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This Idaho Ski Town Has it All - 5 Things We Love About Sandpoint

by Dan Giesin | Jan 23, 2018 | Ski Industry News | 1 Comment



Tucked into the northern panhandle of Idaho, nestled in a valley surrounded by three mountain ranges and hard by the state's largest lake you'll find a delightful all-year playground known as Sandpoint.

This community of about 8,000 souls began life as a 19th century timber town and railroad hub, switched over to a ranching- and farming-centric economy in the early 20th century before becoming the tourist destination it is today some 60 years ago.

Sandpoint, which a couple of national publications a few years back dubbed the country's "Most Beautiful Small Town", is certainly picturesque. With the Selkirk, Cabinet and Bitterroot mountains as a backdrop and Lake Pend Oreille front and center, Sandpoint is very easy on the eye. And this facet of the town is not lost on the creative side of society — witness the photo above, Ross Hall's shot of Main Street from 1934 — as Sandpoint has become ground zero for the Northwest arts scene.

But it's the great outdoors that's the great attractor; whatever your flavor of activity — canoeing, cycling, trail running, snow sports, paddleboarding or simply contemplating nature — you can get your fill here.

That being said, here are five reasons we love Sandpoint.

Schweitzer

Ten miles from and some 2,000 feet above Sandpoint sits Schweitzer Mountain Resort, at 2,900 acres the largest ski resort in Idaho. With a motto that says it all — More powder. Less fluff — Schweitzer has just what any level of skier or rider needs. You can find fun tree skiing (Kathy's Yard Sale, Glade-i-ater), open bowls (Stiles), chutes (Pucci's, C-Chute) and long cruisers (Stella's, Cathedral Aisle). Schweitzer also has a large area with a dedicated lift (Musical Chairs) for newbies. Other on-hill options include three terrain parks, a tubing hill and trails for Nordic skiers and snow bikers.

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Something's Brewing

Because Idaho is the No. 1 state in the country for growing barley for beer, and No. 2 in hops production, it shouldn't come as any surprise that Sandpoint has a great brewery, and that brewery is Mick Duff, a brew pub located in the downtown core. Check out Topsy Towhead Blond (a personal favorite) or Irish Redhead ales, both medal winners at the annual North America Beer Award competition (a local fave is Lake Paddler Pale Ale). Other good places to wet your whistle in Sandpoint are the Idaho Pour Authority, The 21g and Trinity at City Beach.

Getting Your Full

For a small town, Sandpoint has its share of fun dining options, and one of the more entertaining is The Back Door. Located below street level, it's a cozy place with bar and table service as well as three-sofa conversation pit. Check out the meatball and/or portabella mushroom sliders and the harvest pear and brie bruschetta; the place also has an extensive craft beer and wine menu. Another great restaurant is Loaf and Ladle, a bistro that features local farm-to-table produce and meats.

Picture This

At one point in its recent history, Sandpoint had something of a reputation as a hippy artist community, so it's no surprise the town has a varied selection of galleries and exhibits. The Pend Oreille Arts Council sponsors a rotating series of shows featuring local artists, the summer-long Art Walk being the most prominent. Also check out Artist Alley (located between Boyer and Main streets), where local artists grace the buildings' lower walls with examples of their work.

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Dan Giesin

Dan Giesin has spent most of his life poking around the mountains of the American West, especially in his backyard Sierra Nevada range. It has been -- and still is -- an uplifting experience

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I grew up skiing and racing on Schweitzer ski slopes from 1966-1972. It has great powder runs and challenging slopes for all to enjoy. Todd O

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