

Top 10 lake vacations

Grab your swimsuit! Here are the most irresistibly enjoyable, summer-fun-filled lakes in the West



Photo by Erin Kunkel; written by Darren Davidson

Best for a private hideaway

All your life, you've longed for your own personal lakeside retreat. But you haven't inherited money, you haven't issued an IPO. What to do? You rent your lakeside paradise for a week or two. **Christina Lake**, British Columbia, is seemingly created for people who want to rent their own lakeside cottage/cabin/luxury home. Resorts are nonexistent (although there is a scattering of nice, small B&Bs). But what Christina has is a broad range of properties for rent, from quirky but comfortable cabins to a few seven-figure estates.

Christina's charms extend beyond real estate, though. The lake is serenely lovely, set in the Monashee Mountains, near the Canadian Rockies. August lake and weather temps belie the north-of-the-border location: 71° (or, as they have it up here, 22° C); daytime averages around 82°. If you're looking for a lake with sweeping, sandy beaches where you can get so warm that you have to make regular plunges into the water, this is it.

One potential drawback—the lake's somewhat remote location, more than two hours north of Spokane—is

in some ways a plus. Things aren't crowded here. True, in summer the population soars from its year-round 1,500 to 6,000, but that won't faze anybody familiar with, say, Lake Tahoe. And with the north half of the lake embraced by Gladstone Provincial Park, it's easy to find quiet moments, when you can fantasize about living here permanently.

Stay: For rental cabins and homes, which cluster along the lake's eastern shore, a reliable agency is Christina Lake Vacation Rentals (christinalakevacation.com). If you want someone to coddle you, the Sunflower Inn Bed & Breakfast (*from \$131 U.S.*; sunflowerinnbb.com) has three great suites with good lake views, a private beach, and a dock.

Extra: *Cast your vote for the best lake vacations in America!*

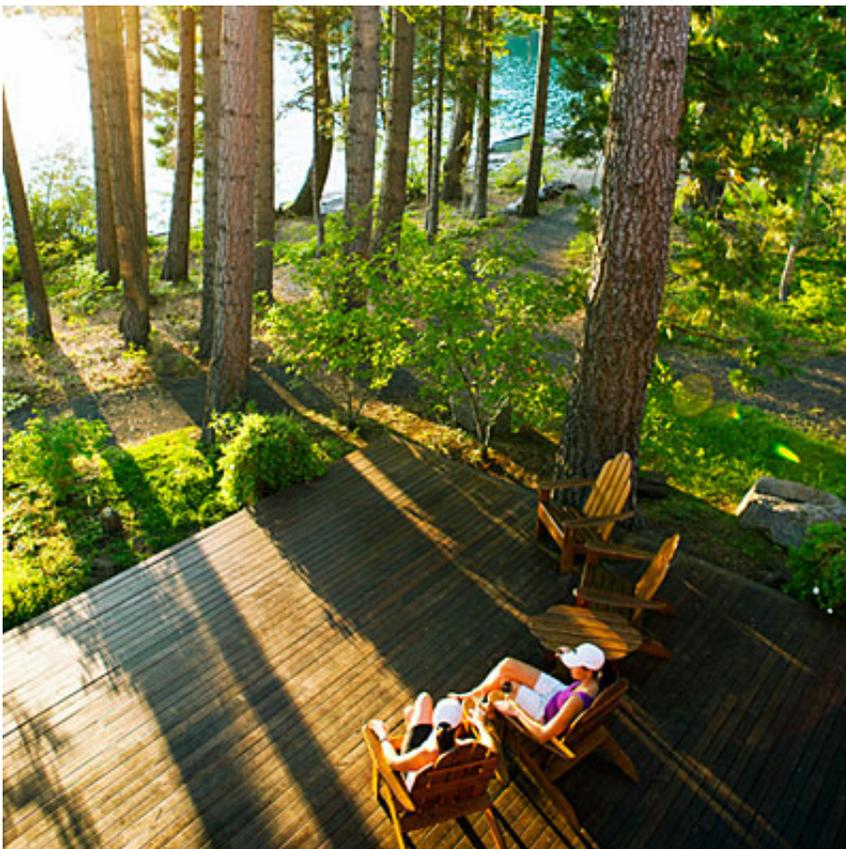


Photo by Erin Kunkel; written by Ted Katauskas

Best for a romantic splurge

The ideal romantic lake outing requires three things. 1. Natural beauty, because soaring hearts demand scenery to match. 2. Not too many people, because romance shuns crowds. 3. Some luxury, because love likes it a little cushy.

Suttle Lake, in central Oregon, earns top marks in all three categories. The glacier-formed lake is undeniably a stunner. But oddly, even at the height of summer, Suttle never feels mobbed—despite being one of Oregon's more accessible mountain lakes (U.S. 20 skirts its northern shore).

But luxury is where Suttle really

scores. Its seven-year-old resort is a modern take on Mt. Hood's Timberline Lodge, big on rough-hewn beams and wrought-iron chandeliers. The spa offers couples' massages; the Boathouse Restaurant serves surprisingly-ambitious-for-being-out-in-the-wilds Northwest cuisine, like grilled salmon with charmoula cumin sauce and buttermilk-soaked trout and chips. There's a long list of activities you can participate in—kayaking, canoeing, fly-fishing, hiking. But if you just want to sit on the lodge lawn gazing off at the lake and thinking only about each other, that's fine too.

