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at Lake Chelan

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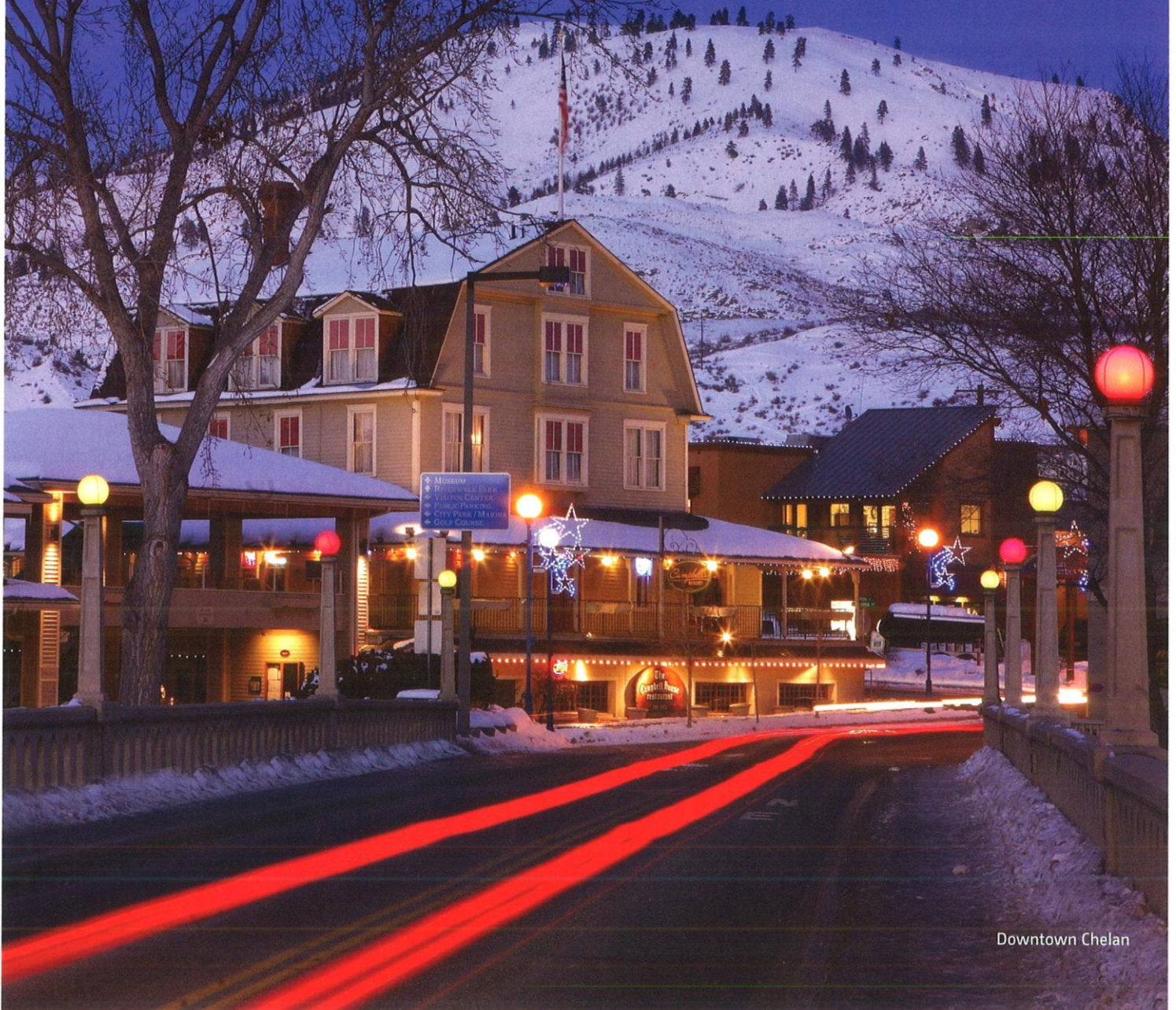
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Post-Holiday “Winterlude”

at Lake Chelan

by Allen Cox



Downtown Chelan

LAKE CHELAN WINTERLUDE

Whatever your traditions, chances are you've just spent the holiday season shopping, decorating, wrapping gifts, cooking, entertaining, eating, celebrating and, finally, raising a few glasses to the New Year. Now it's time to step back into life as usual. But the holiday season can take a toll. If you're not quite ready for your normal routine, you may be in need of a post-holiday break, or a "winterlude."

A winterlude is all about decompressing come January. A winter destination that has all the elements for lowering the stress level is Lake Chelan in north-central Washington. It has a pristine lakeside setting, slopes and forests glistening with snow, a first-rate local wine and food scene, excellent hotels and plenty of winter attractions. Depending on when you go and the type of experience you're looking for, January and February can bring the company of festival-goers or isolation and total tranquility.

