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# Sandpoint

By Colleen Ringer

This northern Idaho town is a true charmer thanks to its lake-centric lifestyle.



Though you may miss the tiny dot in the northern pan-handle of Idaho that denotes Sandpoint on most maps, it's hard to overlook the town from the highway. Approaching from the south, humdrum Highway 95 suddenly opens up offering a shockingly pristine panorama. Directly ahead, Long Bridge, which ushers drivers into downtown Sandpoint, curves over sparkling aquamarine waters showcasing the exact point where Lake Pend Oreille (pronounced pond-o-ray) and the Pend Oreille River become one. Skirting the watery scene, pine tree-laden mountains soar to the sky. This initial view of the former timber town hints at its two-pronged alfresco appeal: boating and skiing and tons of it.

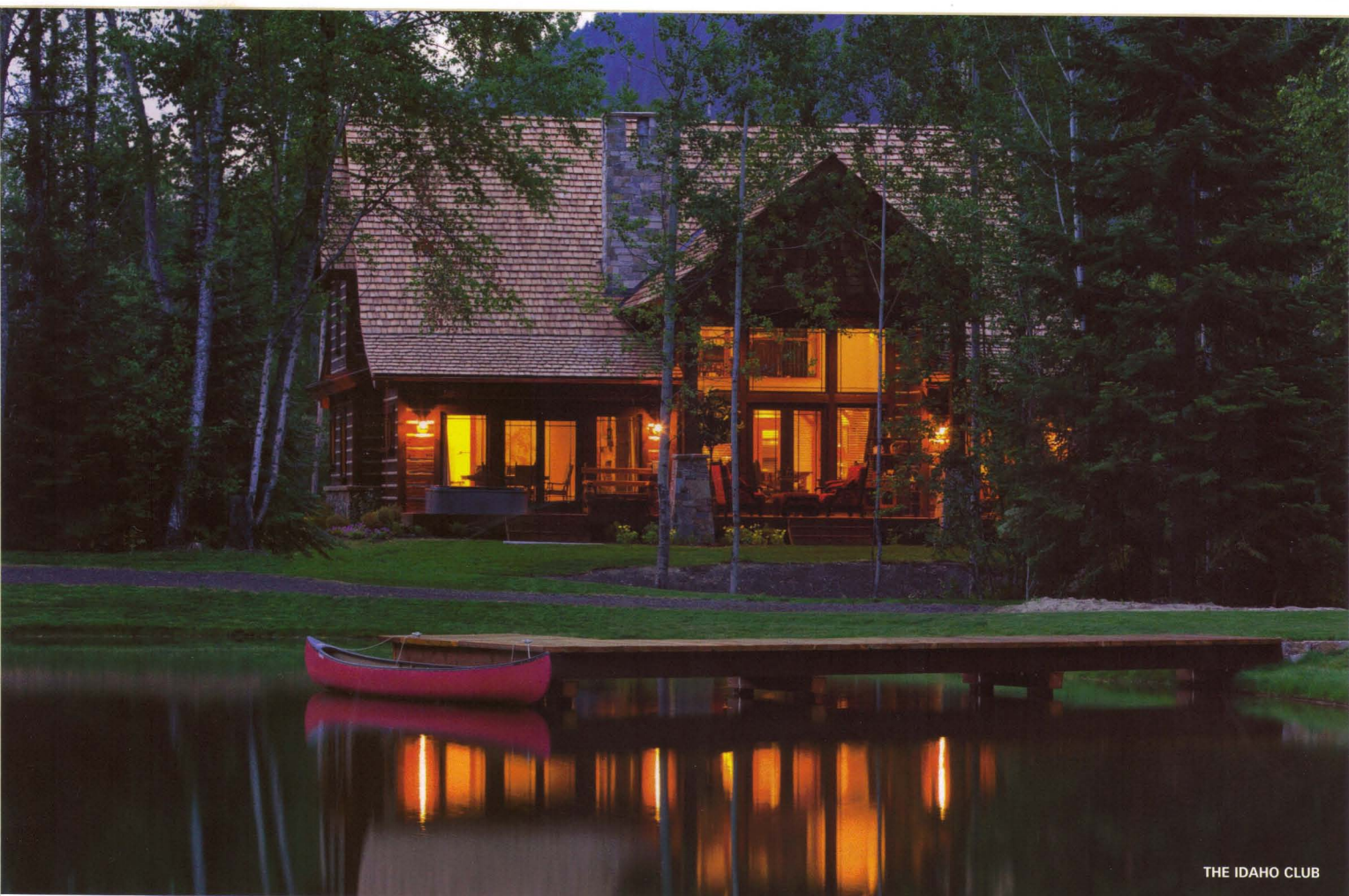
One of the deepest lakes in the country (the United States Navy operates a submarine acoustic testing base here because of its depth), Lake Pend Oreille laps at 111 miles of shoreline, which houses some of the most coveted real estate in the area. Homeowners at The Crossing at Willow Bay have private waterfront access, as well as a sandy beach on which to kick back. To the northeast, The Idaho

