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# The skiing sweet spot

Somewhere between rickety mom-and-pop and mega-resort, these under-the-radar stars have impressive slopes and serious charm factor.

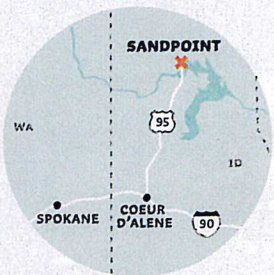
Catch a ride on the Great Escape Quad chairlift at Schweitzer Mountain in northern Idaho's Selkirk Mountains.



## AROUND THE WEST



What to expect in Sandpoint? Slopeside smiles at Schweitzer Mountain; comfy cabins and horse-drawn sleigh rides at Western Pleasure Guest Ranch; the best coffee in town at Evans Brothers; and après-ski martinis at La Rosa Club



### Getting there

Sandpoint is about 80 miles northeast of Spokane International Airport, and Schweitzer is 12 miles from town. Take the shuttle (\$3 round-trip) to the resort from the Schweitzer Park & Ride at the base of Schweitzer Mountain Road. INFO [schweitzer.com](http://schweitzer.com)

## 1 SANDPOINT, ID Have Schweitzer Mountain all to yourself

The numbers at Schweitzer speak for themselves: 2,900 skiable acres (that means less than one skier per acre on all but the busiest holiday weekends); 300+ inches of average annual snowfall; three terrain parks; 92 runs, including a 2.4-mile continuous groomer; 20 miles of nordic trails; and the state's only high-speed six-person lift. Views from the top include three mountain ranges, three states, Canada, and 65-mile-long Lake Pend Oreille. Not only that, lift lines are nearly nonexistent, and a ticket will set you back just \$68. Nonskiers will love the free movies, guided snowshoe hikes (\$15), and on-mountain wine tastings (from \$10) at Gourmandie. [schweitzer.com](http://schweitzer.com)

### The sleeps

**Schweitzer Mountain Resort** (from \$168; [schweitzer.com](http://schweitzer.com)) has 113 ski-in/ski-out rooms in its base area (for perspective, Vail has more than 600) and a newly redone pool. But just outside town, the 1,100-acre, fourth-generation **Western Pleasure Guest Ranch** (from \$125; [westernpleasureranch.com](http://westernpleasureranch.com)) has an even more throwback feel. A working cattle ranch, it also has 2 miles of cross-country ski and snowshoe trails. Or you can bundle up in a blanket and let the draft horses do the pulling on a 2-mile antique-sleigh ride through the forest.

### The town

Sandpoint (pop. 7,300) is an ideal complement to Schweitzer's traditional charm, with minimal winter crowds. First Avenue, the four-block main drag, is lined with brick shops and galleries. Locals gather at **Evans Brothers Roastery & Neighborhood Espresso Bar** (524 Church St.; 208/265-5553) for single-origin drip-to-order coffee; they've heard "Better than Stumptown" more than once. For small plates and sips, **La Rosa Club** (\$\$; 105 S. First Ave.; 208/255-2100) pours a clean-tasting cucumber cocktail, which contrasts well with the bacony brussels sprouts. For dinner, try the century-old home turned Mediterranean oasis **Little Olive** (\$\$; 124 S. Second Ave.; 208/597-7499). Flaming saganaki, comin' up. >33