

America's

BEST CITIES

A RANKING OF U.S. PLACE EQUITY

2023

Where to live, work, invest and visit in America now

BOSTON

How we chose America's Best Cities in 2023 — 05

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Pc Pd Po Ps Pg Pm

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WELCOME TO AMERICA'S BEST CITIES IN 2023

Resonance Consultancy is building the most comprehensive global and regional city rankings on the planet. Here's why this matters now more than ever as America—and the world—adapt to a new post-pandemic reality.



As leading advisors in tourism, real estate and economic development for more than 15 years, our team at Resonance has conducted extensive research on the rise of cities, the key trends propelling their growth and the factors that shape our perception of urban centers as desirable places to live, visit and invest. We are excited to apply our trusted ranking methodology to American cities again, for the eighth consecutive year.

As our cities emerge from the pandemic that upended our perception of what we consider to be desirable in a place to live, work or play, we are seeing growing alignment in the way citizens, corporations and travelers choose cities to visit, live or invest in.

Despite what you may have read during the pandemic about the decline of cities, urban centers remain as desirable as ever. What's changing is how we live and work within them.

Resonance Consultancy's Best Cities rankings are determined by analyzing the performance of each city for a wide range of factors that have historically shown positive correlations with attracting employment, investment and/or visitors. Yes, those include "livability" stalwarts like walkability and the outdoors, but also increasingly coveted talent magnets and prosperity drivers like Nightlife, Restaurants and Pro Sports Teams.

These factors shape a city's "lovability," and our research indicates that they tend to drive investment and local prosperity more than, say, local school quality or a city's safety.

The recognition of these attributes by locals and visitors alike further propels a city's performance in our rankings, via their resonance online and in social media, from exploratory research (captured in our Google Search subcategory), to on-the-ground user-generated marketing (captured in our measurement of Instagram Hashtags and Facebook Check-ins).

The kudos offered up a few years back by Bloomberg are still at the core of our rankings: "The most comprehensive study of its kind; it identifies cities that are most desirable for locals, visitors, and businesspeople alike, rather than simply looking at livability or tourism appeal."

And generational economic sustainability for American cities is within grasp today.

Geopolitical pressure for countries and corporations to reshore their manufacturing and operations—from microchip production to agriculture—are creating new economic opportunities, while remote work and the emergent "15-minute city" obsession among local governments is changing where consumption and production occurs within the city.

New initiatives range from the humble (Spokane's street-front retail dedicated to farmers of eastern Washington) to the monumental (Houston's ascent as the world's spaceport).

Additionally, the ability to launch a start-up anywhere that entrepreneurship strikes means enlightened cities, no matter how "secondary," can inspire, incubate and develop homegrown talent like never before. And with that newfound freedom, many people are choosing to move to smaller—or more affordable, or more interesting—cities, taking their economic output and consumption with them.

Many cities have used the pandemic pause to position themselves as ever more welcoming destinations—for tourism, for much-needed talent and for risk-averse global capital seeking new opportunities in places that have done the work to build in resilience for a changed world.

American cities are also strengthening that local resiliency with regional collaboration, from bold electronics manufacturing between San Antonio and northern Mexico to imminent high-speed rail in Florida and California.

As we emerge from the depths of the pandemic, there's never been a bigger opportunity for cities to act on their ambitions and to do right by their citizens—current and future. The data we collect to produce these rankings will continue to track and monitor this pivotal transformation every step of the way, identifying the Best Cities to live, work in and visit, now and in the years to come.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Chris Fair". The signature is fluid and stylized, with a large initial "C" and "F".

Chris Fair, President & CEO
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SAN FRANCISCO'S ICONIC PAINTED LADIES



HOW WE CHOSE AMERICA'S BEST CITIES IN 2023: THE METHODOLOGY

Resonance Consultancy ranks U.S. cities (principal cities of metropolitan areas with populations of more than 500,000) by using a combination of statistical performance and qualitative evaluations by locals and visitors in 26 areas grouped into six core categories. Principal cities are defined as the largest city in each metropolitan statistical area. Our population numbers are sourced from the U.S. Census, American Community Survey 2021.

