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FREE GUIDE

The Leavenworth Buyer's Guide

Moving here, or buying a second place here: what the upper Wenatchee Valley is actually like, from someone who did it.

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Start here: it is a valley, not a town

People say "buying in Leavenworth" and mean one of six places, and the differences between them decide most of what your life here looks like. The city of Leavenworth is 1.45 square miles. A Leavenworth mailing address covers far more ground than that, and most homes with that address are actually in unincorporated Chelan County. Which side of the city line you land on decides your water source, who plows your road, what a permit costs, and whether you can rent the place out.

Here is the short version of each place. Each one has a full page on my site if you want the long version.

- **Leavenworth.** The incorporated city and the visitor economy. Municipal water and sewer downtown, mixed toward the edges. Schools, the hospital, groceries and most services are here. The busiest place in the valley on a festival weekend and quiet on a Tuesday in November. Tuesdays and Wednesdays are the slow days all year; in the off-season some restaurants do not open on them.
- **Plain.** Not a town, but not nothing either. Cabins and homes on acreage, north of Leavenworth toward Lake Wenatchee, all county, with a small downtown Plain on Beaver Valley Road: Plain Grocer, a hardware store that also pours coffee, the Old Mill Cafe, and Plain Cellars just down the road. Wells, septic, private roads, more snow than town. Shares the 98826 ZIP, so your paperwork will say Leavenworth.
- **Lake Wenatchee.** Also not a town. Second homes and cabins around a glacial lake, with a state park, a grocer, and a gas station at Coles Corner for the basics. The most snow in this guide. Water comes from small community systems, wells, or the lake itself with a UV filter, and the questions here are who plows, where the water comes from, and what the roof was built to carry.
- **Peshastin.** Small, unincorporated, orchards in most directions, ZIP 98847. It sits at the US 97 junction, which matters in winter because it puts you a mile from the Blewett Pass route. A post

office, a library, a laundromat, one bar and a cafe; not a lot else, and that is the appeal for some people.

- **Dryden.** A working orchard community between Peshastin and Cashmere, valley floor, state highway through the middle. Similar to Peshastin, quieter still. Your neighbors farm, and frost fans run at two in the morning in spring.
- **Cashmere.** An incorporated city at 879 feet with the most full-time-resident feel of the six: a strong Americana vibe, a turn-of-the-century downtown, a 26-minute mean commute, and a school system people move here for. Families relocate to Cashmere specifically for the four high school years. Less snow, less tourism, and short-term rental allocation that was still largely unused as of the county's August 2026 count.

If you take one thing from this guide: check the parcel, not the address. The county's GIS map shows the city limit line, and I check it on every property before anything else.

Getting here, and getting out

Two ways in from the west side. US 2 over Stevens Pass runs straight through Leavenworth. The other is I-90 over Snoqualmie Pass to Cle Elum, then US 97 north over Blewett Pass to US 2, and up the valley from the east. East on US 2 is Wenatchee, the regional city, 25 minutes from Leavenworth, with the big-box stores, the regional hospital system, and the airport. Amtrak's Empire Builder stops at Icicle Station in town.

Plan on US 2 closing sometimes. December 2025 flooding washed out Tumwater Canyon between Leavenworth and Stevens Pass, and the highway was closed from December 10 until February 10, 2026. That was an anomaly; most closures on either pass are short and reopen quickly. When it happens, Blewett is the way west, so if you are commuting to the Seattle side, learn the Blewett route before you need it. WSDOT's mountain pass page shows current conditions, cameras and chain requirements for both passes: wsdot.com/travel/real-time/mountainpasses. It becomes a habit.

Flying: Pangborn Memorial Airport in East Wenatchee has Alaska Airlines service to Seattle. We have used it for family trips more than once, though most people still drive to SeaTac for anything beyond Seattle.

What a year here looks like

Winter is what people who move from the west side underestimate. Leavenworth's mean annual snowfall is 80 inches in town, and Plain and Lake Wenatchee get well over 100 most years. Nights in the single digits happen a few times a winter. You will own a snow shovel and probably a roof rake, you will know who plows your driveway, and if you are on a well you will want a generator, because the pump stops when the power does. North-facing slopes and canyons rarely see direct sun in winter and the snow there does not melt until spring. If you happen to be looking in winter, use it: walking a steep-access property in February tells you things a July showing cannot.

