

# Full Houseboat

Family and friends  
vacation together  
on Shasta Lake

By Leslie Mieko Yap



**A BOATLOAD OF FUN:** Family members and friends rent a houseboat for a week on Shasta Lake. The 65-foot-long *Titan* accommodates all 23 (shown here, minus Alan and his son, Schulyer, who are taking the picture) in comfort.

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y husband, Clint, tried the usual tactics to move our houseboat from its overnight moorage on Shasta Lake's shaley shore. He eased the throttle into full reverse, then threw on the side thrusters, which wiggled the beached craft from side to side.

It was no use. The boat wouldn't budge.

Before departing the previous day, the staff at Jones Valley Marina told us the lake was receding up to six inches a day—its normal drawdown of water that's used for power, fisheries, and irrigation. They recommended that we shove off by midmorning each day to avoid getting stuck. It was only 10 A.M. on this sparkling August morning, but already the water level had dropped.

"Everybody to the back of the boat!" shouted Alan, a writer from Redding and the most experienced houseboater on board. All 22 of us passengers—11 adults and 11 children ages two to 14—congregated on the back deck. Together we weighed more than a ton.

"On the count of three, everyone jump!" Alan instructed.

We did, a few times, laughing and joking, and finally the boat broke loose. A cheer went up and we high-fived each other.

As Clint piloted the boat into open water, the kids resumed their card game and the moms went back to clearing the kitchen. Clint, an Irvine real estate broker, settled into his helmsman duties; Cedric, an executive with a nonprofit in San Francisco, retreated to the top deck to read; and Zoom, an engineer from Cypress, checked his fishing gear. I plopped myself into a chair on the front deck with a cup of coffee and a map of Shasta Lake and pondered which of its four arms we should explore that day.

The morning's exertion typified one of the best aspects of our weeklong houseboat trip. Traveling in a group—in our case, a congenial mix of family and friends—made even simple acts like shoving off from shore more fun and adventurous, giving us stories to recount over and over.

## Building Bigger Houseboats

At one time, a group as large as ours couldn't have fit onto one houseboat. Most boats could sleep only eight to 12 passengers. In the past decade, however, houseboat manufacturers have been building vessels for larger groups. Taking cues from yacht designers, they're also making houseboats more elaborate.

For our adventure, we rented the 65-foot-long, three-deck-high *Titan*, which can accommodate 23 people and has six private staterooms, a bunkroom, and three bathrooms. It also has enough creature comforts—including a dishwasher, a hot tub, and eight flat-screen TVs—to make even a die-hard landlubber feel at home.