THE SIX CORE CATEGORIES

Pc PLACE

Pd PRODUCT

Pg PROGRAMMING

Po PEOPLE

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 walkable and bike-friendly it is to how well its parks and landmarks are reviewed, several readily measurable, oft-cited factors influence our perceptions.

Walk Score A city's walkability score on Walk Score (Walkscore.com)

Biking A city's bikeability score on Walk Score (Walkscore.com)

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

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)

Convention Center Size of the largest convention center (10Times.com)

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

University Score of the top local university (QS Rankings)

Pro Sports Teams Number of professional sports teams



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.

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)

Attractions Number of quality family-friendly activities recommended by locals and visitors (Tripadvisor.com)



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, and, for many cities, is increasingly in short supply. To evaluate the relative strength of human capital from one city to the next, we look at both the educational attainment level of the city’s population and the percentage of people participating in the labor force.

BIPOC Residents Percentage of non-white citizens (U.S. Census, American Community Survey 2021)

Educational Attainment Percentage of the population with a bachelor’s degree or higher (U.S. Census, American Community Survey 2021)

Foreign-Born Residents Share of the city’s population born outside of the United States (U.S. Census, American Community Survey 2021)



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 its 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 Companies Number of Fortune 500 corporate headquarters (Fortune.com/Fortune500)

Knowledge-Based Businesses Establishments in professional, scientific and technical services (Lightcast 2022)

Cost-of-Living-Adjusted Earnings Earnings adjusted by the cost of living index (Lightcast 2022)

Poverty Rate A measure of citizens living below their city’s national poverty rate (U.S. Census, American Community Survey 2021)



Pm PROMOTION

A city’s ability to tell its story (and help others do the same) depends on how it incentivizes and rewards the 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 Search Number of Google search results (Google.com)

Tripadvisor Reviews Number of Tripadvisor reviews (Tripadvisor.com)

Instagram Hashtags Number of Instagram hashtags (Instagram.com)

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

America's

TOP 100 CITY PROFILES

LIFE GUARD TOWER AT SOUTH BEACH, MIAMI

American cities are the engines of their regional, national and, increasingly, global economy. For centuries, they've been badges of human ingenuity.

Yes, they've been hobbled over the past three years, exposing the long-ignored foundational and institutional problems that manifested on their streets and in their hospitals. But they're also leading—like they always have—the recovery and future-defining next stages of our innovation, livability and sustainability.

Given the new rules of post-pandemic migration, the rise of remote work and the never-ending search for housing affordability, more cities are catching the imagination of global talent more frequently, with urban wealth and vibrancy created in more places than ever before. And with federal initiatives that prioritize reshoring and energy and food security multiplying with every passing quarter, it is cities—from Houston to San Diego—that are forging new, more resilient, future-focused local economies not seen in decades.

After way too long in isolation, American cities are gathering again, once more colliding and creating the culture, wealth and energy that defines the zeitgeist and path forward for the country, continent and the planet. The 100 cities that we profile over the next 50 pages are, in each of their distinct ways, at the heart of this renewal in 2023.





THE MANHATTAN BRIDGE

POPULATION

METRO 20,140,000

HIGHLIGHTS

1 SIGHTS & LANDMARKS

1 INSTAGRAM HASHTAGS



THE FLATIRON BUILDING

1 NEW YORK NEW YORK

After a hellish two-plus years, few cities on the planet are as busy making up for lost time as NYC.

The greatest city in America—lauded and crowned in our rankings for almost a decade and in countless others for many more—was a ghastly reminder during the pandemic of the vulnerability of even the colossal and seemingly all-powerful; we saw here what awaited other cities across the U.S. and globally.

Today, NYC is also the urban recovery writ large.

Sniping haters who declared that the big, vibrant, cheek-by-jowl city experiment was finally over as the urban exodus intensified in 2020 and vacancy in the city's coveted real estate hit double digits were quickly silenced by the rebound. A mid-pandemic 50% drop

in real estate sales spiked to the highest all-time median rents in Manhattan two years later (currently registering in the mid-\$5,000s per month).

