

SAILING DESTINATION

Sandpoint, Idaho • by Bram Fiebelk



A kayaker enjoys a late sunset. Photo by Chris Bessler

Majestic, snow-capped mountains and lush forests provide a stunning backdrop for inland sailing on pristine Lake Pend Oreille (pronounced Pond-er-ay) at Sandpoint, Idaho.

Located in Northern Idaho just 60 miles south of the Canadian border and 75 miles northeast of Spokane, Wa., Sandpoint is a hidden gem offering stunning lakefront mountain scenery. With its small-town Pacific Northwest charm and superior setting, Sandpoint is a virtually undiscovered outdoor paradise, one that is already being called the "Next Lake Tahoe."

Sandpoint has already merited a mention in the New York Times, which raved about its "old west atmosphere in a sporting paradise."

Sandpoint owes its charm to the surrounding Cabinet and Selkirk Mountains and beautiful, Lake Pend Oreille, Idaho's largest body of water. The magnificent mountains and deep blue lake await outdoor enthusiasts who will appreciate the area's world-class hiking, boating, horseback riding, trout fishing, mountain biking and golf.

In winter, the area offers 2,900 acres of fresh powder for skiing and snowboarding at Schweitzer Mountain. Sailors will find perfect conditions for sailing on the 43-miles-long Lake Pend Oreille, as well as 111 miles of beautiful shoreline. Boaters will appreciate the strong winds from the southwest and deep water – at some parts 1,200 feet deep. Winds regularly blow at 10 to 12 knots, making it a perfect site for the numerous regattas held here every summer.

Lake Pend Oreille offers, on average, seven months of sailing each year. The season opens in April with six weeks dedicated to the spring racing series, and boaters will find comfortable, enjoyable sailing through October. Throughout the season, there's plenty to do for any sailor. The Sandpoint Sailing Association holds many weekend regattas and a Thursday night race series, and the city's recreational department hosts a growing youth sailing program.

Access to Lake Pend Oreille is convenient. The city-owned Windbag Marina's ramp is outfitted to handle trailer boats and offers plenty of nearby



Photo by Trish Gannon
Tyler Clay Cochran of Sandpoint devours his way through his piece of fruit at a Fourth of July watermelon-eating contest.

parking, while the south end of the lake offers a crane to hoist the larger boats. The lake regularly hosts big J/22 class boats, J/24s and a fleet of J/80s. Ranger 20s and Holder 15s can be rented at either end of the lake, providing great

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day sailing opportunities. The city's 18-acre sandy beach park, which juts into the middle of the lake, offers a great place to tie up. Because 75 percent of the lake's 111-mile shoreline is public property, there are plenty of calm spots to anchor for a peaceful evening.

The long stretches of wild shoreline also provide many protected coves with calm conditions for water skiing, wakeboarding, swimming and lounging on the beach.

Fish are bountiful in the clear, cool lake waters. Northern Pike, Tiger Muskie and the giant Kamloops trout, legendary for pushing nearly 30 pounds, are frequently reeled in. Bald eagles, ospreys, bears and moose can all be found in residence.

Sandpoint is also home to a number of private resorts that cater to boating enthusiasts. One of its most impressive is Seasons at Sandpoint, a luxury residential resort on nine acres of lakefront property, designed in harmony with its natural environment. Seasons' mix of luxury and the great outdoors is unique and inviting. All 154 one-, two- and three-bedroom condominium homes and the eight townhouses at Seasons have views of Lake Pend Oreille and feature fireplaces, wood cabinetry, natural stone countertops and wood and porcelain floors.

For boaters, Seasons offers a private 80-slip private marina where boats can be docked just steps from home. The resort also boasts a boat club with rental boats available for residents. Overlooking the lake are viewing decks, a swimming pool and four hot tubs alongside firepits and al fresco dining



Photo by Chris Bessler

(Top) Lake Pend Oreille offers beautiful views and lively winds throughout a six month season. (Below) The Parade of Boats proceeds down Sand Creek during the Wooden Boat Festival that Sandpoint hosts each July, attracting classic wood craft from around the Inland Northwest.

areas. Its many amenities include a three-story 11,000-square-foot resort-style clubhouse, aptly named The Retreat, The Spa at Seasons with an array of rejuvenating services for the sailor, as well as fire pits, dining alcoves and viewing decks, where residents can soak in the majestic scenery. Seasons is also a stone's throw from Sandpoint's unique downtown, which offers plenty of shopping and cultural activities. Each summer, music fans are treated to the Festival at Sandpoint, which has showcased Willie Nelson, Natalie Cole, the Beach Boys and the Doobie Brothers. An arts haven, Sandpoint boasts nearly two-dozen galleries located in town and the surrounding area.

