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THEY'RE
UNCROWDED.
THEY'RE
AFFORDABLE.
THEY'RE READY
TO GO BIG.
THESE QUIET
MOUNTAIN
TOWNS ARE
SKIDOM'S
RISING STARS.

WHETHER
YOU'RE LOOKING
FOR YOUR NEXT
VACATION—OR
YOUR NEXT
RELOCATION—
NOW IS THE
TIME TO GO.

EARLY ADOPTER ALERT

Getting in on the ground floor of a ski resort takes work, a sense of adventure and some luck. Here's a head start, beginning with British Columbia's giant gem, Revelstoke.

> Sandpoint, Idaho

A four-season outdoor community that's got a little bit of everything. By Ken Castle

Why Sandpoint Basking in the halo effect of everything Idaho, Sandpoint seems to have the same mild weather, accessible isolation and full-service community that put Bend, Ore., on the map. There's a Tahoe-esque lake (Pend Oreille), a quaint Western town with nouveau wine and sushi bars, and a ski area, Schweitzer Mountain Resort, 11 miles up the road. While loggers and railroad workers—Sandpoint is an Amtrak stop—once dominated the population, metropolitan sophisticates are arriving to establish new businesses. "This place is ready to pop," says Charles Manning, 33, who moved to Sandpoint from Washington, D.C., two years ago to launch a

gaming software company. "We've got the outdoors, the restaurants, the entertainment and a walkable town." Developers are acquiring large ranches and making land and home sites available. Projects such as the Idaho Club and Seasons at Sandpoint are drawing an upscale second-home clientele. Meanwhile, Schweitzer is launching a major mountain expansion, and condos and golf courses are popping up around the lake. Sandpoint is still laidback, but no longer sleepy.

The Skiing Splurge on 2,900 acres of wide expanse, from steep bowls to blue cruisers. And there's another 4,000 acres just waiting for future expansion. Thanks to the modest elevations—4,000 to 6,400 feet—the only thing breathtaking is the view of Lake Pend Oreille. New this season: Basin Express, a high-speed detachable quad, that links the village with midmountain, and Lakeview Triple, a fixed grip chair, that delivers powder pigs to the South Bowl.

The Vibe Sandpoint is home to an eclectic mix of personalities, from free spirits to pragmatists, and all of them seem to rally around the annual Festival at Sandpoint, a two-week bash in August that brings in acts such as Lyle Lovett and Los Lonely Boys. Local talent prevails year-round, and hot joints include Eichardt's, a pub that hosts live blues jams on Monday, and Coldwater Creek Wine Bar, located above the flagship store of the Coldwater Creek women's clothing company. On any given day, downtown might offer a poetry slam, live music, an art show or a play at Panida Theater.

The Life You can make a buck here, if you choose your vocation wisely. Wood products manufacturing and construction jobs are thriving as more people move in and real estate prices escalate. While Schweitzer Mountain and Coldwater Creek are among the largest employers, other enterprises include Litehouse Foods (salad dressing), Thorne Research (pharmaceuticals) and Encoder Products (electronics). Property taxes are low, averaging 1.57 percent, and housing prices are about half those of major

metropolitan areas such as San Francisco. While locals grouse about driving 45 minutes to Coeur d'Alene to Costco, they can purchase most goods in town. Health care is readily available, with a local hospital staffed by specialists who've relocated for the outdoor lifestyle. Public schools are considered better than average, and there's talk of opening a satellite of the University of Idaho at Sandpoint.

The Visit Fly into Spokane, Wash., and rent a car for the easy 90-minute drive to the ski area. The slopeside White Pine Lodge has condos with great views. Mountain dining shines at Chimney Rock Grill, notable for its homemade chowder. Taps Lounge in the Lakeview

PRIVATE IDAHO Perpetually empty and unsullied by overdevelopment, Schweitzer Mountain Resort is coming into its own.



Lodge is the place for live music on weekends. In Sandpoint, check out Sand Creek Grill for Pacific Northwest cuisine or the new Oishi sushi bar. The town offers several antique stores, a local winery and the new Bonner Mall, with a supermarket and movie theater.

Information Schweitzer Mountain Resort: schweitzer.com; 800-831-8810. Schweitzer Land & Timber (real estate): schweitzerland.com; 888-255-7301. Greater Sandpoint Chamber of Commerce: visitsandpoint.com; 800-800-2106

SANDPOINT POPULATION 8,206 **MEDIAN AGE** 35.6 **MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME** \$36,024 **MEDIAN HOME PRICE** \$323,028
ELEVATION 2,194 feet **ANNUAL SNOWFALL** 300 inches