Tourism, the accelerant for so many of the city's amenities, was a priority for a sustainable recovery, and city leaders are doing everything in their power to bring back not only those apprehensive New Yorkers whose hunger for regular bites of the Big Apple is finally being sated, but also the nearly 70 million people who visited in 2019 and spent \$46 billion across its expansive quilt of Sights & Landmarks (ranked #1 in the country).

Tourism numbers have also had a breathtaking return, from 33 million visitors in 2021 (less than half of 2019's total) to 56 million last year—and onward to a projected 61 million this year.

First order of business: getting those not already here to town. Fortunately, the suspension of travel for more than



a year expedited the long-planned transformations of New York's international gateways. LaGuardia Airport, Newark Liberty International Airport and John F. Kennedy International Airport all have new terminals, with the new Terminal B at LaGuardia alone boasting 35 gates (to say nothing of the FAO Schwarz on site). The new Terminal C also came online last year. Newark Liberty International's updated Terminal A has opened with 33 new gates and construction has started on a new, congestion-easing 2.5-mile elevated guideway train system. JFK's Terminal 8 just unveiled 130,000 square feet of new and renovated space, and a new Terminal One opens later this decade.

Back on the ground, Moynihan Train Hall is a new 17-track expansion of Penn Station that, if you squint, could pass for a Northern European transit hub from the future.

With so many expected arrivals, NYC is certainly making sure everyone has a place to stay. Almost 10,000 new or renovated hotel rooms opened in 2022 alone, including the headline-grabbing Aman New York, an "urban sanctuary" on Fifth Avenue. Also open is the

year-old Ritz-Carlton New York, NoMad—named for its 'hood—which features Jose Andres' Nubeluz lounge on the 50th floor and plenty of massive panels from which to watch the street action. Better yet, soak in the 360-degree city panorama on the rooftop patio. The buildout stretches across the city, with



FIFTH AVENUE VIEWS FROM THE NEW AMAN NEW YORK

a newly opened Thompson in Midtown, and new Renaissance Hotels properties in Harlem and Flushing. Moxy Hotels is also opening multiple locations in the Lower East Side and Williamsburg.

At street level, the city's firehose turns cultural, with massive museums (also ranking #1 nationally) going all-in on expansions and new openings.

The Louis Armstrong House Museum in Corona, Queens, is undergoing a physical and programmatic expansion for a new cultural center that includes an interactive exhibit, archival collections, a 68-seat jazz club and a store. It should be open by the time you read this. The Bronx Children's Museum also just reopened after moving to a new home in Mill Pond Park. Dia Chelsea is a new contemporary installation space, and the Frick Madison (the temporary home of the Frick Collection) has opened in the Breuer on Madison Avenue—a building formerly used by the Met. Speaking of the Met, New York's 153-year-old cultural institution (housing 1.5 million objects and hosting seven million visitors in a non-pandemic year) announced a \$500-million reno of its modern and contemporary wing. Not as storied but equally New York is the new Museum of Broadway, the first permanent museum dedicated to the famed heartland of the stage, which opened in Times Square with a behind-the-scenes look at the creation of major theater productions. Also: Broadway shows are back!

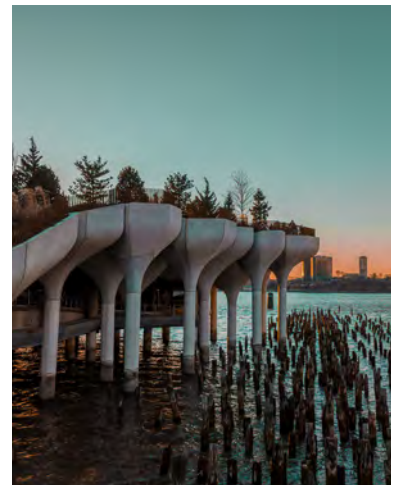


Two more very NYC reasons to experience the city now: this year marks the 50th anniversary of the birth of hip hop music, founded in the Bronx on August 11, 1973, when Clive Campbell—better known as DJ Kool Herc—spun records at his sister’s birthday party. Look for dozens of local celebrations, exhibits and workshops this summer and fall. It’s also the 100-year anniversary of the underrated Museum of the City of New York, which celebrates and documents 750,000 objects, including photographs, prints, costumes, paintings and more, to allow NYC-philes to obsess over this place like nowhere else.

