

PHOENIX

The Valley's Top 20 'Hoods

Great Escapes McCall, Idaho

BY NIKKI BUCHANAN

McCall, Idaho

WITH COOL NIGHTS, WARM DAYS AND PLENTY OF OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES, THIS SMALL MOUNTAIN TOWN IS AS CLOSE AS YOU'LL GET TO HAVING YOUR OWN PRIVATE IDAHO.



Whitetail's lakeside lodge



Whitetail Club and Resort lobby



11th Hole



Presidential suite

PEOPLE SAY MCCALL, IDAHO, IS DESTINED to be the next big thing, a prediction that sounds far-fetched for a secluded mountain town with a population of just under 3,000. But seeing is believing, and people who get a little taste of this alpine paradise find themselves wondering how to get a little more, which explains the housing boom that's already underway.

Located 100 miles and two hours of winding road north of Boise, Idaho, McCall (a former logging town that still retains a certain rough-neck swagger) has been likened to the Sun Valley of 30 years ago, before that once-rustic retreat became a crowded celebrity hangout. Although it's true that potato potentates and other wealthy residents of Boise have taken their summer and winter holidays here for generations (building gorgeous vacation homes around pristine Payette Lake), this breathtakingly beautiful place – a dazzling patchwork of pine-covered mountains, meandering streams, flower-filled meadows and cobalt blue sky – still feels quiet and a wee bit countrified, which is precisely its appeal.

Founded near the heart of the Payette National Forest, on the southern edge of the cleanest, clearest, glacier-carved lake you'll ever see,

McCall is an all-season vacation destination, offering more outdoor activities than the average person can tackle in one trip. With two large ski resorts (Tamarack and Brundage Mountain) located less than 15 miles away, the town gets its share of winter visitors who come for snowboarding, snowmobiling and both downhill and cross-country skiing.

For us heat-crazed desert rats, however, McCall is at its irresistible best in the summer, when cool nights and 80-degree days seem utterly heavenly. Here, all things outdoorsy are possible, including hiking, mountain biking, golfing, fishing, fly-fishing, kayaking, boating, swimming, water skiing, horseback riding and river rafting. In McCall alone, there are 300 mountain lakes, thousands of miles of walking and biking trails and 1,400 miles of rivers and streams to follow. The place is breathtaking in every sense of the word.

As anyone who's done it knows, organizing an action-filled vacation feels suspiciously like work. But in McCall, there's an easy way to avoid that pitfall: Simply book your stay at the Whitetail Club and Resort, a lakeside resort offering a multitude of fun things to do for peo-

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Whitetail Club and Resort



Narrows Restaurant

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ple of every age and inclination. Activities not offered on-site (river rafting, fly-fishing, kayaking and horseback riding, for example) are easily arranged at the front desk, which leaves the worrisome details to someone else. Ah, but convenience is only one of many things you'll love about this gracious place.

Whitetail Club and Resort

The property originally opened in 1948 as the Shore Lodge, a lakeside motel and beloved piece of McCall history that, over the decades, had begun to show its age. Manchester Grand Resorts purchased the fading icon in 1993 and, six years later, began a two-year, \$25 million renovation that utterly transformed it. If anything, Whitetail probably looks more like a lodge now than it did before. But its rustic exterior, which resembles a series of A-frame cabins, belies the elegant environs within, described as "hunting lodge chic" by San Francisco interior designer Warren Sheets. Blend-

ing river rock, massive beams of knotty pine and mounted trophy heads with plush sofas, gleaming mahogany tables and Old World oil paintings, he created a warm, inviting ambiance with one implicit message: "Make yourself at home." Around every corner lies a fireplace, a cozy reading nook or a table designed for playing cards, chess or checkers. Poke around a bit and you'll find both a game room (outfitted with billiards and shuffleboard) and a 45-seat movie theater (McCall's one and only), stocked with make-your-own popcorn and DVDs (Disney for the kids, modern classics for adults).

Whitetail's guest rooms convey the same sense of comfortable elegance as its public spaces. When the lodge was renovated, 116 smaller rooms were turned into 77 larger suites, most offering stunning views of the lake. Considering the spectacular scenery beyond every terrace and balcony, it's a wonder anyone stays indoors for five minutes. But they honestly do because each lavishly appointed suite, decorated in soft shades of green, red and gold, is a quiet haven replete with sitting area, refrigerated mini bar and marble-accented bathroom. Imagine having coffee on the balcony, swaddled in one of Whitetail's thick terry bathrobes, as you watch the mist rise off the lake. That's assuming you can get out of a bed with 900-thread-count Italian sheets and a snugly down comforter.

But even a slugabed must eventually heed the call of the Great Outdoors – especially when the Great Outdoors is so unbelievably great. You can't look at the lake without wanting to get out there on the water. Lucky for you, the resort's private marina is equipped with ski boats, jet skis and a tour boat (all available to rent). And although "go jump in the lake" is usually a putdown, it's merely a suggestion at Whitetail, where pristine Payette is so inviting that kids spend entire days cannonballing off the dock or jumping on the water trampoline. Parents keep a watchful eye from the dock or the sandy beach. There's a sparkling swimming pool, too, for those who'd rather forgo the lake's brisk temperatures (about 68 degrees in the summer).

