

America's

# BEST CITIES

A RANKING OF U.S. PLACE EQUITY

2020

A photograph of a man and a woman smiling and shopping at a farmers market at night. They are looking at fresh produce in wooden crates. The man is wearing a light-colored shirt and a woven basket is slung over his shoulder. The woman is wearing a dark jacket and has curly hair. The background is a blurred market scene with warm lighting.

## America's Best Small Cities

Where to live, work, invest and visit  
(when it's safe to)

Pc Pd Po Ps Pg Pm

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# WELCOME TO THE 2020 RANKING OF AMERICA'S BEST SMALL CITIES

Resonance Consultancy is building the most comprehensive city rankings on the planet. Here's why this matters now more than ever.

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**As leading advisors in tourism, real estate and economic development for more than a decade, our team has conducted extensive research on the rise of cities, the key trends propelling this growth and the factors that shape our perception of urban centers as desirable places to live, visit and invest.**

The COVID-19 pandemic has challenged us and our cities in ways none of us have ever experienced before. It's caused us to reexamine and rethink the way we'll want to live, work and play in the future. If there is one thing that social distancing has taught us, it's that the shared spaces we were asked to close and avoid, from parks to restaurants to sporting venues, museums and galleries, are what we cherish most about the cities we live in or love to visit.

The nation's small cities—with MSA populations under half a million people—face particularly pivotal months ahead. Small-center urban growth was already rising before the pandemic. Now with millions of workers increasingly able to work remotely, will the steady flow turn into a firehose? At the same time, we expect travel to drive-to destinations to recover first. As American travelers hit the road, they'll likely look to small cities to satisfy their travel desires.

Small cities built and fueled this country for a century, only to be often overlooked and left behind. But this decade, small cities—and especially the 50 best hometowns and destinations that our data has surfaced—will take their turn at center stage.

While this Best Cities ranking incorporates standard metrics for factors such as weather, crime and household incomes, what distinguishes our methodology from all others is that we also incorporate user-generated data to quantify the number of quality restaurants, shops, nightlife and other experiences that make urban living so alluring.

Based on the data we have collected over the past five years, we know that a city's performance for factors such as Facebook Check-ins, Instagram mentions, recommended culinary experiences, museums, nightlife, culture and shopping, have some of the highest correlations with not only the number of visitors a city receives, but investment and economic growth as well. Rebooting this software of urban experiences will be as important as improvements to the hardware in terms of investments in infrastructure when it comes to a city's recovery from this crisis.

The rankings in this report reflect the performance of cities for each of these metrics prior to the pandemic. No doubt some restaurants, shops and other unique local experiences will not survive the loss in clientele and revenue that the COVID-19 lockdown has wrought and the results a year from now may vary significantly from one city to the next. Our data will provide a unique perspective to quantify the impact the crisis has had on cities from an experiential point of view.

But survive they will, and some will even thrive. The most likely candidates being those that sit atop these rankings. We hope this report will inspire you to celebrate and rediscover these small cities in the months to come.

To discuss how Resonance can help enhance the prosperity of your city or community, please get in touch.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Chris Fair', written in a cursive style.

Chris Fair, President & CEO  
Resonance Consultancy  
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# THE AMERICAN TOWN IS OUR BLUEPRINT FOR REBIRTH

Our recovery will be local and will start with our small cities and towns. Resonance and AFAR are proud to bring you the stories of human-scale recovery—and discovery.

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What will a post-COVID-19 world look like? Will we still shake hands, kiss cheeks and hug strangers? Will we be quick to board planes—or wary, with masks on and hand sanitizer at the ready? Coronavirus has upended our collective days, and our futures, in ways we can't even fathom yet. At the time this letter is published, I may feel differently than I do as I write it. But at AFAR Media, where I serve as digital content director, we're committed to staying home as long as required, and we continue to cover the pandemic as avid travelers are inclined to do: with empathy, a desire to support our neighbors, and a willingness to see the big picture. We are, truly, all in this together, in an unprecedented way.

Once we finally leave our front yards for something more than a grocery run, I expect we'll tiptoe into the world: we'll check out the neighborhood first—the local parks and beaches, our beloved shops and cafés—but also that Ethiopian restaurant we'd eyed but never tried, or the awning with the bad font that we previously ignored. We'll be travelers in our own towns.

As our orbit expands to include much-missed family and friends, we'll wander locally, driving to places like overlooked local wine regions in lieu of our canceled trip to Tuscany. We'll tentatively plan road trips, weekend getaways—and we'll crave inspiration, feeling like a shop sign that once said "The World Is Closed" now reads "Open for Business!" Where should we go? Better still: How can we help with the dollars we spend?

This isn't just a time for small businesses to shine; it's also a moment for small cities, once overlooked as travel destinations and hometowns, to beckon us. But where are those cities? And how do they excel and stand out? Resonance Consultancy's list of America's Best Small Cities is your primer. The 2020 report showcases the best of our country—where a high quality of life extends beyond incomes and infrastructure to include a dynamic culture fueled by a diverse, creative community. Once you discover these cities, you'll want to return again and again—and some may never want to leave.

Where can you find this list? Check out [AFAR.com](http://AFAR.com), which is proud to be the exclusive editorial partner of Resonance Consultancy for America's Best Cities and the World's Best Cities, released every January. Let's rediscover what's in our own backyard.

Laura Dannen Redman  
Digital Content Director, AFAR Media

# CONTENTS



Methodology — 06

America's Top 50 Small Cities Profiles — 08

America's 100 Best Small Cities Full List — 29

# THE AMERICA'S BEST CITIES METHODOLOGY

Resonance Consultancy ranks American cities (principal cities of metropolitan areas with populations of more than 100,000) by using a combination of statistical performance and qualitative evaluations by locals and visitors in 23 areas grouped into six core categories. Principal cities are defined as the largest city in each metropolitan statistical area.

## THE SIX CORE CATEGORIES

Pc PLACE

Po PEOPLE

Pg PROGRAMMING

Pd PRODUCT

Ps PROSPERITY

Pm PROMOTION



Pc PLACE

Our most layered category quantifies a city's physical sense of place. To score a city within our Place category, we evaluate the perceived quality of its natural and built environments. From how often the sun shines to the safety of the streets, several readily measurable, oft-cited factors influence our perceptions.

**Weather** Average number of sunny days (National Climatic Data Center, Weatherbase)

**Safety** Violent crime rate (U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation)

**Sights & Landmarks** Number of quality points of interest, neighborhoods and landmarks recommended by locals and visitors (TripAdvisor.com)

**Parks & Outdoors** Number of quality parks and outdoor activities recommended by locals and visitors (TripAdvisor.com)



Pd PRODUCT

This is a ranking of the "hardware" of a city—often the most difficult metric for cities to get right. Our product category studies a city's key institutions, attractions and infrastructure. A city's infrastructure and institutions shape its identity via the quantity, quality and reputation of these "products." Expensive and difficult to develop and maintain, exceptional, recognizable products are often found only in large, cosmopolitan cities.

**Airport Connectivity** Number of direct destinations served by the city's airports (Google Flights)

**Attractions** Number of quality attractions recommended by locals and visitors (TripAdvisor.com)

**Museums** Number of quality museums and arts institutions recommended by locals and visitors (TripAdvisor.com)

**University Ranking** Score of the top local university (U.S. News & World Report, Best National Universities)

**Convention Center** Size of the largest convention center (Official Convention Center Website)

**Professional Sports Teams** Number of major league sports teams (multiple sources)



## Po PEOPLE

The more diverse a city's population, the more it produces global ideas... on a local scale. Human capital is often a city's most valuable resource. To evaluate the relative strength of human capital from one city to the next, we consider the diversity of the city's population—something of proven importance when it comes to attracting talent.

**Diversity** Percentage of foreign-born residents (U.S. Census, American Community Survey)

**Educational Attainment** Percentage of the population with a bachelor's degree or higher (U.S. Census, American Community Survey)



## Ps PROSPERITY

A well-paid, economically secure citizenry facilitates stewardship and innovation. In general, beliefs about the wealth and prosperity of a city are shaped by statistics such as the income of citizens, the standard of living and the presence or absence of large, recognizable corporations—despite the fact that start-ups and innovation increasingly drive a city's development and economic growth.

**Fortune 500** Number of Fortune 500 corporate headquarters (Fortune.com)

**Household Income** Median household income (U.S. Census, American Community Survey)



## Pg PROGRAMMING

This category measures the experiential pillars of a great visit: food, shows, shopping and nightlife. If our Product category is the "hardware" of cities and destinations, the mosaic of cultural programming and lifestyle experiences they offer is the "software" that makes them run—including the subcategories of Shopping, Culture, Dining and Nightlife. While such programming initiatives are individually insignificant, their sum fosters a community's connection to place.

**Culture** Number of quality performing arts and cultural experiences recommended by locals and visitors (TripAdvisor.com)

**Nightlife** Number of quality nightlife experiences recommended by locals and visitors (TripAdvisor.com)

**Restaurants** Number of quality restaurants and culinary experiences recommended by locals and visitors (TripAdvisor.com)

**Shopping** Number of quality shopping experiences recommended by locals and visitors (TripAdvisor.com)



## Pm PROMOTION

A city's ability to tell its story (and help others do the same) depends on how it incentivizes and rewards sharing of experiences by locals and visitors. The number and frequency of media coverage, online articles, references and place-based recommendations influence our perception of cities, whether the news is good or bad. Today, residents, businesses and visitors promote a city to the world more than city marketers or chambers of commerce. Resonance ranks a city's Promotion performance based on the number of stories, references and recommendations shared online about that city.

**Facebook Check-ins** Number of Facebook check-ins (Facebook.com)

**Google Searches** Number of Google search results (Google.com)

**TripAdvisor Reviews** Number of TripAdvisor reviews (TripAdvisor.com)

**Instagram Hashtags** Most Instagrammed city (Instagram.com)

**Google Trends** Popularity on Google Trends in the past 12 months (Trends.Google.com)

America's

# TOP 50 SMALL CITIES PROFILES

Small cities (MSA population 100,000 - 500,000) were already having a renaissance before urbanized density and metropolitan life became the ground wars in the COVID-19 outbreak. Those who could fled to places where populations were smaller and the berths wider. If they spent that time in one of America's Best Small Cities, chances are they'll return. If they ever left at all.