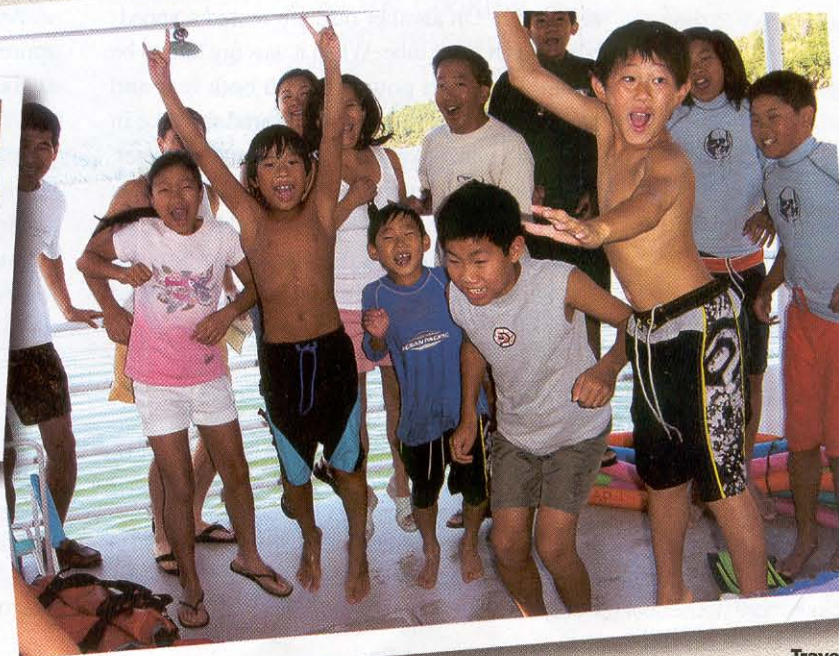
## House Rules

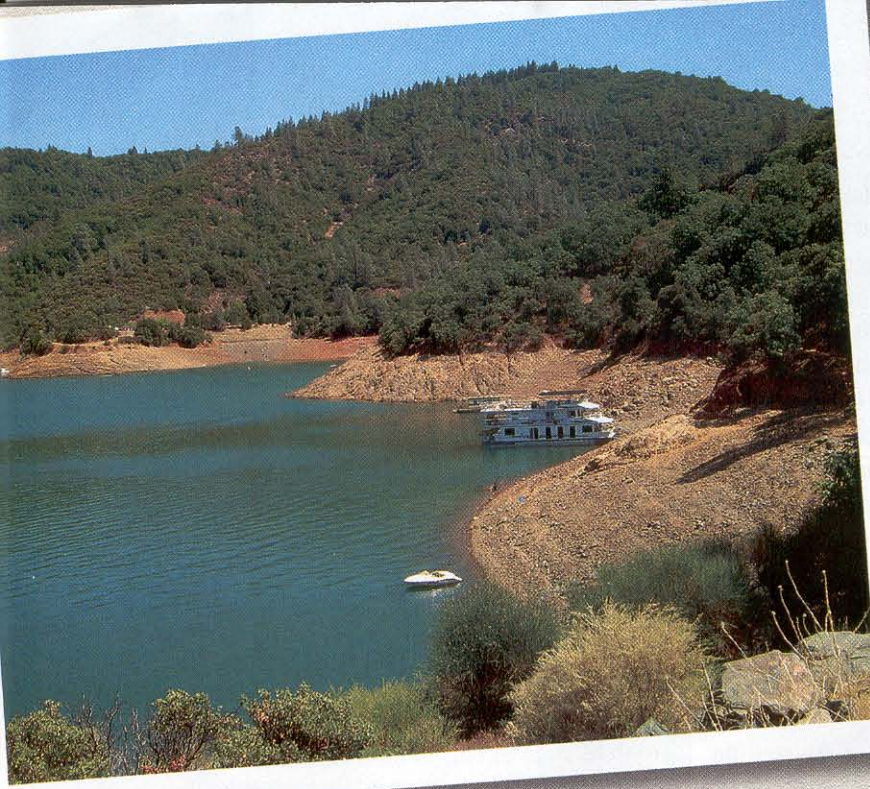
Larry Hartmann of Hacienda Heights takes a houseboat trip with as many as 16 family members every year. At the start of each trip, the passengers create a code of conduct they all must follow. Some examples of rules are: Say only kind words, Clean up your own messes, and Hug your pop daily. Anyone can call a violation, and the perpetrator is then subject to the "walk-the-plank" ritual: In front of the entire crew, he or she is apprised of the offense, blindfolded, spun around, and slowly led off the boat's stern into the lake. —L.M.Y.



### ROCK THE BOAT:

Captain Clint (above) pilots the craft with a little help from his friends—when the boat gets stuck, they hop up and down on the back to free it (right).





#### GOOD TIMES:

Our mariners (clockwise from above) stop in a secluded cove and go exploring, enjoy the houseboat's hot tub, ride the waves on Jet Skis, and relax in the *Titan's* kitchen and common area.

Still, I wondered if being on a boat with a crowd for a week would begin to feel claustrophobic. I discovered that with the right balance of togetherness and solo activities, I could enjoy both company and quiet time.

Shasta Lake itself, with 365 miles of shoreline and hundreds of coves, helped make that combination possible. We opted to leisurely explore the lake, enjoying a different activity each day to get us off the boat and docking in a new cove each night.

One afternoon, we rented Jet Skis from a marina. My boys, Cooper, seven, and Connor, 11, whooped as they sped away with their father at 40 mph. On another day, we rented a speedboat and an inner tube. When it was my turn to be pulled, my heart pounded with both fear and delight as the tube careened around the lake in the boat's wake like a rock skipping over water.

As on an ocean cruise, we even did a couple of shore excursions. In the McCloud River Arm, we saw a hillside sign that read LAKE SHASTA CAVERNS. After mooring our boat, we hiked



up to a bus that took us to the limestone cave entrance, 800 feet above the lake. During a guided tour, we marveled at the glistening stalactites and stalagmites. I was glad that the only bats we encountered on our trip were in those caves.

We also toured an aboveground wonder: Shasta Dam, which created Shasta Lake in 1948. As we neared the behemoth concrete structure, I felt like an ant. The face of the dam covers 32 acres, equal to six football fields.

As much as we enjoyed the activities, we also appreciated the downtime as we cruised along at six miles per hour. I'd brought a book, but as I sat on the top deck I often found myself simply enjoying the views of the wooded hillsides, the sunset, or the deer that came to the water's edge for a drink.