For those who prefer their immersion outdoors, classics like the High Line

and Central Park are joined by the city’s newest green space, Little Island—2.4 acres floating on the Hudson near the Meatpacking District on the site of an old pier. Like most things here, you have to see it to believe it.

When it’s your turn to return to America’s best city, do yourself a favor and make time to see the phoenix rise from above: there are the classics, like the Empire State Building and the Top of the Rock, but there are also spectacular new perches, like SUMMIT One Vanderbilt and its all-glass exterior elevators, called Ascent. Go up, look down and breathe out. This city is back.



LITTLE ISLAND IN THE HUDSON RIVER



VIEW OF THE CHICAGO SKYLINE FROM LINCOLN PARK

POPULATION

METRO 9,619,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 1 CONVENTION CENTER
- 2 NIGHTLIFE



CLOUD GATE AT MILLENNIUM PARK

2 CHICAGO ILLINOIS

America's great Midwest metropolis has an abundance of programming and culture, with the deep infrastructure and affordability that eludes many other cities.

Few American cities fell harder both in visitor numbers and economically over the past 26 harrowing months than Chicago, even after the city deftly rode its gilded pre-pandemic decade. But the hardship of the pandemic, combined with spiking inflation, only meant that the Windy City was spring-loaded for a breakout 2023, powered by a fully operational O'Hare International, ranked #3 in the country as measured by the number of direct destinations served. Meetings and conventions of all sizes are back, pouring into McCormick Place and its stunning

Lake Michigan perch, ranked #1 in our Convention Center subcategory.

The city's quiet productivity is humming again, too, and is leaner and more efficient than ever, with the second-most Fortune 500 headquarters in the country, behind only New York. It also ranks top five in the country in our Knowledge-Based Businesses subcategory, and its citizens enjoy the nation's ninth-best Cost-of-Living-Adjusted Earnings.

Even amid the post-pandemic headlines of emptying city cores and urban flight, Chicago was named the top metro area for corporate investment for an astonishing 10th consecutive year by Site Selection magazine, a business publication that tracks real estate and corporate development in cities with more than a million people. The reason? "Our project data tell us the metro area continues to attract companies and the talent those companies covet. Led by World Business Chicago, the newly formed Greater



Chicagoland Economic Partnership and most of all by talented professionals, workers and business leaders, the region continues to meet its challenges with creative solutions, bold programs and the sort of candor and openness that's almost a Chicago brand."

On the streets of Chicago's #3-ranked Sights & Landmarks (scattered across 77 neighborhoods within city limits), it's summer in the city circa 2019. Sundays on State debuted in 2021 and is back making portions of the iconic State Street pedestrian-only during select

Sundays. Free summer festivals are also returning to Chicago parks (such as Millennium and Grant), with the Millennium Park Summer Music Series rocking the Jay Pritzker Pavilion, with everything from salsa orchestras to Kurt Vile and the Violators.

If the joy and need to dance is everywhere, it's by design, courtesy of Chicago SummerDance pop-ups, by the Night Out in the Parks events that take place across the city's #9-ranked green spaces after sunset and by the extended Chicago Pride programming

before and after the iconic party hits town in mid-June. The local purveyors of the nation's second-best Nightlife (trailing only NYC) are always happy to keep the party going indoors, especially the Diageo Beer Company people, who opened the second worldwide location of the Guinness Open Gate Brewery in the West Loop neighborhood just this summer. This is only further proof of the understated beer culture in a town with 160 breweries, the most of any U.S. city (sorry, Seattle).

