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RESORT RECREATION AT THE PINES

Highway 41 traverses up the center of California, through wide valleys dotted with oak trees and boulders, on its way toward Yosemite National Park. Just 5 miles off Highway 41 and 15 miles south of Yosemite's south entrance, Bass Lake fills a basin bordered by ponderosa pines and the peaks of the Sierra National Forest. This is the scenic setting of The Pines Resort.

Water sports are the resort's recreational mainstay. Bass Lake is a popular outdoor playground that buzzes with boats and beachgoers during the summer months. Bass Lake Boat Rentals, located at The Pines, raises the excitement factor for vacationers with rental watercraft and gear available by the hour and the day. Thrill seekers opt for speedy ski boats and jet skis that can hold one, two or three riders. Those who prefer "people power" explore the lake by kayak, canoe or old-fashioned paddleboat.

For a relaxing outing, patio boats seat six and come with an ice chest and barbeque so families can pack a picnic to enjoy on the water. True outdoor enthusiasts head to Bass Lake to fish throughout the year. Besides bass, casters catch perch, catfish, freshwater salmon (Kokanee) and trout, among others. Rental fishing boats accommodate up to four people. Those new to the area might choose the three-hour guided fishing adventure, which packages boat rental with poles, bait, fuel and refreshments.

Of course, some guests bring their own boats to Bass Lake. Slip reservations come up for rent on January 1 of each year; a three-night minimum applies during the high season. Parking, restrooms and trash facilities are available near the docks. A convenient shop on the shoreline carries boating supplies, gear and tackle, snacks and snorkeling equipment. Wake board and water skiing lessons are offered each summer.

Land lovers appreciate Bass Lake's beaches, as well as the wide, sand-filled sitting area adjacent to The Pines Resort pool. Sun seekers kick back in beach chairs there and on the pool deck, as children frolic in the water and swimmers add short laps to their vacation schedule. A hot tub is open next to the pool, as is a summer-season snack bar.

Sporty types enjoy two tennis courts and a moveable basketball hoop located up the hill from the water. Exercise schedules don't have to suffer on the road, thanks to a fully equipped fitness room open to guests. Grassy open space and a children's playground are not far away.

Each December through February, adrenaline junkies sign up for local snowmobile tours. Guides lead guests into the snowy wilderness near the lake, winding around towering pines, crossing frozen creeks and passing by spectacular seasonal scenery. During a mid-adventure stop, riders are encouraged to build a snowman as they meet fellow participants and enjoy warm snacks.