As soon as we docked in our cove for the evening, the kids (and braver adults) began

## Where the Boats Are

A growing number of houseboat operators in the Western U.S. are renting vessels that accommodate large parties. Houseboat rentals are available on Shasta Lake in California, Lake Mead in Nevada, Lake Powell in Utah and Arizona, and Lake Havasu, on the California/Arizona border. Houseboating high season is June through September, but in California, houseboats are typically available year-round.

A 56-footer, which can sleep up to 15 people, rents for \$3,300–\$7,900 per week. On Shasta Lake, the *Titan*, which is the biggest boat available on any lake, rents for \$14,995 per week. For information about the *Titan* and other boats on several California lakes, visit [houseboats.com](http://houseboats.com). To explore more houseboat options, visit [houseboat.net](http://houseboat.net), [houseboat.com](http://houseboat.com), [sevencrown.com](http://sevencrown.com), or [gordonguide.com/houseboats](http://gordonguide.com/houseboats). —L.M.Y.



making endless trips down the enclosed, three-deck-high spiral slide on the back of the boat. They'd shoot out like cannonballs and plunge into the calm, 80-degree water. The rest of us joined them in the water with our neon-colored flotation "noodles." We happily floated, swam, and splashed, creating a bubbling cauldron of color, until the sun set.

## Cove at First Sight

It was in the evenings that our group came together like one big family. As we ate dinner in the common area next to the kitchen, we recounted the day's activities and laughed and ribbed one another over our adventures and misadventures. Like how Jerry, an engineer from Irvine, made just one catch on this trip: the same two-inch-long fish he reeled in—twice. Or how in one cove, the boat broke loose from its mooring and started to float away without our skipper Clint or the kids on board.

Or the night it took us several hours to find a cove.

We had seen some fine-looking coves near the entrance to the lake's Sacramento Arm, but curiosity about the next cove kept pushing us forward. As the afternoon wore on, we discovered that most of the coves were taken. I began to feel as if we were in a Costco parking lot on a weekend.

"Just grab the next cove you see," I anxiously told Clint as darkness began to fall around 8 P.M. A small houseboat was already moored in the next cove, but we headed for the long stretch of shoreline next to it that remained unoccupied. As the giant *Titan* slid into place, two children ran up to us and shouted, "Find your own cove!" We weren't sure whether they were kidding.

After staking in, Clint visited the occupants of the other boat, apologized for invading their privacy, and promised we'd be quiet.

We kept our promise, but that night as we slept, the wind picked up, literally howling down the lake and rattling the boat. The noise woke Clint and me around 3 A.M., and we went outside to check the stakes. Before returning to our stateroom, we paused on the balcony to view the night sky. It was riddled with stars, twinkling shoulder to shoulder. In a span of a few minutes, I saw three of them shoot across the blackness.

Although I was looking forward to the next day's group adventure, I relished this rare moment of silence. Standing on the deck under the open sky with just my husband by my side, I forgot, for a few moments, that the boat was full of other people. **W**

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## Together-ness Tips

A little organization goes a long way when dealing with a large group on a houseboat.

- ❑ **Assign rooms ahead of time.** When bags are loaded on board, passengers can bring them directly to their rooms, avoiding chaos in the common area, which can quickly become a jumble of sleeping bags, duffel bags, and supplies.
- ❑ **Pack lightly.** Even if the boat is big, storage space is likely to be limited. My son Connor wore just one garment the entire week: his swimming trunks.
- ❑ **Divvy up the cooking.** On our trip, each of the six families was responsible for supplying the makings of breakfast and dinner for the entire group on one assigned day. (Each family was on its own for lunch.) Everyone, however, pitched in to prepare each meal and clean up afterward. Sharing cooking techniques and recipes became a highlight of each meal.
- ❑ **Divvy up the costs.** In addition to the houseboat rental fee, there'll be costs for gas and insurance, as well as fees for things such as personal watercraft rental.
- ❑ **Divvy up the duties.** Staking in a large boat in each cove (pictured) takes muscle power, so several able-bodied passengers are a must. For the captain, no prior experience is necessary, but piloting a huge boat can be intimidating. The captain and cocaptain will receive an orientation prior to departure, and someone from the marina's staff can help navigate the boat out of the marina into open water.
- ❑ **Go with the flow.** Being on a boat for a week with even close family and friends requires flexibility. This is a good time to let the little things go. —L.M.Y.