All that revelry means working up an appetite and Chicago delivers again. From Chef José Andrés' two-year-old Bazaar Meat and Bar Mar inside Bank of America's new Chicago headquarters to the city's youngest Michelin-starred chef, Donald Young, debuting Venteux, a French brasserie in the new Pendry Chicago hotel, this town is fed well.

And speaking of new hotels, their scorching pace continues, with three properties opening this year, including the highly anticipated St. Regis Chicago. The 101-story tower, designed by award-winning architect Jeanne Gang, has changed Chicago's iconic skyline. It is now the third-tallest building in the city, the 10th tallest in the United States and the tallest building in the world designed by a woman.



INSIDE CHEF JOSÉ ANDRÉS' BAZAAR MEAT



THE ST. REGIS CHICAGO
RISES ABOVE THE CITY

“Last year, we welcomed nearly 50 million visitors back to Chicago, and hotel room demand reached more than 80% of pre-pandemic levels,” says Lynn Osmond, president & CEO of Choose Chicago, the city’s destination marketing organization. “The beginning of 2023 has been even stronger, with hotel room nights approaching 2019 numbers and some major conventions setting all-time attendance records.”

She adds that her team’s focus “is shifting from recovery to long-term, sustainable success as a city.”

The \$5.5 million in the recent American Rescue Plan Act funding will allow Choose Chicago to greatly increase efforts to deliver more of the economic benefits of tourism to the vibrant neighborhoods that are off of Chicago’s beaten track.

“The culture and vibrancy of Chicago can be found beyond our traditional tourist locations,” said Mayor Lori Lightfoot when announcing the funding. “Each of our 77 unique neighborhoods are home to rich histories, world-class cuisine and entertainment that tourists should experience.”

One neighborhood that won’t need much help attracting visitors starting in 2025? South Chicago’s Jackson Park and its \$500-million Obama Presidential Center. The campus is intended to function as a world-class museum and public gathering space that showcases the South Side to the world, welcoming 700,000 annual visitors and projected to generate a long-term economic impact of more than \$3 billion.



THE BROAD IN DOWNTOWN L.A. WITH A COLORFUL CROSSWALK BY ARTIST CARLOS CRUZ-DIEZ

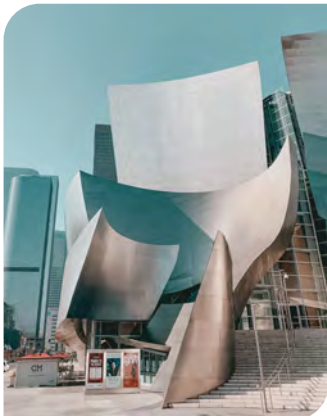
POPULATION

METRO 13,201,000

HIGHLIGHTS

1 RESTAURANTS

2 MUSEUMS



THE WALT DISNEY CONCERT HALL

3 LOS ANGELES CALIFORNIA

The planet's city of stories is telling a few of its own this year. Over drinks, over dinner and on the train ride home.

After a grim two-and-a-half years, L.A. is ready to celebrate, especially with an epic 2023 packed with centennial milestones. The biggie: the Hollywood Sign, synonymous with the city and region both physically and spiritually, is turning 100. In fact, in a recent study commissioned by Los Angeles Tourism, nearly 80% of respondents affirmed that the Hollywood Sign is Los Angeles' most iconic landmark. And nine of 10 Americans consider the Hollywood Sign an iconic American landmark, on par with the Statue of Liberty, the Washington Monument, Mount Rushmore and the Golden Gate Bridge. Local tourism promoters are ensuring that their city's already impressive

#2 ranking in our Facebook Check-ins subcategory and #3 spot for Instagram Hashtags gets even better by helping connect visitors to trails, tours and rooftop patios from which to capture the nine-letter legend.

Another L.A. legend, Warner Bros. Studios, hits triple digits this year and has unveiled the 100th Anniversary Exhibit, exploring a century of helping shape global storytelling from its L.A. home. The new exhibit recognizes a range of classic and contemporary productions, including Casablanca, DC Comics, The "Wizarding World" of Harry Potter, Abbott Elementary, and beyond. The city's #3 ranking in our Attractions subcategory will only be fortified with these initiatives.