THE RENO ARCH

**POPULATION**

METRO 471,265

**HIGHLIGHTS**

- 1 RESTAURANTS
- 2 INSTAGRAM HASHTAGS

# 1 RENO, NV

Natural assets and growing infrastructure make ‘little city’ Reno a big-time destination for visitors and talent.

A casino town goes all in on art, culture and innovation. Is it any wonder that young talent is pouring in?

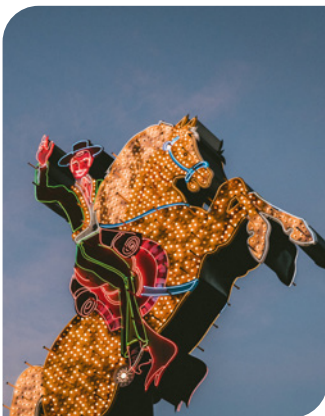
By day, this sun-drenched town at the feet of the snow-capped Sierra Nevadas earns its #16 rank for Weather. By night, its neon-lit casinos help Reno to a Top 5 spot for Nightlife among our small cities.

But it’s not just gamblers taking a chance on the “Biggest Little City in the World.” Increasingly, it’s tech companies and highly educated young workers, who come for the jobs and stay for the enviable location (Lake Tahoe is less

than an hour away) and accompanying year-round outdoor lifestyle.

Reno residents know location is key—and they take full advantage of the natural assets that help earn their city a #2 ranking for Instagram Hashtags among small U.S. cities. The looming Mt. Rose provides a snowy backdrop, the Truckee River is perfect for a float through town, the slopes are less than an hour’s drive and the rocky cathedrals of Yosemite National Park are a legitimate long-weekend road trip option.

But it’s also Reno’s built assets that are separating it from the pack. Its convention center ranks #3, just behind Atlantic City and Redding, California, while its Attractions—from the National Bowling Stadium to the Urban Air Adventure Park trampoline emporium (to say nothing of the Basecamp at the Whitney Peak Hotel and the world’s



RENO NEON

tallest artificial rock-climbing wall at 164 feet)—are Top 3 in the country.

The city's middling ranking of #20 for Fortune 500 companies and its low household income are both poised to rise. Tesla opened its "Gigafactory" battery plant in 2016 and Amazon and Google-parent Alphabet have campuses at the Tahoe Reno Industrial Center, one of the largest industrial parks in the world.

That has opened the cheap land rush, fueled by the Nevada tax breaks, resulting in municipal estimates that there have been almost 15,000 jobs created in the region between 2018 and 2019. The presence of the growing corporate offices and their workforce are giving new energy to the local economy, which is good news for everyone from homebuilders to street artists to whoever wants to sell you, um, supplies for Burning Man, which happens annually 120 miles north in the Black Rock Desert.

Of course the nine-day, 70,000-person rager is cancelled in 2020 due to the COVID-19 outbreak, and most of this festival city's lauded events will likely follow—from concerts to the largest free hot air balloon event in the world.



DOWNTOWN RENO



ELDORADO RESORT CASINO

Another casualty of the outbreak are Reno's fast-rising restaurants—for which the city is ranked #1 in the country among small cities.

The increasingly walkable Midtown district was buzzing like it was the gold rush of the 1880s, with considered local gems like brewery Brasserie Saint James happy to share their reimagined local flavors, like Belgian-style beers brewed with Sierra Mountain spring water. The neighborhood, just like several others in Reno, is being redeveloped by indie chefs opening up new favorites like homemade-soup emporium called Süp. The (relatively) cheaper rents, new, curious residents and rising local incomes should keep Reno at the top of its culinary game for years, post-lockdown recovery willing.

**POPULATION**  
METRO 378,488

## 2 NAPLES, FL

### HIGHLIGHTS

1 PARKS & OUTDOORS

2 RESTAURANTS

Life-affirming sunsets, natural bounty and impressive dining and culture coalesce in a coveted seaside oasis.

Money can't buy happiness, but in prosperous Naples, it can buy a luxe lifestyle amid America's epic oceanfront bounty.

Indeed, the flourishing seaside community is Top 25 in both Household Income and Fortune 500 companies, even though the city is really all about sense of place.

This city's #1 ranking in our deep Place category is powered by its top spot in our important Parks & Outdoors subcategory—Naples is located on stretch called the Paradise Coast that's tucked along southwest Florida's turquoise Gulf waters and sprinkled with dozens of public spaces and powder-white beaches. Citizens here (Neapolitans!) have always prioritized conservation, smart planning and environmental stewardship, all of which becomes obvious as you stroll the sandy streets.

There are dozens of city beaches that will light up your Instagram—the beach volleyball specimens of Lowdermilk Park, or the to-go deliciousness of Vanderbilt Beach and its Beach Box Cafe ice cream and picnic fodder. Right next door is Delnor-Wiggins Pass State Park, with its observation tower from which you can shoot the landscape: undulating sand dunes, the Cocohatchee River and mangroves as far as the eye can see.

From here, you'll start making plans to rent a kayak or stand-up paddle board—or call the local real estate agent.

But the lauded outdoor bounty of Naples isn't contained to city limits, and few cities anywhere are so engulfed by preserves, state parks and refuges.

Case in point: just out of town is Barefoot Beach Preserve County Park, an undeveloped barrier island home to bird life and the rare gopher tortoise, named for its predilection for digging deep underground.

Then there are all those islands. Everywhere. Like, 10,000 of them. In fact, Ten Thousand Islands National Wildlife Refuge is 40 minutes southeast of downtown Naples.

Speaking of downtown, if you prefer to stay local, the beach surrounding the Naples Pier is as perfect an urban escape as you'll find anywhere, providing a dramatic backdrop for enviable sunset photos. It's also walking distance to downtown Naples and its #8-ranked shopping and culture and #2-ranked restaurants among America's small cities. Arrive with your hunger and credit card at Fifth Avenue South, for example, with its palm-lined walkable promenades, and sample the fruits of the city's culinary and retail performance.

Naples also ranks #5 in our Museums subcategory, buoyed by the 2019 opening of Marco Island Historical Museum, boasting prehistoric items like the Key Marco Cat (described as one of the finest pieces of Pre-Columbian Native American art ever discovered in North America) and other rare artifacts from in the area. The loaned pieces are displayed as part of a newly updated permanent exhibit called *Paradise Found: 6,000 Years of People on Marco Island*, and is a reminder that humans have been coveting the Naples region long before yachts and second homes appeared.



NAPLES BEACH PIER

**POPULATION**  
METRO 150,056

**HIGHLIGHTS**

1 INSTAGRAM  
HASHTAGS

1 SHOPPING

A high-altitude city delivers an equally elevated quality of life.

Santa Fe is the urban embodiment of the sentiment that good things come in small packages.

Despite being a state capital, Santa Fe has the smallest population in our Small Cities Top 10, at just a few families over 150,000.

## 3 SANTA FE, NM

Regardless of its size, the fourth largest city in New Mexico (known appropriately as “The City Different”) has distinction to spare, starting with a rich history dating back to its founding in 1610.

As the second-oldest city in the United States, it’s also the oldest state capital in the country—and, tucked into the base of the southern Rocky Mountains at 7,000 feet above sea level, the highest as well.

This natural bounty has won Santa Fe a #5 ranking in our deep Place category, powered by its Top 3 finish in the Sights & Landmarks subcategory. It also boasts the fifth-best Programming for U.S. small cities, including #1 in our Shopping subcategory and #4 in Culture (with its 250-plus art galleries).

Given all this geographic and cultural beauty, it’s not surprising that Santa Fe is also the most Instagrammed small city in the country.



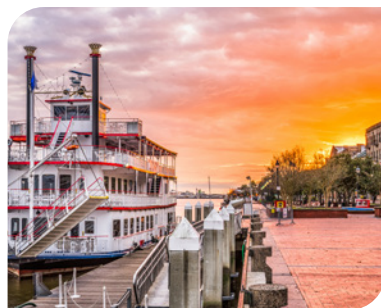
DOWNTOWN SANTA FE

**POPULATION**  
METRO 389,494

**HIGHLIGHTS**

1 SIGHTS &  
LANDMARKS

1 GOOGLE TRENDS



RIVERFRONT PROMENADE

## 4 SAVANNAH, GA

The southern comfort has been tarnished by the outbreak, but this urban gem shines bright nonetheless.

Savannah is not relying solely on its beloved Spanish moss and cobblestone streets to attract visitors. With more than 150 festivals annually, this Southern gem knows how to celebrate—from the famous St. Patrick’s Day Parade (one of the largest in America) to the two-week Savannah Music Festival in the spring and the Savannah Craft Brew Fest to end the summer on Labor Day weekend. Music, art, culture and food are just a few of the excuses for city-wide parties—and the reason behind the city’s rise to second place for Programming.

Increasingly, Savannah is garnering more attention for its food than for its historic sights. The ingredients for the rising culinary scene? Fresh local seafood, Southern home cooking and chef-driven restaurants cropping up throughout the Historic Landmark District, Starland and Tybee Island.

As a city so reliant on gatherings and public celebrations, Savannah has been devastated by the COVID-19 outbreak. When visitors and locals do get back on the cobblestone, they’ll have the new JW Savannah Plant Riverside District waiting for them. The former power plant has been transformed into Savannah’s most luxurious hotel and new entertainment destination.

**POPULATION**  
METRO 459,585

**HIGHLIGHTS**

- 1 NIGHTLIFE
- 2 SHOPPING

An arts and music city with uncommon spirit and smarts.

Asheville celebrates its bohemian spirit and artsy roots year-round, with cultural events, festivals and good times that rank first in the country for small cities. Dig down into our Programming category and this mountain gem boasts some stellar nightlife (#1) and

## 5 ASHEVILLE, NC

shopping (#2). Unsurprisingly, the after-hours scene is a launching pad for musicians, offering what artists of all ages crave in a city: affordability, local beer and good eats. Live music born of the region's bluegrass roots harmonizes with new talent and innovative sounds to the tune of almost \$400 million in the region's tourism economy, according to the Economic Development Coalition. Of course, with the COVID-19 outbreak, the economic shortfall for this year will be staggering.