Stay: Eagle Feather, the most desirable of the 11 lodge suites, features a sitting room with a stone fireplace and a sleeping loft overlooking the lake. The older lodge cabins are pretty simple, but four contemporary versions fronting Cinder Beach feature all the modern luxuries of the lodge rooms. *Lodge suites from \$199, waterfront cabins from \$299; 2-night min.; thelodgeatsuttlelake.com*



Photo by Dave Lauridsen; written by Dina Mishev

Best for National Park luxury

In Wyoming's Grand Teton National Park, **Jenny Lake** reflects the Teton peaks better than any mirror. And Jenny Lake Lodge reflects rustic elegance. The restored historic cabins have handmade quilts. Breakfast, five-course dinner, and use of bikes and horses are included. *From \$620; gtlc.com*



Photo by Thomas J. Story; written by Ted Katauskas

Best for throwback fun

Lakes don't get much more old school than **Crescent**, in Washington's Olympic National Park. Lake Crescent Lodge is one of the great national-park hotels, with a wood-paneled dining room—President Franklin Roosevelt ate here—and a sunroom where parents and young children play games of Uno and Jenga.

As for the lake itself, it's a gem: second-deepest in Washington and, locals claim, clearer than Western rivals Crater and Tahoe. There are biological reasons for this—such as an almost complete absence of water-clouding nitrogen—but what will count more is all the fun you can have on and around Crescent. The lodge rents canoes, rowboats, and tandem kayaks; you can fish for two

species of trout found nowhere but here. (You do, however, have to put the trout back.)

Stay: Best (and only) choice is 1916-vintage Lake Crescent Lodge. Singles and couples cocoon in the eight upstairs lodge rooms (all have lake views); families go for the four Roosevelt Cottages, each with a working fireplace and situated steps from the water. If they're booked—and they often are—the 13 Singer Tavern Cottages lack fireplaces but have Dutch doors that open to let in lake breezes. *Lodge rooms from \$115, Roosevelt Cottages from \$259, Singer from \$224; olympicnationalparks.com*



Photo by Gina Sabatella; written by Matthew Jaffe

Best for a variety of outdoor activities

With its green pines and blue water, California's **Big Bear Lake** feels like a step into vacations past. But you can get in good mountain biking at Snow Summit and stand-up paddleboarding on the lake. And Windy Point Inn is sleekly contemporary. *From \$290; windypointinn.com*



Photo by Erin Kunkel; written by Anne Marie Brown

Best for simple pleasures

Simple pleasures really can be the best. They're what Northern California's **Lakes Basin** area has to offer. About an hour and a half northwest of Lake Tahoe, the basin holds more than 50 alpine lakes—**Gold, Packer, and Lower Sardine** are the most popular—accessible by car or hiking boots.

The region has its plush side—just sample the Citron cocktail at sunset at Sardine Lake Resort—but its true heart is easygoing, low-key, and thrifty. There are more than 10 public campgrounds, including Sardine Campground, where every site has a view of the jagged Sierra Buttes. You can rent boats at Sardine Lake Resort. Or hit the area's dozens of trails: Families can wander the easy 0.5-mile path to Frazier Falls; intrepid hikers can climb about 2.5 miles to the top of Mt. Elwell or conquer the mighty pinnacle topped by the Sierra Buttes Fire Lookout, a 7-mile round-trip.

Stay: Spots at Sardine Campground can be reserved (\$21; [recreation.gov](https://www.recreation.gov)). Gold Lake Campground is first come, first served (\$10), as are some sites at Lakes Basin Campground; others can be reserved (*from* \$18; [recreation.gov](https://www.recreation.gov)).



Photo by David Fenton

Best for celebrating a Western icon

Clear, blue, and still a classic: Summer at **Lake Tahoe** is the same as it ever was. Go for a sunset sail, take a shot at paddleboarding, or find a slice of beach and take in the to-die-for beauty.

More: [Lake Tahoe summer](#)



Photo by José Mandojana

Best for grown-up fun

Discover the sophisticated side of Washington's summer playground, **Lake Chelan**--where sandcastles and jet skis are making way for (really good) wine.

More: [Lake Chelan summer escape](#)



Photo by Gary Crabbe; written by Ted Katauskas

Best for uncrowded hiking

Oregon's turquoise jewel, **Crater Lake** is a must-visit spot. Rather than tailgate from viewing spot to viewing spot, park your car in the Rim Village lot and hike the moderate 6-mile (one-way) West Rim Trail, which fortunately isn't packed in the summer.



Photo courtesy of Montana Office of Tourism

Best for pure blue beauty

Stretching northeast for some 10 miles from near the west entrance to Montana's Glacier National Park, **Lake McDonald** has a beauty that seems easy, almost lazy, with dense forest sloping down to the glass-smooth water. Lake McDonald is the largest (10 miles long) and deepest (464 feet) body of water in the park.

More: [Guide to Glacier National Park](#)

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