A third centenary celebration is the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum, as hallowed American ground as you'll find and home to both the first Super Bowl in 1967 and multiple Olympic Games



(including the upcoming 2028 Summer Games, when L.A. will become the first place in the U.S. to host the event three times). In honor of its 100th anniversary, the Los Angeles Coliseum's Coliseum Forever program is hosting events, speakers and exhibits that memorialize stories from the iconic figures who contributed to the venue's unparalleled legacy. The year of events will bring the community together to plan the next century of nurturing a city that already ranks #4 in our Culture subcategory.

The home of America's most ambitious museums (ranking #2, second only to NYC) is demanding the world come and visit, with vital exhibitions already launched and massive openings and expansions planned in the months ahead. This spring, The Broad presented the city's first museum exhibition of Keith Haring's expansive body of work. And The Grand LA's Jean-Michel Basquiat: King Pleasure exhibit is drawing summer crowds downtown with 200 rarely shown and even never-before-seen pieces.

In Westwood, the Hammer Museum at UCLA has just reopened after its two-decade-long project transforming the campus, anchored by the new Lynda and Stewart Resnick Cultural Center at the gateway to Westwood Village. The museum today extends across a full city block, increasing gallery space by 60% to display the Hammer's large collection of nearly 50,000 pieces.

Anticipation is also building at the two-year-old Academy Museum of Motion Pictures and its Hollywoodland exhibit this November, tracing the history of filmmaking in Los Angeles back to its roots at the beginning of the 20th century, illustrating how and why the city became the world capital of cinema.

The next two years are equally frenzied for the city's arts and culture scene. The Los Angeles County Museum of Art is scheduled to reopen next year with 110,000 square feet of gallery space, a new theater, education spaces, three restaurants and multipurpose event spaces, and will span Wilshire Boulevard in order to accommodate 3.5 acres of new park and outdoor space. The Natural History Museum also opens its NHM Commons in 2024—a new wing and community hub on the southwest side of the museum campus in Exposition Park. Opening in 2025 is the Lucas Museum of Narrative Art, founded by philanthropist and filmmaker George Lucas and his wife Mellody Hobson, co-CEO and president of Ariel Investments; it will focus on the universal art of visual storytelling and will feature expansive galleries, state-of-the-art cinematic theaters, dedicated spaces for learning and engagement and a new public green space.

The city's long-smoldering arts bounty isn't just confined to paid access, of course, and there's no better place for walkable immersion than the recently

reopened historic Sixth Street Viaduct, a transformative infrastructure project for the city that replaced the original 1932 bridge and today unites the Boyle Heights community to the east and the Arts District and Downtown to the west. The project has reinvigorated the Arts District and today its galleries, murals and dozens of independent shops and outdoor markets host daily events that draw locals from across the county.

They also come for a dining scene that's a distilled version of the larger culinary destination that the city as a whole has become (topping all U.S. cities in our Restaurants subcategory). Local Arts District favorites like the local-first Mexican cuisine at Enrique Olvera's Damian and the dreamy Italian of Bestia have been recently joined by the Korean fusion of Yangban Society, the Greek cuisine of Mandolin Taverna and—this being L.A.—the 1970s Italian-themed Let's Go! Disco and Cocktail Club. A short stroll away are two Michelin-starred restaurants, Hayato and Kato, that can insufficiently be described as "Japanese."

With the City of Angels this ascendant, it's a good thing that all nine of LAX's terminals are in the midst of a combined \$14.3-billion modernization, with the automated people mover (APM) train scheduled to open next year. The new \$1.7-billion Regional Connector Transit Project, featuring a 1.9-mile underground light-rail system that will provide a one-seat ride across Los Angeles County, just opened, making travel on the Metro Gold Line to Long Beach and from East Los Angeles to Santa Monica possible without transferring lines. And, more importantly, not sitting in traffic.