Asheville continues its ascent in the Museum category with a #2 finish, behind only Santa Fe. Case in point: the recent reopening of the Asheville Art Museum, which features education facilities, an art library, a lecture and performance

space, a new Art PLAYce for families and children and the addition of a rooftop sculpture terrace and café.



DOWNTOWN ASHEVILLE

**POPULATION**  
METRO 399,148

**HIGHLIGHTS**

- 2 CONNECTIVITY
- 4 SIGHTS & LANDMARKS



CHUGACH NATIONAL FOREST

## 6 ANCHORAGE, AK

The most remote entry on our list is hardly off the beaten path.

Alaska's vibrant port city, which earned a Top 10 ranking for Place, isn't just a stopover for an increasing number of cruise ships—especially in a COVID-19 world. Anchorage is also a destination for nature-lovers, art buffs, beer enthusiasts and folk who like their urban experience with a dash of the rustic, capped off on a clear day by views of North America's tallest peaks. All of it is easily accessible via Ted Stevens Anchorage International Airport, which serves over 5 million passengers annually and is the second most connected among the nation's small cities.

The city's #4 spot for Parks & Outdoors is obvious when you first set foot here: Anchorage is a prime base for outdoor adventure, from skiing to salmon fishing to kayaking down plentiful rivers—from mild to wild. And while the sun sets early in winter, nature offers excellent compensation with regular displays of the Northern Lights.

Locals love to talk about that time a moose walked down the street or a grizzly showed up in the backyard. But in addition to wild visitors, the city's neighborhoods are home to a surprisingly cosmopolitan population, serviced by Top 10-ranked museums, shopping and restaurants among small cities in the country.

## POPULATION

METRO 326,078

## HIGHLIGHTS

1 EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

5 HOUSEHOLD INCOME



THE PEARL STREET MALL

# 7 BOULDER, CO

Where an unrivaled natural setting and the energy of an urban playground meet.

Back in 1967, Boulder became the first city in the country to tax itself specifically to preserve open space. Set at the base of the Rocky Mountains, at the edge of a verdant valley and along the banks of a rushing creek, Boulder today is the kind of city that respects its unrivaled natural setting while offering the energy of an urban playground. That sensibility has attracted the most educated residents in the country among the nation's small cities.

The city boasts more than 300 miles of hiking and biking trails, 45,000 acres of open space and a climate that

facilitates getting out there. Residents are some of the fittest people in the country, who think nothing of heading out on a five-hour hike. But while the city draws plenty of attention to its outdoor playground, there are more than enough creature comforts, too. Considered the Napa Valley for craft brewing, Boulder is home to some of the country's finest microbreweries and gourmet restaurants, and year-round concerts and theater productions. Most of the action takes place along the brick-paved Pearl Street Mall, where glasses clinked and conversations flowed. After COVID-19, they will again. After all, with some of the highest household incomes in the country, this town is thirsting to get back on its feet again.

## POPULATION

METRO 369,811

## HIGHLIGHTS

1 PEOPLE

1 PROSPERITY

Small but mighty Trenton embraces newcomers with job opportunities and an educated citizenry.

Few small cities anywhere are as connected—and subsequently endowed—as New Jersey's state capital.

The 250-year-old urban center on the Delaware River ranks first in our People category, seventh among America's

# 8 TRENTON, NJ

small cities for Foreign-Born Residents and #13 for Educational Attainment.

The diversity of the city—composed of an American tapestry spanning all ancestry, creeds and religions—has always welcomed immigration.

So has the city's performance in our Prosperity category: it tops our small city index for presence of Fortune 500 headquarters, and ranks in the Top 10 for Household Income. Centrality has always been Trenton's ace card—it even briefly served as the capital city of a young nation in 1784.

Its proximity to the economic engine of the Philadelphia metropolitan area and the academic innovation of Princeton—only 10 miles away—makes for a kinetic place that

prioritizes the things that matter, including the #8-ranked restaurants among the country's small cities.



STATE HOUSE



## 9 MYRTLE BEACH SOUTH CAROLINA

**POPULATION** METRO 480,891

### HIGHLIGHTS

- 1 FACEBOOK CHECK-INS
- 1 CULTURE

Myrtle Beach is a funhouse—in the water and out.

Myrtle Beach has been a playground long before European settlement, since the Waccamaw and Winyah people lived and subsisted on the area’s bounteous 60 miles of shore. When the Intracoastal Waterway was established in 1936 and the town was incorporated two years later, an all-American getaway was born.

Last year, 19 million visitors climbed aboard 50 direct flights from around the country to frolic in calm waters, see the Ripley’s odditorium and then go for a medieval dinner. After that, there’s the 1.2-mile-long Oceanfront Boardwalk and Promenade, perfect for walking off the feast. With so much to see and do, it’s no wonder that the city tops our Attractions subcategory for small cities.

The climate for business is even better. Myrtle Beach is one of the fastest-growing small cities in the country; already home to 25 international companies, it’s in the Top 10 for foreign direct investment. The business community lauds the location as central, and the Conway–Horry County Airport (the city ranks #18 for Connectivity) is working to further position the region as an East Coast hub.



## 10 ANN ARBOR MICHIGAN

**POPULATION** METRO 370,963

### HIGHLIGHTS

- 2 EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT
- 3 UNIVERSITY

One of the smartest small cities in the country is a bastion of employment security and safety.

Residents lean decidedly to the left in this friendly college town, where the yogi on the next mat might just be the CEO of a tech start-up, a prize-winning pickle entrepreneur or a tenured engineering professor. In a city that takes the #4 spot in our People category, you never know who you’ll meet—but you know the experience will be interesting.

A quarter of Ann Arbor citizens work at the University of Michigan, an intellectual powerhouse that helps earn this smart small city our #2 ranking for Educational Attainment by residents.

They’re drawn to higher education, and Ann Arbor places #3 in our University ranking. With smart graduates who tend to stick around, UM can also take credit for Ann Arbor’s burgeoning tech sector, including companies like Duo Security (acquired by Cisco for \$2.35 billion) and the headquarters of global supply chain management software company LLamasoft.

Even though the calendar revolves around the university, Ann Arbor truly shines when the students go home for the summer—that’s when locals and visitors take over the place known appropriately as “Tree Town.”



## 11 SANTA CRUZ CALIFORNIA

**POPULATION** METRO 274,255

### HIGHLIGHTS

- 3 HOUSEHOLD INCOME
- 10 PARKS & OUTDOORS

This laid-back surfing mecca just an hour south of Silicon Valley offers an opportunity to escape the high-pressure Bay Area lifestyle, without compromising on culture and prosperity.

Santa Cruz might be the quintessential coastal California city, with its Beach Boardwalk, artisanal food and drink producers, and laid-back surfer culture. With sports—including wetsuit and mountain bike companies—and marine research as two of the city’s major industries, it’s no wonder Santa Cruz ranks #10 for Parks & Outdoors. The city’s burgeoning tech sector is bolstered by easy proximity to Silicon Valley, and the presence of UC Santa Cruz has earned a tie place for #16 in our University ranking. The strong business climate, meanwhile, powers the city’s #3 Household Income and #11 People rankings. Downtown is already teeming with Banana Slugs—UC Santa Cruz students, that is—and it’s set to grow even further thanks to new zoning rules encouraging more apartments.



## 12 NAPA, CALIFORNIA

**POPULATION** METRO 139,417

### HIGHLIGHTS

- 2 HOUSEHOLD INCOME
- 7 NIGHTLIFE

Prosperous and welcoming, Napa handles earthquakes and fires with resilient elegance.

As the gateway to the world-famous Napa Valley wine region, Napa is perhaps the most glamorous small city in America. Situated just a short drive from some of the world's finest wineries and restaurants, including the legendary French Laundry, it's no surprise this city ranks #2 for Household Income among America's small cities. For those not willing to drive out to the wineries, Napa boasts many bars and hotels right downtown, giving it a #7 ranking in Nightlife and a #10 ranking in TripAdvisor Reviews. Every fall, the city hosts BottleRock Napa Valley, which has grown into a major stop on the music festival circuit—albeit with an extra emphasis on beverages. Much of the city's economy comes by way of its vibrant hospitality sector, and from the production and distribution of wine, both of which supply ample opportunity for the city's large foreign-born population (#8).



## 13 ATLANTIC CITY, NEW JERSEY

**POPULATION** METRO 265,429

### HIGHLIGHTS

- 1 CONVENTION CENTER
- 5 INSTAGRAM HASHTAGS

Few places do mass tourism like Atlantic City.

Washed by the ocean swell on New Jersey's shore, world-famous Atlantic City has been a magnet for shoppers, diners, gamblers and people-watchers for centuries. True to its roots, the city's main industry—at least outside a pandemic—is tourism, and service jobs continue to draw immigrants from around the world, netting a #19 ranking for Foreign-Born Residents. And it's not just beachgoers and gamblers who take advantage of the deep hospitality: Atlantic City earns a #1 Convention Center ranking for the \$126-million, 100,000-square-foot Harrah's Waterfront Conference Center. The Boardwalk—namesake of the top property in Monopoly—stretches five miles along the beach and is lined with casinos, hotels, retail and eateries. But watch out for selfie sticks—Atlantic City tourism is now bolstered by social media, with the city earning a #5 ranking for Instagram Hashtags and #7 for TripAdvisor Reviews.



## 14 HILTON HEAD ISLAND, SOUTH CAROLINA

**POPULATION** METRO 217,686

### HIGHLIGHTS

- 2 PARKS & OUTDOORS
- 4 SHOPPING

It's known for beautiful beaches, but it's also so much more.