Spring starts muddy. March is the melt: the snow is going, the ground is soft, it is not warm yet, and the town is slow. November is the other shoulder season, but for the opposite reason; the fall crowds are gone and the first real snow is usually still a few weeks off, often not until Thanksgiving or December. Then April and May are some of the best weeks of the year. Around Easter the hills that are brown the rest of the year go green all the way down to Cashmere, and the balsamroot and lupine bloom at the same time for a few short weeks. Frost fans run in the orchards down-valley on cold nights, and the county sets its short-term rental numbers.

Summer is dry, hot, and busy. The Enchantments permit season runs May 15 through October 31, and between that and every other trailhead up there, Icicle Road carries steady traffic. Late summer brings wildfire smoke some years, and you plan around it the way west-siders plan around rain: air purifiers, checking AQI, and a willingness to move plans indoors.

Fall is the best season here and also the most crowded downtown. Autumn Leaf Festival is the last weekend of September, Oktoberfest is the first three weekends of October, and the town changes character on those days. Locals learn which streets close, where to park, and when to stay home. Christmastown, which the town also calls the Village of Lights, runs from the day after Thanksgiving through Christmas Eve, and the lights stay up through February and often closer to St. Patrick's Day.

January is my favorite month to have people visit: all of December's lights, none of December's crowd, and Winter Karneval on the January weekends, which is the only fireworks show the town puts on all year. If you have not spent a weekday in January here, do it before you buy. Most people who love the place in October love it more in January. Some do not.

The everyday stuff

Healthcare. Cascade Medical in Leavenworth is a nonprofit Critical Access Hospital with a 24/7 emergency department, a family medicine clinic, inpatient beds, imaging, lab, physical therapy, behavioral health and ambulance service. Its district covers Plain, Leavenworth, Peshastin and Dryden. I have been in that emergency room with my own kids more than once, and I am glad it is here. For the everyday stuff, illness, cuts, scrapes, it is really good. When they send you out, it is usually Confluence Health in Wenatchee; that is where our broken bones have gone. In the rare serious case, people get flown to Seattle.

Schools. Cascade School District covers 1,175 square miles of western Chelan County and serves Dryden, Lake Wenatchee, Leavenworth, Peshastin, Plain and Winton. Two small elementary schools cover the early grades outside town, Peshastin-Dryden Elementary down-valley and Beaver Valley Elementary up in Plain for families north of Leavenworth; everything else is in Leavenworth. It is a good district and a small one, with the funding realities that come with small. Cashmere has its own district and a reputation strong enough that families move there for it. Bus routing varies road to road, and school buses only run on maintained county roads the district has designated, so if the bus matters to you, confirm your specific address with the district before you buy, not after.

Power. Chelan County PUD generates its own hydropower and, by its own account, Chelan County pays the second-lowest electric rates in the nation, about 2.8 cents per kilowatt hour against a

national average near 13.7, with a median household bill around $55 a month. In my experience the service is good and outages get fixed fast. Two caveats: on raw land, price the power extension before you price the house, and on a well, own a generator or some water storage.

Internet and cell. Chelan County PUD built a fiber network that reaches most of the county, sold through retail internet providers rather than by the PUD itself, and the coverage is excellent. The gaps are mostly low-population canyons that have not been reached yet. Check the specific address on the PUD's site before you buy, or call them; a Nokia box on the outside of the house is the sure sign it is already connected. Cell service drops out in the deeper canyons. If you work remotely, test your carrier standing on the actual parcel, not downtown.

Groceries and errands. Leavenworth has three grocery stores: Safeway, which is exactly what you expect; Dan's Food Market, locally owned, and where we shop most of the time because the prices do not swing with the tourist season; and Sage Natural Foods, for the higher-quality meat and produce when that is what you are after. The hardware and lumber store is Marson and Marson. Cashmere has Martin's IGA. Anything bigger, Costco, Walmart, Home Depot, Lowe's, and most medical specialists, is a Wenatchee trip, and most people here batch those into one trip every couple of weeks or once a month.

