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## Go Jump in a Lake

**These lakeside cities have offered generations of Americans serene options for lazing.**

By Crai S. Bower for MSN Local Edition



Linger on a pier overlooking calm waters in cities such as Kelowna.

Lakeside property may be the natural extension of the American dream; for in our national consciousness, realty and prosperity, leisure and relaxation are often bound to the idyll of that quiet cottage nestled on fresh water.

Our lakes are timeless outposts of pleasure and recreation, depicted in the loop of the canoe paddle rather than the industry of the paddle wheeler. True to this characterization, many lakeside towns provide vacation over vocation, as evidenced by classic resort destinations like the Adirondack's Lake George, Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, and the Belgrade Lakes region of Maine. Resort towns hold such a valuable place in our collective history that I've included several in this list, a group as diverse as our North American geography, and our reservoir of lakes.

### Saint Paul, Minn.

Like all the major cities along this longitude, St. Paul is lauded mostly for its relationship with the mighty Mississippi. But this is Minnesota, and St. Paul's many lakes deserve attention of their own, especially given the city's many parks that envelope water. The city's two largest lakes, [Lake Como](#) and [Lake Phalen](#) are surrounded by paved paths (1.7 and 3.2 miles respectively) designated for inline skating, walking or biking, with plenty of other wilder paths to discover. Naturalists young and old turn to the Wood Lake Nature Center, where footpaths and boardwalks lead through a typical upper Midwest ecosystem teeming with turtles, herons and other critters, each easily identified at the 4,000 sq ft. interpretive center.

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### Sandpoint, Idaho

A lake runs through it, and what a lake it is. [Lake Pend Oreille](#) covers 148 square miles, dug deep (1,170 feet) by a glacier, with 143 miles of shoreline. Trains yawn across the two-mile trestle into Sandpoint proper, an ideal alpine town



with every amenity from biweekly farmers markets to a great little burrito outlet. The vista from

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Vast views around Lake Pend Oreille include mountains and the Moyie River.

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nearby [Schweitzer Mountain](#) ski resort's "Great Escape" quad chair is impressive, with views of [Montana's Cabinet Mountains](#) and the [Selkirk Range](#) of British Columbia. River runners will find the [Moyie River's](#) Class 5 rapids a white water enthusiast's dream, while mellower boaters can hope to catch rainbow trout worthy of a note home. The source of great cultural and mineral speculation over the years, one constant remains in the Idaho Panhandle: One must experience the waters of Lake Pend Oreille to grasp the majesty of the area.

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View the lake while sipping some vin in Kelowna, B.C.

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#### Kelowna, British Columbia

Like [Malheur Lake](#) in Oregon's Great Basin, a large body of water in the middle of a desert clime holds spectacular appeal for waterfowl and wildlife. But unlike Malheur, one of North America's great wildlife refuges, Kelowna primarily serves as a habitat for people, who take advantage of Lake Okanagan's diverse microclimate to produce some of the continent's best wines. Peer down at the lake from [Mission Hill Family Estate Winery](#), which resides in full architectural splendor complete with bell tower and dining terrace, and you'll feel as though you can reach out and touch Tuscany. But this central B.C. hub holds more than vintages in its hand, no less a bright light than Swarovsky Crystal chose the region to erect [Sparkling Hill Resort](#), its first full service spa, and top notch golf resorts like [Predator Ridge](#) lure visitors from across the continent.

#### Oakland, California

Located in the heart of Oakland's downtown, [Lake Merritt](#) once possessed a tainted reputation, marred by pollution and congestion. But the 155-acre oasis now claims a 3.4 mile path around its circumference, a rowing club and the [Lake Merritt Boating Center](#), where recreationists rent kayaks and other boats. Originally a tidal lagoon, which explains the brackish water, the lake once provided fish for Ohlone natives and became America's first wildlife refuge in 1870. The former 1,000-acre estuary is populated by white pelicans in the summer. Each evening 3,400 light bulbs on 126 lampposts light the scenery -- one example of the city's many enhancement projects. The [Children's Fairyland](#) hosts one of the country's oldest children's theater programs, and was an inspiration to Walter Elias Disney, who visited the park to gather ideas for Disneyland.

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**Wolfeboro, New Hampshire**  
 New Hampshire claims plenty of watery paradise, but nowhere more so than Wolfeboro, which was named for the **Battle of Quebec** hero General James Wolfe. America's oldest summer resort -- established when the Pavillion was built 160 years ago -- Wolfeboro sits

Rent a boat to motor around Wolfeboro's many islands.

on a land bridge between New Hampshire's largest lake, **Lake Winnepesaukee**, and **Lake Wentworth**. Over 250 islands within Winnepesaukee await explorers today, who may travel aboard the latest incarnation of the Mt. Washington -- among America's first tourist vessels - or perhaps in a rowing skull, like those engaged by Harvard and Yale here in 1852, when the eights competed in the first intercollegiate competition of any sport. (Harvard won by 2.7 seconds.)

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**Niagara-On-the-Lake, Ontario**

A stone's skip across the mighty Niagara River from Fort Niagara in New York State, Niagara-On-The-Lake is to romantics what nearby Niagara Falls is to newlyweds. Queen Street bustles with activity, as visitors walk hand in hand to explore a variety of shops and dine in numerous bistros and formal restaurants. Flowers



Benches provide opportunities to park it along Lake Ontario and the Niagara River.

line the street in spring, summer and fall, and thespians haunt the boards of the adjacent **Shaw Festival**, one of North America's finest repertory theaters. While American tourists invade the town each year by the thousands, hospitality was once harder to come by: American militias invaded and burned the town during the **War of 1812**.

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**Leesburg, Lake County, Florida**

Minnesota may be the "Land of 10,000 Lakes," but Lake County, Florida, alone boasts over 1,400 distinct bodies of water. Leesburg offers several parks on the shores of what locals call the "little" lakes, as well as four beaches alone on **Lake Harris**, the county's largest lake, spanning almost 14,000-acres. Unlike much of the submarine state, the "Harris Chain of Lakes" is surrounded by sand hills that reach over 300 feet above sea level. Located due north of Leesburg, **Lake Griffin** contains the **Emeralda Marsh Conservation Area**, a 7,000-acre preserve that resides as testament to the restoration ecology movement, having once been drained for agricultural purposes. Today, the preserve offers some of the best bird watching in Central Florida.

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**Salt Lake City**  
 Few states boast the



Dramatic landscapes surround the Great Salt Lake.

geographical spectacle of Utah, where limestone and sandstone form natural bridges and where the [Great Salt Lake](#) defies our understanding of an aquatic seascape. The lake is considered one of the fifty largest on Earth, though, throughout the years, its

size has fluctuated between 3,300 square miles and just 950 square miles. Salt Lake City is one of America's great recreational hubs, where myriad trails through a kaleidoscope of desert lure cyclists and hikers in the summer, and each winter skiers take to [Wasatch Mountain](#) ski areas surrounding [Park City](#) where the legendary dry snow is considered by many the best on earth. While world-renowned adventure is synonymous with the region, visitors to Salt Lake City also traverse galleries and numerous cultural institutions including the [Salt Lake Art Center](#), [Salt Lake County Center for the Arts](#) and the [Rose Wagner Performing Arts Center](#).

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