There's a lot to love about this boot-shaped sea island in the Lowcountry of South Carolina, and the thousands of lucky residents who call it home get to play in the sea, sun and sand year-round. The city also boasts unbelievable bike trails and cultural opportunities like the Coastal Discovery Museum, which educates visitors and locals alike on the island's ecological history and significance. There's no shortage of ways to have fun in Hilton Head—just for a start, you're surrounded by beaches to explore and wildlife to see. And beyond the beaches, there's also iconic lighthouses, fishing, and golfing to keep you busy, whether you're just visiting or staying for the long haul. Hilton Head is a natural playground for those who love to get in the great outdoors, ranking #3 overall in our Place category and #2 for Parks & Outdoors. And it's not hard to believe that the city ranks #5 on our list for TripAdvisor Reviews and #4 for Shopping.





## 15 LANSING MICHIGAN

**POPULATION** METRO 481,893

### HIGHLIGHTS

- 1 FORTUNE 500 COMPANIES (TIE)
- 5 SIGHTS & LANDMARKS

New tech provides the Michigan capital with an insurance policy for growth.

After taking over the title of state capital from Detroit in 1847, Lansing became an industrial hotspot, with auto manufacturing driving its growth. General Motors remains a major employer, but Lansing's economy has diversified due to a surge in insurance, insurtech, medtech and IT businesses. Little wonder it ranked #3 overall in our Prosperity category, being tied for first among small cities for Fortune 500 companies. Hundreds of new jobs are on the horizon, with 15 projects worth \$311 million in private investment approved last year alone. With downtown's revitalization in the works, the city in the center of the Great Lakes State is growing up. Yet it retains its small-town appeal, ranking #5 for Sights & Landmarks. Charming character homes surround the Capitol Building, and trails line the banks of the Red Cedar and Grand rivers. Leafy East Lansing is home to Michigan State University, which bolstered the city's Product profile and tied it for #16 in our University ranking. MSU's 5,300-acre campus features three medical schools (two human medicine, one veterinary)—the most in the country—and was the first to offer a graduate degree in nuclear physics.



## 16 LINCOLN NEBRASKA

**POPULATION** METRO 333,964

### HIGHLIGHTS

- 4 CONVENTION CENTER
- 6 NIGHTLIFE

With its vibrant art and nightlife scenes, Lincoln is the Midwest's next hot college city.

Home to the University of Nebraska's flagship campus, Lincoln is much more than a college town—it's a regional hub where settling down to raise a family doesn't mean settling for less than a cosmopolitan urban experience, albeit a subdued, considered one. While Lincoln may be growing, it's still a place where strangers greet one another on the sidewalk and the whole community gets together to back Cornhuskers football (or at least they will as soon as we get a vaccine). With a #18 ranking for Educational Attainment, Lincoln has a diversified, knowledge-based economy centered on the university and its research dollars. Families appreciate Lincoln's affordable cost of living and well-regarded public schools, but the city is also investing millions in public transit and a revitalized downtown, which is attracting younger talent, too. And since joining the Bloomberg Philanthropies What Works Cities initiative in 2016, forward-thinking Lincoln is also working on open-data and performance management programs to make the city work better for everyone.



## 17 KAHULUI HAWAII

**POPULATION** METRO 167,295

### HIGHLIGHTS

- 3 CONNECTIVITY
- 5 PARKS & OUTDOORS

Maui's urban heart is an overlooked jewel, even in the obsessed-over Hawaiian Islands.

While visits to Hawaii are currently off-limits, Kahului has historically had the third-best-connected airport among America's small cities. But when the time comes to return to America's paradise, don't just jump in your rental car and head out of town. Kahului's bounty is a surprise, so stay a while.

With a Top 5 finish in our Parks & Outdoors category, the city has a unique climate that nourishes green spaces ranging from wildlife and avian refuges (Kanaha Pond State Wildlife Sanctuary) to white-sand state beaches plied by pro (and soon-to-be-pro) surfers.

The city may not be a tourist attraction on an island full of them, but its residents—boasting a household income that ranks #6 among America's small cities—have plenty to do, from local restaurants that act as a delicious, daring test kitchen for the rest of the state to upscale shopping like Whole Foods and luxury car dealerships.

The convenience is facilitated by the Kahului Airport (OGG to you and your vacation-planning experience), which ranks #3 in connectivity among America's small cities and is planning to resume its expansion plans once the pandemic subsides.



## 18 CHARLOTTESVILLE, VIRGINIA

**POPULATION** METRO 231,565

### HIGHLIGHTS

- 4 UNIVERSITY
- 7 EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

History, smarts and sweet isolation make this small city an ideal hometown.

Locals sometimes complain that Charlottesville is far from it all, but while the nearest big city (in this case, Washington, D.C.) might be a good distance away, this bustling college town has everything residents need day-to-day, from a dynamic restaurant scene to thriving local cultural institutions. It's even possible to live car-free here, and many residents get around on two wheels. Thomas Jefferson's hometown has plenty to recommend it, from a solid local economy grounded in one of the country's top universities to abundant natural beauty and deep historical significance. He might have written the Declaration of Independence and served as the nation's third president, but Thomas Jefferson was just as proud of founding the University of Virginia, which tied Charlottesville for its #4 University ranking and earned its citizens a #7 ranking for Educational Attainment. And while the University of Virginia may be the foundation of the local economy, there has historically also been abundant jobs in health care and tourism.



## 19 FORT WAYNE, INDIANA

**POPULATION** METRO 437,631

### HIGHLIGHTS

- 1 FORTUNE 500 COMPANIES (TIE)
- 6 ATTRACTIONS (TIE)

Housing affordability combines with plenty of cultural and tourist attractions.

Like it did in a lot of Rust Belt cities, the manufacturing economy in Fort Wayne took a big hit in the 1980s. But the city has emerged from this local downturn with a 21st-century economy based on transportation and distribution, health-care services, and leisure and hospitality. Yet it hasn't completely turned its back on the manufacturing sector: the city is a defense industry hub, with companies like BAE Systems and Harris Corporation employing thousands. As part of its civic rejuvenation, Fort Wayne invested heavily in urban renewal, with projects like the Allen County Public Library, Grand Wayne Convention Center and Fort Wayne Museum of Art—which, along with the Fort Wayne Children's Zoo and landmarks like the 1930s Art Deco Lincoln Bank Tower (once the city's tallest), boosts the city to a #6 rank for Attractions.



## 20 SANTA MARIA, CALIFORNIA

**POPULATION** METRO 446,527

### HIGHLIGHTS

- 5 UNIVERSITY
- 8 PEOPLE

Hispanic influence and student energy fuels this Californian cornucopia.

From the freeway, Santa Maria's subdivisions and strip malls nestled amid golden hills might lead you to mistake it for any other California city. But step inside Rancho Nipomo BBQ or Jocko's and you'll encounter something altogether unique: Santa Maria-style barbecue. The most famous approach to barbecue on the West Coast originated here back when California was part of Mexico, and still features the same simple, oak-fired grilling methods. Plenty of hungry pilots and farmers—who make up the city's two largest industries—have surely enjoyed this regional cuisine. Vandenberg Air Force Base is Santa Maria's largest employer, with many other locals, especially the diverse population that drives the city's ranking of #10 in Foreign-Born Residents supporting the area's strawberry, grape and lettuce farms. Santa Maria is a fairly prosperous city, ranking #11 for Household Income, and its proximity to UC Santa Barbara powers a tie for #5 in our University ranking. This being central California, the weather's nice too, ranking #10.



## 21 MOBILE ALABAMA

**POPULATION** METRO 413,757

### HIGHLIGHTS

- 8 MUSEUMS
- 9 CONVENTION CENTER

A historic Alabama city cruises into the future.

Founded in 1702 by French settlers, Mobile is the oldest city in the Heart of Dixie. Cruise ships dock in the state's only deep-water port, which is also home to the World War II-era USS *Alabama* battleship. The Dora Franklin Finley African-American Heritage Trail and institutions like the Mobile Carnival Museum also reflect the region's multicultural history. (Do you think Mardi Gras originated in New Orleans? Think again.) The waterfront Arthur R. Outlaw Mobile Convention Center, meanwhile, is a 317,000-square-foot facility that's considered tops along the Gulf Coast. So many attractions are key selling points: Mobile ranked #9 in our Product category for Convention Center and #8 for Museums. There will be more to tout in the near future, too: the city's aggressive goals are pinned on the creation of 2,000 new jobs with relatively high annual wages and the procurement of new- and expansion-project capital investment totaling \$1.25 billion by 2022.



## 22 FORT COLLINS COLORADO

**POPULATION** METRO 350,518

### HIGHLIGHTS

- 8 EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT
- 11 NIGHTLIFE

An outdoor-focused university town enjoys the highlife.

Though much of life here revolves around the Colorado State campus, Fort Collins is itself a thriving metropolis with big companies, cultural gems like the Fort Collins Museum of Discovery and quirky spots like the Global Village Museum, which holds a collection of international art. The city also has bragging rights to jobs with Fortune 500 companies like Anheuser-Busch and Hewlett-Packard as well as with major health-care giant Kaiser Permanente. Fort Collins has a well-educated workforce, ranking #8 for Educational Attainment and #20 for Household Income. Even though it's located right at the base of the Rocky Mountains, Fort Collins gets about 300 days of sunshine per year—which is perfect, considering there's an abundance of outdoor terrain to explore, from the scenic Horsetooth Reservoir to the majestic cliffs of the Cache la Poudre River to, of course, the iconic and beautiful Rocky Mountain National Park.



## 23 BLOOMINGTON ILLINOIS

**POPULATION** METRO 190,884

### HIGHLIGHTS

- 11 EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT
- 30 SAFETY

Affordability and Midwest heritage have piqued the interest of talent and business.

Located in the heart of Central Illinois, approximately 125 miles southwest of Chicago and 155 miles northeast of St. Louis, the Bloomington–Normal metro area is a safe (ranked #30 for Safety) and vibrant community that embodies Midwest hospitality and ambition.

It was here where Abraham Lincoln proved himself as a top attorney and the town has been attracting talent ever since. More and more corporate headquarters and branch offices have opened in recent years, attracted by historic downtown spaces and, with an average rent well under \$1,000, an ability to house employees and draw in young people looking for affordable housing. And plenty of that talent has already arrived: the city's citizenry ranked #11 in our Educational Attainment subcategory.

But it's not all work: there are three golf courses in town, plus lots of music venues (see proximity to Chicago and St. Louis) to keep the good times flowing. The Castle Theatre is a must for music lovers—a throwback to spare-no-expense architecture and a reminder to the city of what's possible.