Lake Chelan Winterfest Fire & Ice

If you're looking for a festive atmosphere and a line-up of fun activities, visit Chelan during Winterfest Fire & Ice. It takes place over two weekends this winter: January 11-13 at Manson Bay Marina and January 18-20 in historic downtown Chelan.

At the festival's Wine Walk, the Lake Chelan region's wineries pour at several downtown venues. It's a chance to see the town, browse the shops and galleries, and sample the region's fine wines while walking from venue to venue. You can also go on a Winter Ale Walk, view the amazing creations of international ice sculptors, tap your feet to the beat of live music, warm up at a chili cook-off, judge a soup-making contest and much more.



Snowga

For a one-of-a-kind experience during Winterfest, try yoga on snowshoes, or snowga—no experience necessary. It's not as difficult as it sounds. You'll put on snowshoes, and your guide will take you and other curious souls out for a refreshing trek at Echo Ridge Snowshoe Trails.

At breaks, you'll strike a yoga pose, breathe deeply and feel all that pent-up holiday stress dissolve into the frigid, mountain air as you exhale. You'll emerge clear-headed, focused and maybe even a bit giddy from all that fresh air and exercise.

Wine, Wine, Wine

The Lake Chelan Wine Valley is one of Washington's newest AVAs (American Viticultural Area), and boasts distinctive varietals and styles. Even if you're not a connoisseur, it's a wonderful spot for a wine-tasting escape. Many of the tasting rooms are open in winter, and winemakers welcome visitors who want to stop in to learn about their wines.

For a self-guided wine tour that covers the most scenic parts of the valley, you can't go wrong with these

three. On the north side of the lake, the Benson family operates Benson Vineyards and Estate Winery, the only 100 percent estate winery in the Lake Chelan region. Try the new release of the 2008 Syrah Reserve; co-fermented with a small amount of Viognier, it's an elegant and complex wine.

For the next stop, head for the 35-foot bell tower on the south shore of the lake. You've arrived at Tsillan Cellars with its Tuscan-influenced tasting room. Here, order a flight to sample the spectrum of varietals and styles this winery is known for. Be sure to check winter hours before you go. Continue around the south shore to Karma Vineyards, open year round. Known for fine bubbly that sparkle like the lake in the winter sun and made in the Methode Champenoise, this winery is a must on any Lake Chelan wine tour.

Of course, many other wineries are open in winter as well, so you may want to create your own wine trail after visiting lakechelanwinevalley.com.

Red Wine and Chocolate

There's no sexier pairing of food and drink than fine red wine and

LAKE CHELAN WINTERLUDE



chocolate! Throughout the weekends of February 9-10 and 16-17, lovers of this legendary pairing converge on Lake Chelan to indulge in this exquisite marriage.

Eighteen wineries pouring their best reds to pair with chocolate seems almost sinful, and certainly too wonderful to pass up. But, after all, it is the romantic month of February.



"Nefarious"

Slow Boat to Stehekin

If you're a big-city dweller, you've taken a giant step to "get away from it all" by going to Lake Chelan, but you're still in a cocoon of civilization with all its comforts. To leap even farther into the wilderness, buy a ticket and board the Lady of the Lake, the venerable vessel that travels the length of 55-mile Lake Chelan to Stehekin, among the most remote villages in the country.

As you make the journey, the peaks of the North Cascades surround you, increasing in altitude as you venture deeper into the wilderness. Watch for wildlife on the banks and cliffs.

Stehekin gives "getting away from it all" a fresh meaning. Boat or seaplane is the only access to the village, whose small population dwindles in winter. Once in Stehekin, you can stretch your legs on the dock, but don't go too far. Soon it will be time to board for the return trip.

There is a cash-only snack bar on board, but feel free to pack your own picnic. Do not miss the boat for your return journey to Chelan; in January and February, the Lady runs on Monday, Wednesday and Friday only.

No matter your pick of activities—whether it's solitude by a crackling fire with a good book and a local wine, or the camaraderie of festival-goers on a quest for their own "winterlude"—after a post-holiday visit to Lake Chelan, you'll feel the stress ease away. You're ready to face life again. But you won't be able to deny the urge to return next winter.

Planning Your Lake Chelan Winterlude

Winery locations, hours and details:

Lake Chelan Wine Valley, lakechelanwinevalley.com.

Information about visiting Lake Chelan: Lake Chelan Chamber, lakechelan.com.

Where to stay:

>> Campbell's Resort, 104 W Woodin Ave, Chelan; 509-682-2561; campbellsresort.com.

>> Lake House at Chelan, 402 W Manson Hwy, Chelan; 509-293-5982; lakehousechelan.com.

Winterfest Fire & Ice: lakechelanwinterfest.com.

Reserve your spot for Snowga: yogachelan.com/snowga_345.html.

Red Wine & Chocolate: lakechelanwinevalley.com.

Lady of the Lake: 509-682-4584; ladyofthelake.com.

All about Stehekin: stehekin.com.