The town's winery, which won Idaho's Winery of the Year in 2003, offers tours for visitors. During Sandpoint's annual Lost in the 50s celebration, held the third weekend in May, the whole town's clock turns back some four decades.

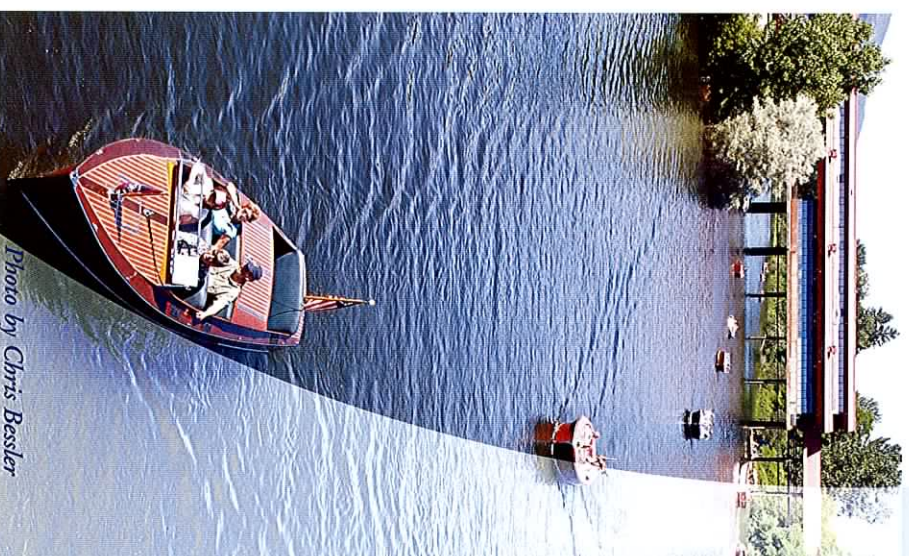


Photo by Chris Bessler

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(Above) The resort, Seasons at Sandpoint, offers luxury with a deck overlooking the lake, a swimming pool and four hot tubs alongside firepits and al fresco dining areas. (Below) The Idaho Draft Horse and Mule International show is staged at Bonner County Fairgrounds.

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The celebration showcases hundreds of vintage cars and music of the era. Shop-a-holics will relish Coldwater Creek's flagship store and the unique log structure of the Cedar Street bridge, overlooking Sand Creek.

If there's not enough to do in town, the nearby Kootenai National Wildlife Refuge and six state parks and forests offer Seasons residents spectacular day excursions on more than 75 hiking trails covering 275 miles. Golfers love the five golf courses near the resort, with a Jack Nicklaus Signature course slated to open soon. Ski and snowboard terrain are easily accessible from November until April. The ease of learning on its 82 trails and open bowl skiing attract many beginners. A quick 11-mile drive on the Seasons resort shuttle and a ride on Idaho's only six-person high-speed lift will take skiers to a summit on Schweitzer with stunning views of three mountain ranges, three states and Canada.

Timing a visit to Sandpoint depends on one's preference. The town is lively and bustling with activity between Independence Day and Labor Day, a good time to enjoy the lakeside cafes and a brisk south wind for sailing. The season winds down after Labor Day, when the lake hosts its highly anticipated Spud's Cup Regatta, with each year seeing nearly 60 participating



sailboats. Some say this is when the mountains best display their natural beauty, with the reddening of huckleberry bushes and snow beginning to fall on the highest peaks.

Sandpoint is accessible by plane, train or automobile. Although the Sandpoint Airport caters to private and chartered aircraft, commercial flights arrive at Spokane International Airport just 78 miles away. The town's Amtrak station doubles as a historic railroad depot with trains running daily in and out of Sandpoint.

Getting there is easy. With the majority of its 6,000 residents, vacationers who decided to stay, it seems leaving Sandpoint is the hard part.