## 24 ITHACA, NEW YORK

**POPULATION** METRO 102,793

### HIGHLIGHTS

- 2 UNIVERSITY
- 4 EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

The smallest city in our Top 50 ranking is big on smarts.

This upstate New York town 227 miles north of NYC (and almost that distance from Philly) values its education. Ivy League Cornell University (giving the city its #2 rank in our University subcategory) and renowned Ithaca College don't just keep the town hopping with students—the two schools are also the area's largest employers.

Citizens of this Central Finger Lakes region of New York State, tucked at the southern tip of 40-mile-long Cayuga Lake, walk the academic talk, making Ithaca one of the nation's smartest small cities (ranked #4 in our Educational Attainment subcategory). It's easy to see their reasoning for settling here, too: downtown is big-city thriving, with several breweries, irresistible indie restaurants and an underrated nightlife scene.

But it's what's just outside of town that's responsible for the city's pun-tastic slogan: "Ithaca Is Gorges." The 100+ gorges and waterfalls located within 10 miles of downtown include the 215-foot Taughannock Falls, actually three stories taller than Niagara Falls, all of it part of 28,000 acres of accessible public forestland.



## 25 GREEN BAY, WISCONSIN

**POPULATION** METRO 321,591

### HIGHLIGHTS

- 1 PROFESSIONAL SPORTS TEAMS
- 4 GOOGLE TRENDS (TIE)

Sports rule this Wisconsin town, but other industries have long built on the momentum.

With four Superbowl rings to brag about, the NFL's Packers set the tone around here, and in the fall social life revolves around game day. (It's obvious why Green Bay is first in the Professional Sports Teams category for small cities.) But while Packers fandom binds the community, there's also a lively entertainment district along the Fox River and on Main Street, resulting in the #21 ranking for Nightlife. But while joining the "Cheeseheads" might be obligatory, even the off season is alluring. Green Bay's strategic Great Lakes location makes for an economy centered on shipping and manufacturing—although, unlike other traditional blue-collar hubs, unemployment is usually lower than the national average. Schneider National, one of the country's largest privately owned trucking companies, is based here, as is a growing health-care sector. Yes, winters can be brutal, but in the summer the Great Lakes get greater. With scenic cycling and walking trails along the Fox River, the serene, 700-acre Bay Beach Wildlife Sanctuary set within city limits, and beautiful Door County just a 45-minute drive away, Green Bay residents mine the most from their summers.



## 26 WILMINGTON, NORTH CAROLINA

**POPULATION** METRO 294,436

### HIGHLIGHTS

- 6 PROGRAMMING
- 7 ATTRACTIONS

Authentic heritage blends with modern design and attractions in this southern city on the Cape Fear River.

Even if you've never set foot in Wilmington, you probably recognize some of its sights: the scenic Riverwalk, the vibrant nightlife along the Cape Fear River, the Boardwalk and the stunning antebellum mansions that line the quaint streets. With more than 400 film and television credits under its belt, it's no wonder the city is affectionately known as Hollywood East. It's also no surprise that a place that brings together beaches, history and natural beauty has its waterfront regularly listed among the prettiest and most enjoyable in the country. In our ranking, Wilmington finished #6 for Programming, including #7 for Restaurants and #4 for Nightlife. Residents and visitors alike will likely soon return to the recently expanded 1.75-mile Wilmington Riverwalk, where brick-lined streets with cafés and boutiques in the historic district lead to new hotels and restaurants, a performing arts center, the Port City Marina and an outdoor event concert venue.



## 27 **SPRINGFIELD** MISSOURI

**POPULATION** METRO 468,126

### HIGHLIGHTS

- 4 ATTRACTIONS
- 9 GOOGLE TRENDS

The home of the Mother Road is Ozark royalty.

The birthplace of Route 66 is known as the Queen City of the Ozarks. The city surrounded by lakes and caves appeals to fishermen and spelunkers, as it does to country-music lovers, college students and ball fans. (Springfield’s Double-A affiliate belongs to Major League Baseball’s St. Louis Cardinals.) Engineering, health care and IT are among the top industries and together powered Springfield to a #17 finish in our Prosperity category: consider, for example, O’Reilly Auto Parts, which employs nearly 4,000 people. Where Springfield truly shines is in Programming (#15). It ranked #13 in Restaurants, with more than 1,000 to choose from. Wineries, craft breweries and microdistilleries are joining the indie food and beverage scene. Springfield performed well for Nightlife (#17), with everything from art walks to comedy clubs available to residents and visitors. Draws such as the Route 66 Car Museum and the certified haunted Pythian Castle helped earn it a #4 spot in Attractions and an overall Product ranking of #14. In 2019, the city announced the development of a comprehensive plan to set a sharp vision for its future—its first such initiative since 1998.



## 28 **MIDLAND** TEXAS

**POPULATION** METRO 177,218

### HIGHLIGHTS

- 4 PLACE
- 8 HOUSEHOLD INCOME

Prosperity and safety (with a healthy dose of the outdoors) make this small Texas city big on potential.

Midland is a fast-growing small city in West Texas with a diversified economy that includes the health-care, energy and agricultural sectors. As the home of the Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center, Midland has become a hub for health-care research and innovation. The city also serves as the support center for the Permian Basin drilling region, which is expected to produce 5.4 million barrels of oil per day by 2023—that’s double 2017 levels. This strong business climate pushes Midland up to #8 in our Household Income ranking, and a new food hall and four-star hotel downtown will enable residents to spend that money locally. Of course, Midland isn’t all business—it’s also a nice place to live. The city’s excellent weather and low crime rate (both ranking #4) give it a #4 overall ranking in our important Place category... yet its proximity to Big Bend National Park also makes it a great place to escape from.



## 29 **DAVENPORT** IOWA

**POPULATION** METRO 380,106

### HIGHLIGHTS

- 10 NIGHTLIFE
- 16 CONNECTIVITY

Young talent and culture vultures flock to the only area where the Mississippi runs east-west.

Davenport is part of the Quad Cities, which also includes Iowa’s Bettendorf and Moline, East Moline, and Rock Island in Illinois (yes, that’s technically five cities). Distinguishing Davenport on the banks of the Mississippi is its status as the region’s economic powerhouse. It reached the Top 10 in our Prosperity category (#8), thanks to the heavy presence of companies such as Kraft Heinz, Nestlé Purina and John Deere. Midway between Chicago and Des Moines, Davenport ranked high in our Product category (#32), notably due to its airport connectivity (#16). Four airlines served 11 nonstop hubs through Quad City International Airport as of early 2020, but of course the COVID-19 pandemic has changed that, for now. Along with educational services and health care, arts and entertainment are a significant employer. Not coincidentally, Davenport performs well in our main Programming category (#23), ranking #10 for Nightlife, #21 for Museums (consider the glass Figge Art Museum) and #22 for Culture (take the annual Riverssance fest). Not surprisingly, construction of hundreds of downtown apartments is underway to house those being drawn to the city.



## 30 BEND, OREGON

**POPULATION** METRO 191,996

### HIGHLIGHTS

- 8 PARKS & OUTDOORS
- 14 GOOGLE SEARCHES

Craft beer worship, an outdoor focus and an increasingly urban core make Bend one of the country’s coveted small cities.

The bounty of small but mighty Bend has been whispered about by mountain bikers, brewers and skiers for decades. A regular contender in outdoors-media “best towns to live” lists, this former logging center sits 3,600 feet above sea level, on the eastern edge of the Cascade Range along the Deschutes River. The Ponderosa pine forests and high desert are a sandbox for all kinds of self-propelled pursuits, facilitated by a progressive local leadership that once opened a whitewater kayaking park right in town. Given all that, the city’s #8 Parks & Outdoors ranking somehow seems disappointing, especially when you add Mount Bachelor, not even 30 minutes away and catering to skiers and snowboarders in the winter and lift-riding downhill bikers in summer. Almost 100 outdoor-related businesses call Bend home, as do an increasing number of tech firms and more than 20 craft breweries. And Bend being Bend, it’s also home to the country’s last Blockbuster.

## 31 PENSACOLA, FLORIDA

**POPULATION** METRO 494,883

### HIGHLIGHTS

- 6 PARKS & OUTDOORS
- 7 CONNECTIVITY

With lively beaches, a walkable downtown and a Spanish-style architecture, Pensacola is Florida’s small city to watch.

The history of Pensacola and its proximity to the Alabama border help explain the vibe of this city—and its Southern hospitality. Over the course of its years, Pensacola has been ruled by the British, the Spanish, the French, the Confederacy and the United States—hence, its nickname of “The City of Five Flags.” Founded in 1559, Pensacola has rigorously preserved its historic architecture, ranking #17 for Sights & Landmarks and Top 25 in our deep Place category. Of its 52 miles of sugar-white beaches stretching alongside one of America’s oldest settlements, Pensacola Beach is in the forefront, with TripAdvisor ranking it as one of the five best in the nation—helping power the city to its #6 ranking for Parks & Outdoors. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, tourism spending was on the rise in the area, with visitors to Escambia County spending more than \$800 million in 2018. Obviously, Visit Pensacola’s “Tourism Works” campaign, which launched the previous year to promote the industry’s impact on the economy, is working itself. The campaign focuses on the jobs and tax revenue, but more so on the “quality of place” that tourism creates for residents.

## 32 GAINESVILLE, FLORIDA

**POPULATION** METRO 288,711

### HIGHLIGHTS

- 5 UNIVERSITY (TIE)
- 9 GOOGLE TRENDS

A mecca for outdoor rec has the smarts for growth.

The largest city in Alachua County is set within 75 miles of beaches on the coasts of the Atlantic and the Gulf of Mexico. In between are wilderness trails and freshwater springs, making it a nature lover’s haven. But where Gainesville really flexes its muscle is in our Product category (#17), led by the University of Florida earning a tie for #5 spot in the University ranking. UF contributes more than \$8 billion to the local economy annually, generating more than 100,000 jobs and acquiring more than \$700 million in research. Upping Gainesville’s Product cred is its #23 ranking for Attractions, which range from a wildlife sanctuary to a historic homestead. The citizenry is also well educated, as evidenced by the #16 ranking for Educational Attainment. Retaining talent is a key goal of the Greater Gainesville Chamber: by focusing on areas of strength—human life sciences, agricultural science & technology and clean technology—the organization seeks to create 2,500 jobs for a total of \$250 million in new capital investment by 2025.



