregon Cabaret Theatre** First and Hargadine streets, 488-2902, [www.oregoncabaret.com](http://www.oregoncabaret.com). **Rogue Valley Symphony** On the Southern Oregon University campus, 552-6398, [www.rvsymphony.org](http://www.rvsymphony.org).

### EATS

**Allyson's** Soups, salads, and generous sandwiches. 115 E. Main St., 482-2884. **Amuse** French-Pacific Northwest cuisine. 15 N. First St., 488-9000. **New Sammy's Cowboy Bistro** Acclaimed restaurant just outside of town. Opens Feb. 14; book well in advance. 2210 S. Pacific Hwy., 535-2779. **Pilaf** Vegetarian dishes from the Middle East, the Mediterranean, and India. 18 Calle Guanajuato, 488-7898.

### SLEEPS

Rates listed here range from the lowest-price room in low season (winter) to the highest-price room in high season (summer). **Ashland Creek Inn** \$125-\$300. Luxurious B&B on the creek, a block from the plaza. Seven suites, all with kitchens and decks; some with fireplaces. 70 Water St., 482-3315, [www.ashlandcreekinn.com](http://www.ashlandcreekinn.com). **Ashland Springs Hotel** \$69-\$199. On-site restaurant and 70 rooms. 212 E. Main St., (888) 795-4545, [www.ashlandsspringshotel.com](http://www.ashlandsspringshotel.com). **Peerless Hotel and Restaurant** \$74-\$242. Restored 1900 brick boardinghouse in the Railroad District with four rooms and two suites. 243 Fourth St., (800) 460-8758, [www.peerlesshotel.com](http://www.peerlesshotel.com). **Winchester Inn** \$129-\$239. Full restaurant, wine bar, and 19 rooms and suites in two cottages and two Victorian homes. 35 S. Second St., (800) 972-4991, [www.winchesterinn.com](http://www.winchesterinn.com).



*Partly manicured, partly wild, Lithia Park covers 93 acres on Ashland's edge.*



**I**N 1988, WHEN MY WIFE AND I announced that we were moving from Marin County, Calif., to Ashland, Ore., our friends reacted with understanding and sympathy. One, a feature writer for the *San Francisco Chronicle*, made examples of us in an article deploring the fact that the Bay Area's stratospheric cost of living was causing a "brain drain"—a flight of writers, artists, software engineers, filmmakers, and so on. Being mentioned in such creative company was flattering but also unsettling because the story's subtext was that we were forsaking the very Olympus of culture and culinary arts for a dreary life in the provinces.

Now, 18 years after our move, two major revelations about culture and cuisine in Ashland come fondly to mind, ironically both involving refugees. The first occurred shortly after we arrived, at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival's performance of Janusz Glowacki's *Hunting Cockroaches*, a riotous farce about two Polish émigrés living in a crummy apartment on Manhattan's Lower East Side. Watching the play—superbly acted and staged in the most intimate of the festival's three venues—I realized that our fears of cultural deprivation had been sorely misplaced. Glowacki's acclaimed comedy had opened only a year earlier in New York, and here it was playing five minutes away from our new doorstep.

An edgy, contemporary play at a Shakespeare festival? "Our name can be misleading for people who don't know what we are," says festival spokesperson Amy Richard. "We are not just two weeks of Shakespeare in the summer. It's a real festival experience, with lectures, backstage tours, classes, music, and dance." This year, the festival's 71st, the eight-month season opens with previews on February 17 and the final curtain doesn't descend until October 29. Only four of the 11 plays are Shakespeare's. (See page 18 for a full schedule.)

My next epiphany about Ashland struck when I sampled Charlene Rollins's Copper River salmon in



Downhill skiers can check out trails named *Romeo, Juliet, and Tempest*.

tarragon-scented broth. Charlene, her husband, Vernon, and then baby boy, Sammy, were also Northern California refugees, having abandoned their celebrated but failing restaurant in Boonville. They had recently opened New Sammy's Cowboy Bistro just north of town in a renovated shack of a building that was once a gas station. Today it still has only six tables and no sign out front except for a blinking arrow. Vernon's wine cellar has grown, however—to 18,000 bottles—and the odds on snagging a last-minute reservation are only slightly better than on winning the Oregon lottery.

Lately our little town seems to have acquired a glossy reputation as the "next Napa," partly on the strength of its cultural offerings and Victorian charm but also due to the recent boom in wine touring in the surrounding Rogue Valley. Other assets include the vital downtown plaza and the lovely walking trails in Ashland's crown jewel, Lithia Park, a grassy 93-acre woodland that stretches along Ashland Creek up into the foothills of the Siskiyou Mountains. Our Mediterranean climate with long, sunbaked summers is



*Buckingham and Richard III* reveled in evil schemes during the 2005 season.