Taxes. Washington has no state income tax. Sales tax and property tax carry the load instead. Property taxes here generally run under 1 percent of assessed value, and the county assessor's site will show you the actual bill on any parcel.

Working here

Most of my relocating buyers fall into three groups: remote workers keeping a west-side or out-of-state job, people taking a job in Wenatchee, and people buying a business or working in tourism, hospitality or the trades here in the valley. Stevens Pass is the closest ski area and brings a seasonal crowd every winter, though they mostly rent. The remote group has the most freedom and the most homework, because the whole decision comes down to internet and cell on the parcel and how often they need to be in an office. If that is you, a week here working from a rental before you buy is the best money you will spend, and if you need help finding one, ask; I manage a couple.

The five questions that decide which property

Whatever else you want in a house, these five decide whether a specific property works here. I go through all of them on every showing.

1. **City or county?** Decides short-term rental rules, water and sewer, plowing, and permits. The GIS map answers it in a minute. 2. **Where does the water come from?** City system, private well, or shared community system. Outside the city, get the well log and a flow test, and test the water: bacteria always, nitrates if the ground was ever orchard. Some wells here run high in iron and minerals; that is normal and it means a filtration system, not a bad well. 3. **Who plows the road, and what does it cost?** Many rural properties are on private roads maintained by the owners who use them. The county only maintains roads in the county system, and some public roads are maintained by nobody.

Ask whether there is a road maintenance agreement and read it if there is; plenty of private roads out here run on a handshake, and summer grading is part of the cost too. 4. **What is the roof, and what sits under it?** Metal sheds snow, so look for snow breaks above doors and decks. Composition holds it, so look for heat tape and ask about ice dams. Then look at whatever is under the shed line: decks and railings take a beating from years of snow sliding onto them. 5. **Can you insure it?** Many carriers auto-decline a Chelan County address on wildfire models before a human looks at the house. Write the offer with a homeowners insurance contingency and get a binder inside the inspection period. I work with local agents who place policies where the big names say no.

The full version of this, with what to ask for and who to call, is my Mountain Property Due-Diligence Checklist. Message me CHECKLIST and I will send it.

Stay here first

Before you buy, spend a week or two in the part of the valley you are considering. Book a short-term rental in Plain or up at the lake if that is the short list; in town, a hotel gives you the same read. Even a week tells you which side of the valley you want, how you feel about the drive to Wenatchee, and whether the quiet is your kind of quiet. Renting long-term first is what I did and it helped, but I do not recommend it to most people: long-term rentals here are scarce, and they are not much cheaper than Seattle. A lot of buyers who stay first end up buying somewhere other than where they thought they wanted, and they are happier for it.

About renting the place out

Short-term rental income is the reason a lot of people look here, and it is the thing buyers get wrong most often. Inside the city, nightly rentals are allowed in the commercial zones; in residential zones the path is an owner-occupied bed and breakfast with a Conditional Use Permit. Outside the city, Chelan County caps non-owner-occupied rentals by area, and unincorporated Leavenworth, Plain and Lake Wenatchee are all over their caps as of the county's latest count. County permits do not transfer to a new owner. If rental income is part of your math, that is its own conversation and I have a separate guide for it; message me STR. Do not let projected rental income set the price you pay.

How I work with people moving here

Most of my out-of-state relocation clients start with video, and I will do video for anyone who wants it. I walk a property with you on a live video call or send a recorded walkthrough, and we get honest about it before anyone books a flight. Then we plan one trip that covers the short list, the town, the drive to Wenatchee, and ideally a school or a coffee shop on a weekday morning. I would rather you make one good trip than three rushed ones.

That said, nothing replaces standing in the house. If you are within driving distance, come over when you can. The drive is part of the decision, you see things on a walkthrough that no video shows, and sellers take an offer more seriously from a buyer who has walked the property.

If you want the long version of any of this, the six area pages on justinhorvath.com are the practical conversation I have with buyers before they come out. And if you want to talk through your situation, call or text (509) 652-2023 or email hello@justinhorvath.com.

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General information, not legal or tax advice. Rules and counts change; confirm the details for a specific property before you rely on them.