## 33 STATE COLLEGE, PENNSYLVANIA

**POPULATION** METRO 162,805

### HIGHLIGHTS

- 1 SAFETY
- 9 EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

A happy hamlet launches new businesses while playing it safe.

There is no more fitting category for State College than “college town.” The 8,000-acre Pennsylvania State University calls the borough home, and Penn State’s Nittany Lions football team plays at the 107,000-seat Beaver Stadium. Some 40,000 students shop local, while the land-grant institution contributes more than \$11.6 billion to the state’s economy and supports more than 105,000 jobs. With views of the Appalachians and ski resorts nearby, State College is also known as Happy Valley. Boosting its livability is the fact that it’s the safest small city in America. The borough ranked high for People (#17), with a #9 standing for Educational Attainment. Nearly 93% of adults here have at least a high school education, and 40% have a bachelor’s degree or higher. Perhaps it’s an easy sell, but there’s much to work with in terms of Promotion; State College ranked #5 in this category, with a #3 for Google Searches. Situated within the I-99 Innovation Corridor and boasting a strong presence of tech and life sciences, State College is a launchpad for what’s next, with several new incubators in town—many started by students who recognized their sweet spot and stayed.



## 34 SALINAS, CALIFORNIA

**POPULATION** METRO 435,594

### HIGHLIGHTS

- 2 FOREIGN BORN
- 22 HOUSEHOLD INCOME

The future of American food security is being created in Steinbeck country.

Once widely known as the setting of John Steinbeck’s novels about rural California, Salinas has embraced the latest technology while continuing to be “the salad bowl of the world.” The Salinas Valley is one of the most fertile areas in the country, generating an economic impact of more than \$8 billion per year and attracting a large foreign-born community (ranked #2 among America’s small cities). Its proximity to Silicon Valley has made Salinas an important agtech hub: since 2015, the city has played host to the Forbes AgTech Summit. Prosperity has followed, as seen by the city’s #22 ranking for Household Income. The city calendar is punctuated by community events like the El Grito festival celebrating Mexican culture and Ciclovía Salinas, an open-streets event that reclaims a 1.5-mile stretch of road for bikes and pedestrians. The sunny, picturesque Salinas Valley, ranking #22 for Weather, is a short drive away from Monterey and its world-famous aquarium.



## 35 CHAMPAIGN, ILLINOIS

**POPULATION** METRO 237,356

### HIGHLIGHTS

- 8 NIGHTLIFE
- 10 CULTURE

People power this diversified mini metropolis.

Self-described as a “micro-urban” community and home to the University of Illinois, Champaign prides itself on its diverse economy. Education, health care and banking are leading employers, while jobs are also abundant in light manufacturing and social services. The diversity extends to demographics, too—in fact, outside of Chicago, the county has one of the largest immigrant populations in Illinois. Champaign made the Top 20 in our People category, at #19, with a #14 ranking for Educational Attainment and #40 for Foreign-Born Residents. Hailing from nearly 80 countries (from Colombia to Democratic Republic of Congo), immigrants make up more than 20% of the area’s STEM and education workforce. And while Champaign residents may work hard, they also have plenty of options to play hard, with an overall Programming score of #17, driven by high rankings in Culture (#10) and Nightlife (#8). Expect arts and entertainment sectors (among others) to further flourish: the 11-acre Yards project proposes a hotel and conference center, office tower, apartments, University of Illinois sports arena and more, generating an expected \$112 million-plus in annual economic activity.



## 36 BURLINGTON, VERMONT

**POPULATION** METRO 220,612

### HIGHLIGHTS

- 10 EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT
- 18 HOUSEHOLD INCOME

A compact community accommodates mighty job growth.

Situated on the eastern shore of Lake Champlain with sweeping views of the Adirondack and Green Mountains, Burlington is known for outdoor recreation, architecture and small-town charm. Despite occupying a mere 10 square miles, or just under 2% of the land mass of Chittenden County, it's the largest and most developed community in the Green State. Alongside health care and financial services, tourism is a major employer. The University of Vermont's Fleming Museum is a draw, as is Church Street Marketplace, a National Register Historic District. Residents here are educated, with nearly 92% earning a high school degree or higher, and 26% a bachelor's degree or higher. The city finished Top 10 for Educational Attainment and hit an overall People ranking of #23. Planning staff recently launched the city's first comprehensive economic development strategy: the little engine that could will be home to a third of the region's jobs over the next several decades, as the progressive city seeks to become a Net Zero Energy community by 2030.



## 37 SAN LUIS OBISPO, CALIFORNIA

**POPULATION** METRO 284,010

### HIGHLIGHTS

- 13 WEATHER
- 16 SHOPPING

SLO speeds up.

The sunny and perpetually mild Mediterranean-type climate allows you to get outside all year long, ranking SLO #13 in our Weather subcategory. Good thing, too, because the city is stacked with reasons to be outdoors. Its location among loamy, vineyard-dotted hills and forested mountains is still just minutes from undeveloped coastline and dramatic eye candy like Morro Bay.

These days, SLO is moving fast—to protect its natural bounty while laying the foundation for a more inclusive community. From recently creating a Destination Management Strategy with the local community to nurturing new talent in partnership with California Polytechnic State University (Cal Poly)—consistently ranked one of the top public colleges in the country—SLO is creating its future collaboratively.

But there's always time for wine—and fresh local produce. SLO's Thursday evening farmers' market is one of the best on the West Coast, helping raise the city to its #16 ranking for Shopping.



## 38 PUNTA GORDA, FLORIDA

**POPULATION** METRO 184,998

### HIGHLIGHTS

- 1 CONNECTIVITY
- 16 SAFETY

Where leisure and work are not mutually exclusive.

Royal palm trees swaying in subtropical breezes off Charlotte Harbor, cyclists rolling along scenic paved paths and homeowners sipping lemonade on wide verandas: life in Punta Gorda is nothing if not relaxed. Access is outstanding, the city earning a #1 spot for its airport connectivity, with three nearby airports typically providing nonstop flights to destinations like Toronto; Washington, D.C.; Dusseldorf; and Aalborg, Denmark. Plus, two U.S. highways intersect here: a strategic location just off Interstate 75 contributes to the city's #10 ranking overall for Product. Punta Gorda reached a notable #22 ranking in our Place category, thanks to a low crime rate (#16) and high marks for Parks & Outdoors (#17). The beloved 19-acre Punta Gorda Nature Park features plenty of wildlife viewing amid naturally occurring wetlands. The number of jobs is set to skyrocket, too: Fort Myers-based Intrepid Aerospace recently signed a letter of intent to build a \$1.8-million temporary hangar with plans to soon build a much larger permanent facility to work on commercial aircraft.





## 39 SOUTH BEND, INDIANA

**POPULATION** METRO 322,424

### HIGHLIGHTS

- 1 UNIVERSITY
- 19 GOOGLE SEARCHES

Mayor Pete and Notre Dame shine a light on one of the country’s most dynamic hometowns.

The South Bend Mishawaka region landed definitively on the map of the American imagination in 2019 when native son and former local mayor Pete Buttigieg made a run for the Democratic presidential nomination. But the area, about a hundred miles east of Chicago, has been growing in stature under the radar for, well, centuries: 178-year-old Notre Dame University, an institution that balances its Catholic origins with cutting-edge scientific research, has given the region its first-place University ranking among small cities. But Notre Dame is not alone—there is a range of innovative learning institutions around South Bend, and the insular grande dame is beginning to engage with the community with innovative results—the respected IDEA Centre and IDEA Week, which help bring entrepreneurial efforts to market, are cases in point. Mayor Pete saw the future of South Bend when he took office in 2012, working to rejuvenate South Bend’s derelict Studebaker factory and downtown, installing dark fibre and repositioning the region as a hub for future innovation. Today, it’s ready to welcome new residents and retain current ones with an attractive mix of prosperity and quality of life.



## 40 IOWA CITY, IOWA

**POPULATION** METRO 173,401

### HIGHLIGHTS

- 5 EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT
- 6 CONNECTIVITY

A city that writes its own narrative.

Eye-opening fact: Iowa City is a UNESCO City of Literature, the world’s third after Edinburgh and Melbourne. (Grads from University of Iowa’s Writers Workshop, which dates back more than 80 years, include John Irving and Jane Smiley.) Those who call the city home are one of its greatest strengths, with the citizenry ranking Top 5 for Educational Attainment in the country. Nearly 34% of the area’s population has a bachelor’s degree, and close to 28% has earned a master’s. The city ranks #32 for Foreign Born Residents (just over 14%, according to the most recent census data), while Household Income, at a median of approximately \$61,000, ranks at #34. Several large projects are currently in development, including the \$50-million, 5,000-seat Xstream Arena as well as the university’s \$33.5-million Brain Sciences Building and \$50-million Stanley Museum of Art.



## 41 BARNSTABLE TOWN, MASSACHUSETTS

**POPULATION** METRO 213,413

### HIGHLIGHTS

- 9 SAFETY
- 15 EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

Life in Cape Cod is as ideal as you think it is.

Incorporated by English settlers in 1639 and once the summer home of John F. Kennedy, mid-Cape Barnstable Town is comprised of seven enclaves (including Barnstable Village) and is set among more than 100 miles of sandy beaches. Fishing, boating, surfing and snorkeling are more than tourist attractions; they’re a way of life. Combine the city’s #26 ranking for Parks & Outdoors (supported by its thousands of acres of ever-shifting sand dunes) and its #9-ranked sense of safety driving a #21 tie spot for Sights & Landmarks and it’s easy to see why the city situated 74 miles southeast of Boston ranked #17 overall in our Place category. Sixteen percent of residents have a graduate degree, helping it rank #15 for Educational Attainment; it reached #25 for Household Income, with a median of \$68,919. Considered Cape Cod’s economic and commercial hub, Barnstable Town aims to invest in people’s health with a proposed Cape Cod Hospital Downtown Campus expansion.



