



Nestled within Mount Charleston's forests are million-dollar homes, such as this 4,740-square-foot abode with a cedar-siding and stone exterior, a built-in fire pit, a copper-roofed gazebo and a spacious wraparound deck.

For expansive views and a laid-back lifestyle, head to Mount Charleston.



MOUNTAIN HIDEAWAYS

BY KATHLEEN FOLEY

Mount Charleston Offers Cool Vacation Homes and an Escape from Las Vegas

Summertime in Las Vegas can mean 115 degrees of intense desert heat—almost hot enough to melt your flip-flops into the asphalt. Wouldn't it be wonderful to escape to a close-by cooler locale for a weekend, or even for an afternoon?

Well, in fact, you can. Relief from the sultry summer heat is just a short drive away, in the alpine hideaway of Mount Charleston. Once one of Southern Nevada's best-kept secrets, the mountain hamlet is becoming an increasingly popular location for the construction of upscale homes—not only for year-round residents but also for those wanting a refreshing, peaceful weekend getaway from the hustle and bustle of Las Vegas.

Soaring to an altitude of 11,918 feet, Mount Charleston is one of the Spring Mountains, which form the western boundary of the Las Vegas Valley. Driving north from Las Vegas, you

can quickly leave the desert behind and enter a pine forest that is home to several exclusive residential enclaves.

THE DRAW OF MOUNT CHARLESTON

Gary Tomashowski of Mt. Charleston Realty said the mountain has always attracted Las Vegas residents who want a vacation home convenient enough for a weekend or daylong visit. He estimated that about half the mountain homes are owned by part-timers. The rest are full-time residents, most of whom live in Kyle Canyon, just south of Mount Charleston's peak. The surrounding aspen-and-pine forest provides ample hiking trails, camping and

recreational areas, and families here enjoy a myriad of outdoor activities, including winter sports, right in their collective backyard.

For example, just 20 minutes north of Kyle Canyon is the Las Vegas Ski & Snowboard Resort, with four lifts and 11 trails. Just down the mountain, you'll find the Mt. Charleston Lodge, which has a restaurant, a bar and rental cabins.

"Recreation on the mountain is completely different from Las Vegas," explained Tomashowski. "Communing with nature off your deck, hiking virtually outside your front door, horseback riding, snowboarding and biking—Vegas is

A custom-designed stone fireplace serves as the focal point for this living room, which features massive 33-foot-high cathedral ceilings. The house also offers a 10-person bar and a redwood deck with Jacuzzi spa, perfect for entertaining guests.



big-time in everything else, but not in this type of entertainment." Mount Charleston doesn't have the same 24-hour neon glow as Las Vegas, but "the chill-out aspect is great for people looking for balance in their lives," he said.

What's more, residents of Mount Charleston can enjoy the beauty of snow-covered peaks and the exhilaration of skiing and snowboarding without suffering bitter winter weather. In the summer, when the valley floor is steamy at more than 100 degrees, the temperature at Mount Charleston is in the 70s. Winter highs in the Las Vegas Valley average in the mid-60s, while the mountain temperature may be in the mid-30s.

"If our winters were just five degrees warmer, we wouldn't be able to have snowpack," Tomashowski explained. "Our weather is as mild as it can be to still have snow in the winter. We're in the same sunbelt as Las Vegas, with a similar number of sunny days."

LIVING LARGE

Tomashowski said he's seeing a trend develop now as more people are choosing to build luxury residences in Kyle Canyon as second and third homes. Most live in Las Vegas and many are empty-nesters with disposable income to spend on cozy mountain retreats. And professionals, business owners and casino executives recognize the value of having an upscale mountain home to entertain clients and to host company events like picnics and holiday parties.

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The solid-oak post-and-beam construction, oak flooring, cathedral ceilings and stone fireplace in this three-level, nearly \$1.7 million home echo Mount Charleston's naturally cool and airy feel.



In contrast to some wilderness areas that have been opened up and overdeveloped, Mount Charleston and the lifestyle it offers are not expected to change—at least in our lifetime. The mountain is located within the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest, and the USDA Forest Service is not going to release any nearby land for public use. In fact, for several years the trend has been for the federal government to buy land in order to keep it out of the hands of private developers.

"These neighborhoods were created approximately fifty years ago when the roads were cut through the forest," said Tomashowski. "There are a limited number of lots—fewer than five hundred—on the mountain, with no room to build more. This helps keep property values up."

Instead of small cabin-type houses, which were once the standard for mountain living, larger homes with more amenities are being built. Many of the older homes are being remodeled and upgraded, too. Homes currently being constructed in Kyle Canyon range from 3,000 to 5,000 square feet, and plenty top the million-dollar mark. This past spring, there were six Mount Charleston homes on the market with prices exceeding \$1 million.



This stunning 4,700-square-foot, four-bedroom home features a designer kitchen with cherry-wood cabinetry and granite countertops; a romantic master suite with a sitting room, a fireplace and an aromatherapy bathtub; game and media rooms; a garden room with a six-person spa; and a garage with a heated driveway.



"A million-dollar home here is going to be smaller than a comparably priced home in Las Vegas, but the ambience and the views are worth it. You're buying a lifestyle," said Tomashowski.

Many Mount Charleston homes are designed with walls of windows and expansive decks to take advantage of the magnificent vistas of pine trees and rocky mountain peaks. Inside the amenities include gourmet kitchens, sumptuous master baths, soaring vaulted ceilings and massive stone fireplaces. Everything you'd expect—and want—in a mountain hideaway. Imagine, come wintertime, waking up in your luxurious vacation home in the mountains and seeing deer outside your window as you eat breakfast.

And if the cool mountain atmosphere becomes too quiet for you, the bright lights of Las Vegas are just down the mountain. It's less than an hour's drive to the Strip. CP

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