Club complements the lackadaisical lake lifestyle with a Jack Nicklaus Signature golf course, plus a future full-service spa. Here, homesites top out at \$1.2 million, while The Crossing's parcels cost between \$250,000 and \$900,000.

In winter, when splishing and splashing have been put on hold on account of the weather, powder buffs head to Schweitzer Mountain Resort (just 11 miles from downtown), which sits in the Selkirk Mountains, the high-altitude sentinels watching over Sandpoint.

One of the hazards of living in this 8,000-person town—besides wiping out on the slopes or overturning a Jet Ski—is that, on occasion, you may find your path blocked while crossing the street. Not by anything sinister, however, just a friendly neighbor who wants to chat you up. "Even if you're just walking into Safeway, people stop, smile, say hello," says Jennifer Leedy, a 29-year resident and realtor with Century 21 on the Lake. "It doesn't take long to meet people. If you volunteer, they eat you up with a spoon."





THE IDAHO CLUB

Walking with Leedy through town is like trailing a celebrity—everyone seems to know her name and wants to give her a hug. Sandpoint residents are in fact the main reason she put down roots after coming to the area to experience the four seasons.

Unlike some places where a small-town atmosphere can lead to small-time circumstances, Sandpoint's Pleasantville vibe isn't a shortcoming. On the contrary, the hamlet offers full- and part-timers a mixed bag of cultural offerings, entertainment options and more. Renowned photographer Ross Hall called Sandpoint home; and now his son, Dann Hall, owns Hallans Gallery in the downtown area, where you'll find many of the former's striking black and white images. The Panida Theater, which dates back to 1927, hosts film festivals, as well as shows current blockbusters. Add to that the town's collection of high-end boutiques and eclectic eateries, and you have a recipe for enjoyment. (Locals will tell you the much repeated joke: The best place to eat in Spokane, Wash., is Sandpoint.)

Luckily, Sandpoint also has accessibility on its side. "It's

one and a half hours to Spokane and six hours to Seattle," says Leedy, who notes that this level of convenience gave her even more cause to settle in Sandpoint. However, she does add that the roads aren't terrific in winter, with the surrounding mountains receiving an average of 300 inches of snow each year. "You have to make a lifestyle choice," she says. And it's a tempting choice to make, especially when the town lives up to its hype as the next best place to call home. **EW**

### to learn more

Century 21 on the Lake,  
888.923.8484, [www.c21sandpoint.com](http://www.c21sandpoint.com).

The Crossing at Willow Bay, 800.653.7007,  
[www.crossingwillowbay.com](http://www.crossingwillowbay.com).

Greater Sandpoint Chamber of Commerce,  
800.800.2106, [www.sandpointchamber.org](http://www.sandpointchamber.org).

The Idaho Club, 800.323.7020, [www.theidahoclub.com](http://www.theidahoclub.com).