## 42 TALLAHASSEE, FLORIDA

**POPULATION** METRO 387,455

### HIGHLIGHTS

- 6 FACEBOOK CHECK-INS
- 9 RESTAURANTS

Higher learning and youthful energy power Florida's state capital.

Florida State University might be one of the first things to pop to mind on mention of this Big Bend-area city, but Tallahassee is also home to a world-renowned equestrian competition, a historic stop on the Mississippi Blues Trail, two mosques, an all-female roller derby team and more. Nevertheless, it's the post-secondary scene that distinguishes the state capital. In addition to FSU and Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University, many smaller colleges thrive here. Tallahassee made it into the Top 10 for our University subcategory (#9), contributing to its overall #19 ranking for Product. (Also playing a role were its equal rankings for Attractions and Museums, both #35.) The financial outlook is sunny: a recent analysis of just six of the 100 or so projects in development found a combined economic impact of \$775 million and a yield of more than 6,000 jobs. If you've got it, flaunt it: Tallahassee ranked #29 overall for Promotion, largely due to its social media savvy (#6 for Facebook Check-ins, #8 for Instagram Hashtags and #18 for TripAdvisor Reviews). #Impressive.



## 43 KALAMAZOO, MICHIGAN

**POPULATION** METRO 340,318

### HIGHLIGHTS

- 7 PROSPERITY
- 21 CONVENTION CENTER

A city that delivers the fruits of education.

What's in a name? In the case of Kalamazoo, the answer is a mystery. The origins of the city's handle are uncertain, though the most widely accepted theory is that it was derived from a Potawatomi Native American legend. Located halfway between Detroit and Chicago in the heart of the Great Lakes Region (there are 83 lakes in Kalamazoo County alone), the city prides itself on prioritizing education: the Kalamazoo Promise is a pledge by a group of anonymous donors to cover tuition at any of Michigan's universities or colleges for all graduates of Kalamazoo public high schools. Pharmacy and medical sciences are major industries here, and the city is home to Fortune 500 medtech giant Stryker: it ranked #7 overall for Prosperity, landing in the top 100 for Household Income (#98), which sits at a median of \$42,759. Downtown revitalization is coming: the Kalamazoo City Commission has approved the Downtown Economic Growth Authority and a plan to reinvest \$66 million in state and local taxes for infrastructure, business retention and building rehabilitation during the next 30 years.



## 44 FARGO, NORTH DAKOTA

**POPULATION** METRO 245,471

### HIGHLIGHTS

- 14 CONVENTION CENTER
- 14 ATTRACTIONS

An off kilter, pioneering spirit with big-city aspirations defines this midwestern community.

Despite its prairie cool, thriving DIY arts and culinary scene and entrepreneurial spark, Fargo has slipped under the radar over the past decade. The city, which comes in at #49 for Prosperity, is home to Microsoft's third-largest campus in North America, one that employs more than 1,800 people. Fargo start-ups are also getting a fair share of the national spotlight, including Appareo Systems, a leader in electronic and computer products for the aerospace and defense industries. Silicon Prairie, the Heartland's version of Silicon Valley, is not only thriving, it's also helping to attract and retain talent. The median age of Fargo residents is 31, which makes sense when you take into account that a good 30,000 of the people who live here are college students at North Dakota State University.



## 45 MEDFORD OREGON

**POPULATION** METRO 219,564

### HIGHLIGHTS

- 27 CONNECTIVITY
- 28 GOOGLE TRENDS

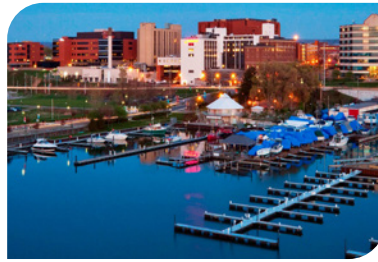
Southern Oregon’s largest urban center is focusing on its downtown to compete with its great outdoors.

The largest city in Southern Oregon has long been a gateway to a dizzying bounty of America’s northern West Coast greatest hits—from Crater Lake to the northeast, the theater lovers’ pilgrimage to the city of Ashland and, more recently, the vineyards of the Rogue Valley.

With more than 200 days of annual sunshine, easy access to the wild Rogue River, striking waterfalls and lush rainforest, Medford was always happy to be basecamp for the legions of mountain bikers, hikers, golfers and fishing enthusiasts.

The volume of sites is surely a reason why the city ranks #27 for Connectivity. The Medford Airport has been growing steadily and topped 1 million passengers last year.

But the city offers myriad reasons to stay a while—maybe permanently. The area’s economic development leaders are increasingly talking about being a Pacific Northwest business hub, while recent resident and actor Jim Belushi is helping restore the city’s historic Holly Theater into a 1,000-seat venue that will reignite the downtown area.



## 46 ERIE PENNSYLVANIA

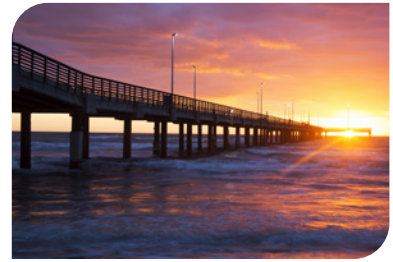
**POPULATION** METRO 272,061

### HIGHLIGHTS

- 15 CULTURE
- 21 SIGHTS & LANDMARKS (TIE)

Innovation and culture combine on the water.

The waterfront that derives its name from Lake Erie and the Eriez Native American Nation is also known as “Flagship City,” with one of the few remaining ships from the War of 1812, Oliver Hazard Perry’s *Niagara*, anchored just offshore. Insurance, tourism, health care, manufacturing and higher education are among its major sectors. Home to Erie Insurance Group (a Fortune 500 company) and sitting at #196 for Household Income (median \$52,576), Erie ranked #15 in our overall Prosperity category. It’s a vibrant place, coming in at #30 for Programming: arts organizations from the Glass Growers Gallery to the Erie Philharmonic contributed to its #15 ranking in the Culture subcategory; tax-free clothing and shoes helped it reach #34 in Shopping. In the works: the transformation of the region into a secure cyber-services hub through the recently launched Erie Innovation District; there’s also the Erie County Convention Center Authority’s Bayfront Place Development Plan (with retail, residential, office space and views of Presque Isle Bay) at an estimated cost of up to \$300 million.



## 47 CORPUS CHRISTI, TEXAS

**POPULATION** METRO 452,927

### HIGHLIGHTS

- 3 FACEBOOK CHECK-INS
- 11 RESTAURANTS

A heritage of hospitality keeps the young pouring in, even during a pandemic.

As the largest coastal city in Texas and one of the nation’s main ports, Corpus Christi is an economic powerhouse among U.S. small cities. And a big engine behind that powerhouse is the tourism heritage of being the gateway to Padre Island.

Corpus Christi boasts miles of beaches and multitudes of activities, including #11-ranked restaurants—don’t miss the gulf seafood, especially shrimp and oysters.

Of course the area is best known globally for its spring break revelry, when the beaches around Corpus Christi Bay and Padre Island become a mass of humanity for the better part of the month. Even the pandemic didn’t stop too many from feeling the lure of the place, as newsfeeds showed the usual crowds, undeterred by the risk of infection. They of course documented it all on social media, which explains why the city ranks #3 nationally in our Facebook Check-ins subcategory and #7 for Instagram Hashtags.



## 48 EVANSVILLE, EVANSVILLE

**POPULATION** METRO 314,672

### HIGHLIGHTS

14 ATTRACTIONS

36 NIGHTLIFE

Historic architecture and a low cost of living are bringing Evansville back.

The largest city in Southern Indiana, sitting along the Ohio River on the Kentucky border, is the state's third-largest metro. An economic force for more than a century, Evansville, like so many, fell on hard times in the late '70s and early '80s as manufacturing jobs dried up and the population fled to the suburbs.

But visionary, city-sponsored revitalization and preservation of the impressive early-1900s brick buildings has gone a long way to bring Evansville back to its former glory, with a low cost of living helping boost citizens further. Riverside, a U.S. Historic District since 1978, boasts a lot of the hot casinos, restaurants and bars that helped the city rank #36 for Nightlife.

The city's proud heritage is obvious in its #14 ranking for Attractions. The Victory Theatre is a vintage 1,950-seat venue that is home to the Evansville Philharmonic Orchestra. It also boasts the Children's Museum of Evansville, the Evansville Museum, and the Reitz Home Museum, a beautiful example of Victorian architecture located a stone's throw from the Ohio River.



## 49 ATHENS, ATHENS

**POPULATION** METRO 211,802

### HIGHLIGHTS

8 UNIVERSITY

19 EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

The Classic City rocks.

Also known as Athens-Clarke County (following the 1990 move to unify two governments), Athens is the birthplace of American higher education: in 1785, the University of Georgia was founded as the nation's first land-grant institution. Along with UGA, technical schools and colleges boosted the city's standing in our University category (#8) and Product overall (#30), the latter also including its #24 ranking for Convention Center: the Classic Center hosts an average of 660 events a year, outperforming similar venues in larger cities two to one. The city has spawned several famous musical acts, including REM and the Black Crowes, and is widely considered to have launched "alternative" music. Its arts and entertainment scenes continue to thrive. The "Classic City," situated 70 miles east of Atlanta, ranked #27 for Programming overall, including high rankings in Culture (#13), Nightlife (#33) and Restaurants (#49). Creatives and college students enjoy everything from the Georgia Museum of Art to the annual AthFest, which draws close to 200 bands. Agribusiness is a major economic driver, too, as is tourism: a proposed Classic Center expansion would generate an additional \$33 million per year in economic impact, an increase of 100,000 hotel room nights and more than 600 jobs.



## 50 LAS CRUCES, LAS CRUCES

**POPULATION** METRO 217,522

### HIGHLIGHTS

4 WEATHER

11 CONNECTIVITY

The sunny spot is flying high.