Whether or not you choose to take a dip in the drink, do yourself a favor and set aside an hour or two (preferably a whole afternoon) for lolling around in a deck chair on that gently undulating marina. Your frazzled nerves will mend as you read, doze, sip a cocktail, stare out at the lake, eat lunch and doze some more. This is what

life (or at least life on vacation) is all about.

Type As, on the other hand, will probably feel compelled to take advantage of Whitetail's racquetball, volleyball, tennis and basketball courts as well as its roomy fitness center equipped with free weights, stationary bikes, treadmills, elliptical trainers and more.

Meanwhile, avid golfers have discovered that Whitetail's challenging 18-hole, par 72 golf course, designed by two-time U.S. Open winner Andy North, is one of the best new championship courses in the country. Golf lessons, club rentals, a resident golf pro (Ken Simonds), meticulously groomed fairways, panoramic views from the clubhouse – it's all here, including an unlimited golf package for the golf-obsessed.

When you've physically punished yourself enough, soothe those sore, achy muscles in the sauna or one of the resort's two hot tubs (one of which faces the lake). Better yet, get wet noodle-relaxed at the Whitetail's Waterblue Spa, which offers a full menu of facials, body treatments and massages. Spa director Darin Bolyard specializes in sports massage, while co-director Rebecca Spring Endter is a licensed esthetician and massage practitioner. Together, they offer the Oxygenating Facial (which begins with a back massage); the Stone Facial (using hot and cold stones to increase circulation); the Fire & Ice Facial (which combines invigorating exfoliation with a chilled masque); the Classic Organic Facial; a seasonal body wrap; a seasonal fruit/sugar scrub; relaxation massage; deep tissue massage and healing stone massage. [It's best to book spa appointments when you book your trip.]

Eating well factors into vacationing too, and to that end, Whitetail offers two restaurants – casual Emma's and the Narrows, a fine dining, evening-only venue featuring sweeping vistas of the lake. Both restaurants make use of indigenous ingredients. Emma's, for example, offers smoked Idaho trout omelets and duck salad with glazed pecans, while the Narrows seasonal menu features Kobe short ribs with Idaho Merlot reduction, oven-roasted Idaho rainbow trout with crabmeat and lemon *beurre blanc* and oven-roasted half duckling with honey-huckleberry *demiglace*. Entrée prices at the Narrows range between \$18 and \$43, while you can do very nicely at Emma's for well under \$20 per person.

As much as there is to do at Whitetail, you may still feel the urge to venture off-site for a look around. If excitement is on your vacation agenda, look no further than Hells Canyon Raft, a small, owner-operated company specializing in three- to six-day river-rafting trips down the Snake and Salmon Rivers. HCR also offers a one-day, 20-mile ride down the Salmon, a "pool and drop" river (i.e., calm pools between rapids), which is especially suited to novices, children and scaredy cats. From launch to pick-up, the trip takes about six hours, and it's nothing but fun – lots of lazing around intermixed with periods of serious paddling through Class III white water. By the time the boat pulls up to a sandy beach for lunch, you'll be very appreciative of the yummy spread of sandwiches, salads, fruits and cookies the staff provides. This Whitetail-arranged day-trip makes a great introduction to river rafting.

For milder thrills, take the kids to one of the resort's four fully stocked ponds for catch-and-release fishing that pretty much guarantees success. They'll love it, and you won't have to clean the fish.

No matter what you choose to do at Whitetail, whether it's spending your days as a super-athlete or making like a first class slug, you're bound to fall in love with this beautiful, family-oriented retreat. In fact, a stay at Whitetail is as close as some of us will ever get to having our own private Idaho.

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Guidebook



Dockside at Whitetail Club and Resort

Accommodations

Whitetail Club and Resort: 501 W. Lake St., McCall, Idaho; 208-634-2244 or 800-657-6464; whitetailclub.com

Seasonal Rates

If you're looking for a bargain, book your stay **June 1-30** or **September 1-30**. Rates (and temperatures) are lower during these times, with standard rooms ranging **between \$195 and \$299**. In peak season (July and August), standard room rates range from \$275 to \$425. Call for details.

Spa Services

Seasonal Body Wrap: 50 min., \$105
Seasonal Fruit/Spice Sugar Scrub: 45 min., \$85
Oxygenating Facial: 75 min., \$125
Stone Facial: 60 min., \$100
Fire & Ice Facial: 60 min., \$95
Classic Organic Facial: 50 min., \$90
Yam & Pumpkin Enzyme Peel: 30 min., \$60
Relaxation Massage: 60 min., \$85
Deep Tissue Massage: 60 min., \$100;
90 min., \$140
Healing Stone Massage: 90 min., \$140

River Rafting

Hells Canyon Raft: 800-523-6502 or hellscanyonraft.com. One-day trip: adult, \$85; child (up to 12), \$68.