



Personal stuff first: Just as soon as my December retirement party ended, my spouse, I and our packed car hit the highway from snowy, foggy, humid PA and headed 2,000 miles west to always sunny, hot, dry AZ. That winter vacation has lasted every day for nearly 20 years. I've no urge to have anything to do with winter except to watch TV scenes of poor slobs slushing and sneezing through snow.

That said, here are some suggestions I have, and have experienced, for nice, warm winter vacations that offer both hot and cold features:

Some family members enjoy winter sports, and I do reluctantly get my snow experience about once every three years. I relax in cozy, warm welcome at Homewood Mountain Resort (skihomewood.com) at the winter wonderland of Lake Tahoe in Northern California.

Homewood caters to all ages, but offers special activities and discounts for seniors who like to just hang around the luxury resort, or if their ancient legs can handle it, go out to ski, ice skate and trek through the beautiful High Sierra woods. My best time there is when I can ferry across Lake Tahoe into Nevada and enjoy gambling and entertainment in old Sinatra haunts like the CalNeva Lodge (calnevaresort.com) and other hotels on that side of the lake.

If winter cruises are in your plans, there's Cruise West (cruisewest.com) for booking small ship excursions, some catering to seniors. Their ships are not as large as the superliners, but are much more cozy, friendly and just as luxurious. They also dock in smaller, quieter port cities where the tourist mobs seldom go. Especially in the winter, senior travelers can enjoy some quiet shopping, dining and sightseeing. One warm winter example is a whale watching expedition and swim with dolphins off the Baja coast of Mexico. We enjoyed it immensely, and have the pix and video to prove it.

Several years ago, we cruised from England to Southern France, and our ship docked at Villefranche-sur-Mer. It is a very old, beautiful, brightly-colored harbor town that looks like it's always posing for a tourist postcard. In fact, the first sight we saw was something right out of a Winslow Homer watercolor, a bunch of fishermen on the beach repairing their boats at sunrise.

Another photogenic image is the Marine and Zoo Lab, which dates back to the 15th Century, when it was a prison and auction site for galley slaves. I also thought the nearby Promenade des

Marinieres looked familiar.

In my Navy days, it was the base for our Med fleet until the late 60s. In the early 50s, I was in the icy cold North Pacific on an aircraft carrier that sent our bombers and fighters in combat over North Korea. How I envied those lucky swabbies back in France's Riviera with the warm weather and even warmer madamoiselles.

The entire Riviera makes a wonderful warm winter destination for seniors. All the major cruise lines, including Cunard, Princess, Carnival, Royal Caribbean and Celebrity schedule visits to the various ports, as well as offer land excursions that allow tourist opportunities for spending time and family fortunes in such famed places as Cannes, Nice and Monte Carlo.

Another winter vacation choice can be enjoyed without requiring too much heavy walking through ports, airports and train stations. They're the river cruises, and once you're aboard, the comfy little ships become your hotel. There are several excellent river liners, including quaint paddlewheelers that ply the Mississippi through the middle of the US.

There are many passenger ships that sail the big rivers in Europe, including the Thames, Rhine, Seine and Danube. Or maybe you'd prefer the other side of the world on some of the new, surprisingly posh Yangtse River cruises in China. You can have all the chow mein and egg rolls you want, plus steak, lobster and other luxurious repasts.

Of course, there are thousands and thousands of winter vacation offerings for seniors available throughout the world. If you're considering taking one, first do a lot of internet surfing and homework before choosing the exact right one for you. Check with your favorite online and hometown travel agencies, and visit websites of senior organizations including AARP and Elderhostel for specific winter travel packages.