The very land of Las Cruces is written with history: ancient Mogollon petroglyphs within and around the city date back as far as 200 AD. The sun shines 320 days a year here, earning Las Cruces ("the crosses" in Spanish) the #4 spot for Weather among America's small cities. That's just one subcategory that helped it rank high overall in our Place category, at #23. It was also #18 for Sights & Landmarks. Several stunning hiking, mountain biking and horseback riding trails are found within 10 miles of the city center. The home of New Mexico State University excelled in our People category too, ranking #21 overall, with #15 for Foreign-Born Residents (just over 12% of citizenry). Agriculture and defense/aerospace are among its key industries, while a highlight of the city's Economic Development Plan is a major renovation to Las Cruces International Airport to accommodate an additional 20,000 passengers annually by 2022, sure to improve its already impressive #11 Connectivity ranking.

America's

# 100 BEST SMALL CITIES FULL LIST



<b>RANK</b>	<b>CITY</b>	<b>STATE</b>	<b>PLACE</b>	<b>PRODUCT</b>	<b>PROGRAMMING</b>	<b>PEOPLE</b>	<b>PROSPERITY</b>	<b>PROMOTION</b>
1	Reno	Nevada	14	1	4	36	59	8
2	Naples	Florida	1	35	7	3	42	11
3	Santa Fe	New Mexico	5	9	5	13	83	14
4	Savannah	Georgia	2	18	2	84	95	4
5	Asheville	North Carolina	30	8	1	70	141	6
6	Anchorage	Alaska	10	6	8	50	26	16
7	Boulder	Colorado	27	64	9	2	24	23
8	Trenton	New Jersey	158	91	29	1	1	151
9	Myrtle Beach	South Carolina	49	3	3	134	151	3
10	Ann Arbor	Michigan	50	16	11	4	35	26
11	Santa Cruz	California	16	69	32	11	22	18
12	Napa	California	13	195	33	6	21	44
13	Atlantic City	New Jersey	125	5	16	29	74	15
14	Hilton Head Island	South Carolina	3	66	18	30	56	17
15	Lansing	Michigan	65	23	26	62	3	73
16	Lincoln	Nebraska	53	11	13	39	93	27
17	Kahului	Hawaii	9	20	109	24	25	223
18	Charlottesville	Virginia	48	13	38	15	39	46
19	Fort Wayne	Indiana	95	15	24	108	9	31
20	Santa Maria	California	34	40	150	8	29	35
21	Mobile	Alabama	106	41	19	191	232	1
22	Fort Collins	Colorado	35	62	14	25	38	42
23	Bloomington	Illinois	77	89	77	35	2	138
24	Ithaca	New York	211	7	104	7	101	112
25	Green Bay	Wisconsin	101	4	41	129	71	7

<b>RANK</b>	<b>CITY</b>	<b>STATE</b>	<b>PLACE</b>	<b>PRODUCT</b>	<b>PROGRAMMING</b>	<b>PEOPLE</b>	<b>PROSPERITY</b>	<b>PROMOTION</b>
26	Wilmington	North Carolina	59	22	6	61	139	22
27	Springfield	Missouri	152	14	15	170	17	33
28	Midland	Texas	4	107	125	49	27	86
29	Davenport	Iowa	138	32	23	126	8	141
30	Bend	Oregon	12	60	52	63	44	20
31	Pensacola	Florida	25	24	12	128	96	21
32	Gainesville	Florida	115	17	25	20	172	32
33	State College	Pennsylvania	20	94	134	17	100	5
34	Salinas	California	43	147	126	5	40	124
35	Champaign	Illinois	82	31	17	19	137	120
36	Burlington	Vermont	127	38	49	23	36	100
37	San Luis Obispo	California	28	79	82	37	37	60
38	Punta Gorda	Florida	22	10	168	96	136	140
39	South Bend	Indiana	222	2	43	88	118	41
40	Iowa City	Iowa	178	36	106	9	51	72
41	Barnstable Town	Massachusetts	17	98	129	27	43	244
42	Tallahassee	Florida	89	19	21	57	166	29
43	Kalamazoo	Michigan	217	71	63	74	7	75
44	Fargo	North Dakota	117	27	57	44	49	55
45	Medford	Oregon	147	77	98	95	6	93
46	Erie	Pennsylvania	182	85	30	132	15	48
47	Corpus Christi	Texas	21	55	22	146	124	24
48	Evansville	Indiana	193	43	54	172	10	85
49	Athens	Georgia	111	30	27	41	153	52
50	Las Cruces	New Mexico	23	48	80	21	245	106

<b>RANK</b>	<b>CITY</b>	<b>STATE</b>	<b>PLACE</b>	<b>PRODUCT</b>	<b>PROGRAMMING</b>	<b>PEOPLE</b>	<b>PROSPERITY</b>	<b>PROMOTION</b>
51	Rochester	Minnesota	112	67	66	34	34	62
52	Sioux Falls	South Dakota	97	29	42	65	76	50
53	Lawrence	Kansas	102	92	90	10	119	111
54	College Station	Texas	61	47	127	16	170	58
55	Huntsville	Alabama	175	28	40	53	55	39
56	Columbia	Missouri	113	78	59	14	123	37
57	Manchester	New Hampshire	187	59	74	31	28	102
58	Eugene	Oregon	185	21	10	85	132	30
59	St. George	Utah	7	58	128	86	107	69
60	Vallejo	California	81	239	141	18	23	119
61	Flagstaff	Arizona	26	105	61	64	66	40
62	Columbus	Georgia	146	84	46	180	14	36
63	Yuma	Arizona	11	104	139	28	231	80
64	Redding	California	47	12	94	155	109	84
65	California	Maryland	84	197	201	66	20	9
66	Kennewick	Washington	44	88	132	42	50	189
67	Gettysburg	Pennsylvania	8	76	85	171	63	82
68	Amarillo	Texas	71	52	48	75	134	45
69	Lubbock	Texas	55	51	34	92	180	34
70	Appleton	Wisconsin	63	37	70	124	46	96
71	Oshkosh	Wisconsin	99	177	116	165	5	180
72	Port St. Lucie	Florida	24	150	103	48	112	126
73	York	Pennsylvania	184	75	58	153	47	2
74	Merced	California	46	135	205	22	97	160
75	El Centro	California	32	241	244	12	192	25



<b>RANK</b>	<b>CITY</b>	<b>STATE</b>	<b>PLACE</b>	<b>PRODUCT</b>	<b>PROGRAMMING</b>	<b>PEOPLE</b>	<b>PROSPERITY</b>	<b>PROMOTION</b>
76	Greeley	Colorado	42	129	121	82	31	168
77	Laredo	Texas	38	196	95	26	209	70
78	Waco	Texas	41	61	37	115	206	43
79	Billings	Montana	100	34	55	123	87	79
80	Olympia	Washington	214	120	56	40	33	129
81	Springfield	Illinois	96	73	47	99	58	56
82	Burlington	North Carolina	142	191	160	105	13	154
83	Rapid City	South Dakota	79	39	64	130	85	68
84	Bloomington	Indiana	110	65	78	32	205	94
85	Cedar Rapids	Iowa	139	33	60	104	61	91
86	Blacksburg	Virginia	18	50	220	78	175	222
87	Montgomery	Alabama	90	49	36	137	144	38
88	Prescott	Arizona	15	102	68	110	197	110
89	Lafayette	Indiana	170	46	105	38	165	71
90	Missoula	Montana	105	63	93	58	106	89
91	Peoria	Illinois	183	26	44	133	92	88
92	Bismarck	North Dakota	87	45	173	122	41	159
93	Panama City	Florida	31	57	87	167	147	49
94	Logan	Utah	45	172	179	51	88	177
95	Norwich	Connecticut	83	234	96	54	45	236
96	Wenatchee	Washington	60	209	164	45	67	192
97	Yakima	Washington	75	113	108	55	152	103
98	Bellingham	Washington	226	83	62	56	64	65
99	The Villages	Florida	29	165	102	81	127	144
100	Bremerton	Washington	227	109	71	71	30	187

# SHAPE THE FUTURE OF YOUR CITY, COMMUNITY OR DEVELOPMENT.

As leading advisors in tourism, real estate and economic development, Resonance helps places realize their full economic potential. We take a uniquely future-focused approach to research, strategy, branding and marketing, and help our clients understand market trends, assess strengths and weaknesses, engage local communities, create strategies, envision the future and produce branding and communications that influence their audiences.



## RESEARCH

Resonance tracks the sentiments of the most influential consumers and travelers today, and our original benchmarking and assessment methodology offers new ways to understand the way people truly perceive and “consume” communities, cities and destinations. This World’s Best Cities report is an example of our expertise in providing destinations and developers with new tools and perspectives on the key factors that shape a city’s competitive identity, community wellbeing and future prosperity. Our research is used by National Geographic, and Bloomberg has called our city rankings “the most comprehensive study of its kind.”

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**Consumer Research**

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**Destination Assessments**

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**Performance Benchmarking**

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**Economic Analysis**

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## DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

Resonance has extensive experience creating strategies for destinations from cities to mixed-use urban developments and resort communities. Our destination development strategies are the product of custom benchmarking and consumer research, stakeholder engagement and the crafting of a clear vision for the future. The result is a strategic roadmap that prioritizes the actions required to realize the full economic potential of place.

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**Real Estate Development**

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**Tourism Development**

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**Economic Development**

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## BRANDING & MARKETING

We approach the branding and marketing of places by thoroughly understanding market trends, uncovering the aspirations of consumers and vividly articulating sense of place in a manner that resonates with target audiences, be they prospective residents, visitors, tenants or investors. Brands are then propelled by marketing strategies that guide the journey of building audiences, credibility and meaningful connection. The goal isn't merely to bring more attention, awareness and people to the brand, but to elevate the quality, value and loyalty of specific audiences in order to achieve targeted objectives.

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**Brand Strategy**

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**Brand Identity**

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**Advertising**

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**Digital**

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**Activation**

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**Environment**

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## PLACEMAKING

Placemaking is a way to design underused spaces to be more enjoyable and engaging for the communities around them. Resonance placemaking strategies leverage the power of art, culture and experiential retail to help animate public, private and under-utilized spaces, test alternative uses and create gathering places and unique points of interest that draw both locals and visitors.

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**Art**

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**Culture**

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**Experience**

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