



destination

Above: Hill's Resort on Priest Lake promises an ideal outdoors destination. Right: The Coeur d'Alene Resort, on Lake Coeur d'Alene, offers 23,000 square feet of meeting space close to many amenities.



WAITING TO EXHALE

BEAUTIFUL NORTH IDAHO WILL ROCK YOUR STEREOTYPE.

BY LINDA HAGEN-MILLER

IF YOUR NOTION OF IDAHO involves potatoes, it's time to recalibrate and hone in on the Idaho Panhandle, a 60-mile wide swath of green that divides Washington from Montana. ¶ With shimmering alpine lakes, mountains studded with evergreens, art-filled towns and local dining delicacies like buffalo, elk and huckleberries, North Idaho is a world away from cubicles, freeways, sterile meeting rooms and run-of-the-mill buffets.

The Spokane International Airport is the closest international airport and a mere 26 miles from the Idaho state line and the Panhandle's best known city, Coeur d'Alene (pronounced "core-da-LANE").

French trappers, the first Europeans to visit the area in the late 1700s, named the local Schee-Chu-Umsh Indians the Coeur d'Alene, a term that means "heart of the awl" referring to their sharp trading practices. The tribal name stuck and is now shared with the town and its nearby lake and resort.

Lake Coeur d'Alene, 25 miles long and studded with coves, is a popular venue for summer action, with easy access to hiking, boating, water skiing and

parasailing. Meanwhile, walkers, joggers and cyclists take to the Centennial Trail, a paved, non-motorized path that starts in Spokane, runs through Coeur d'Alene and extends east another 24 miles.

"Meeting attendees want to interact with a community," says Wendi Haught, CMP, with Framework Meetings and Destinations in Coeur d'Alene. "They can start the morning with a 'Bowl of Soul' at Java on Sherman, walk a block to craft a glass pendant at Summers Glass, do some gallery browsing at Art Spirit Gallery, then pick up something fun to wear at Marmalade or the Velvet Hanger. All in just three blocks."

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Since 1986, the Coeur d'Alene Resort has been a magnet for visitors and conventioners. The 338-room hotel commands a prime lakeside spot and offers all the services and amenities of a metropolitan hotel. More than 23,000 square feet of meeting space and 25 separate meeting rooms offer versatility, and the award-winning Beverly's restaurant commands a wall-to-wall view of the lake.

The legendary Coeur d'Alene Golf Course, a quick boat ride from the resort, boasts the world's only floating green as well as a 6,803-yard, par 71 course designed around the lakeshore, woodlands, a revitalized trout stream and a ridge of evergreens.

Eighteen miles north of Coeur d'Alene, the Northwest's premier fun park isn't just about kids. Silverwood Theme Park's dedicated group sales staff can book the pavilion for 15 to 5,000, arrange discount tickets and direct delegates to water-park slides and more than 60 rides including the Aftershock roller coaster that whizzes up, down and all around at 65 miles per hour.

Still abuzz from the Silverwood adrenaline rush? Hold that momentum and continue to Schweitzer Mountain Resort 40 miles north of Silverwood (90 miles from Spokane), a year-round destination well suited to small board meetings or groups of up to 250.

There's no question, meeting on a 6,400-foot high mountain kicks creative juices into gear to say nothing of the way spirits soar after a break to ski 2,900 acres of groomed terrain or swoosh along cross-country or snowshoe trails. In summer and fall when the weather is sunny and dry, an array of off-site activities are available on the mountain, including horseback riding, mountain biking, hiking, huckleberry picking in July and August and disc golf. Mid-June through October are quieter and offer better rates, but even winter rates are reasonable compared with many western ski resorts.

Schweitzer works closely with venues in nearby Sandpoint, a charming arts community 14 miles down the mountain on the shores of Lake Pend Oreille ("pond-do-RAY"), 65 miles long and Idaho's largest lake. The Shawnodese, a 40-foot cruise boat, putt-putts across the lake for breathtaking views while Owner Linda Pearson delivers lively history tales.

Or turn your delegates loose to browse galleries (part-time Sandpoint resident Viggo Mortensen's work is often displayed at Hallans Art Gallery). Coldwater Creek's flagship store has the latest offerings in ladies' wear coupled with a conveniently located northwoods wine bar upstairs. Mix with locals and catch some music at Eichardt's Pub or sip

locally crafted wine at the Pend d'Oreille Winery.

For more than 60 years, the Hill family has welcomed guests to their lakefront resort on the shores of Priest Lake, northwest of Sandpoint and 84 miles north of Spokane. Imagine lakeside cabins and chalets with fireplaces, pine strewn decks and sweeping views of the pristine, 25-mile-long lake. The Selkirk Mountains rim the horizon, so close you'll want to reach out and touch the pink and purple sunset glow. Think brainstorming sessions that culminate in a group bonfire beneath a canopy of stars. Think gourmet meals focusing on locally picked morel mushrooms and huckleberries.

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Groups from 15 to 60 are invited to Hill's during the resort's quiet season, September through June. In fall and spring, delegates can play at nearby Priest Lake Golf Course, hike through pine and cedar forests, canoe or kayak the lake. When the snow flies around mid-November, the focus turns to cross country skiing, snowshoeing and snowmobiling 400 miles of groomed trails in the nearby hills.

"When leaders and employees learn they're going to Hill's Resort, you can just feel them exhale," says Karen Marsolek, a group facilitator, speaker and business coach who lives in Missoula, Mont. "They know what will happen at Hill's—you have permission to exhale."

One of Marsolek's clients, Providence Health & Services in Spokane, has utilized Hill's for more than 25 years for employee retreats. The reasons, she believes, are threefold: food, service and setting.

"The meals are exquisite," Marsolek says, "and people feel special and invested in when they are treated well. Hill's is a family owned place where guests come back year after year, so their employees know about personalized service and are accustomed to building relationships with clients. Remote? Good! When you go to a hotel, you sit in sessions, maybe share a meal, then everyone heads for their room and cable TV. The remoteness of Hill's encourages people to communicate and it strengthens the corporate community culture. People take walks together, sit on the dock and talk, build bonfires and linger. They linger—and that's when the real work gets done." 