THE LOS ANGELES MEMORIAL COLISEUM
IN EXPOSITION PARK

POPULATION

METRO 4,749,000

HIGHLIGHTS



WALK SCORE



SIGHTS & LANDMARKS

Job opportunities and infrastructure buildout pave the way as the world continues to rush in, despite the haters.

San Francisco doesn't just welcome differences, it celebrates them, ranking it #2 in our People category, including #3 for Educational Attainment among its citizenry, and #4 for the percentage of that citizenry who were born outside of the U.S.

Its #5 Prosperity ranking is demonstrative that the promise of high salaries draws global workers who fuel a city's ambition and ideas—and, in this case, driving San Francisco's #17 ranking for Fortune 500 Companies. In fact, the Bay Area remains the No. 1 place for start-up innovation powered by venture capital, kept interested by the city's famed "ecosystem"—for talent, for research and for universities. In Henley & Partners and New World Wealth's "World's Wealthiest Cities Report 2023," San Francisco ranked third, tied with London, after New York and Tokyo. In terms of the actual number of millionaires living in the city? San Francisco had 285,000 last year.

Still, the city has been deeply wounded economically—by the pandemic, the lack of affordable housing and what many see as regulatory overreach.

San Francisco's rate of population decline was the worst among large U.S. counties between July 1, 2020, and July 2, 2022. The city and its surrounding Bay Area counties saw a net population loss of more than 250,000 people in the first two years of the COVID-19 pandemic. Equally terrifying is the city ending 2022 with a 27% office vacancy rate, according to

4 SAN FRANCISCO CALIFORNIA

GOLDEN GATE BRIDGE AND DOWNTOWN BEYOND



local numbers. Even the proudest locals writing their hands as companies leave for Austin and Florida. And then tweet about how you should, too. But life goes on for those who choose to stay and fight for "everyone's favorite city."

Local leaders are rolling out the most daring bike and pedestrian infrastructure in America and the protected bike network now boasts 464 miles of bikeways, including 50 miles of new car-free/car-light streets in the past year alone. The world has noticed, with the New York Times highlighting the city's weekend car-free two-mile stretch along its western shore (called the Great Highway) in its influential "52 Places to Go" roundup last year, calling it a "telling microcosm of the ways in which our cities, and our values, shifted during the pandemic." The city just announced that it will remain car-free on weekends until at least 2025.

The investments mean San Francisco ranks #1 in the nation for walkability and #4 for biking.

The aggressive pursuit of outdoor public spaces—from downtown's new Salesforce Park, 70 feet above street level atop the roof of the Salesforce Transit Center, to the half-dozen parks, tunnels and spaces opened last year in

the Presidio alone (including Presidio Tunnel Tops, a 14-acre park built over the Presidio Parkway highway tunnels)—was a clinic in opportunism.

"We are building on the momentum of last year's rebounding tourism, which was fueled by the return of international visitors and conventions," says Joe D'Alessandro, president and CEO of the San Francisco Travel Association. "By 2024, we expect to reach 2019's level of visitor spending."



WATERFRONT BIKE LANE AT AQUATIC PARK

POPULATION

METRO 6,385,000

HIGHLIGHTS



GOOGLE SEARCH



EDUCATIONAL
ATTAINMENT

America's intriguing capital city has the world's attention—and is working to keep it.

The ubiquity of D.C. in dramas on screens small and large, combined with the shocking events of recent years, means we're all thinking about Washington. Want proof? It once again topped all U.S. cities for searches on Google in the past year. Given its omnipresence, there are few cities so poised to build on their exposure.

"We are looking forward to continuing to welcome more visitors this summer and beyond," says Elliott Ferguson, president and CEO of Destination DC. "There is currently \$9.6 billion in development underway and the city has added new hotels, museums, rooftops, Michelin-rated dining and more for travelers to explore. A few upcoming highlights include... MLS All-Star Week in July, DC JazzFest over Labor Day Weekend and Theater Week this fall."

Those 2023 openings include the late-summer launch of the 274-room Royal Sonesta Capitol Hill, the city's second Royal Sonesta property; part of a mixed-use complex, it boasts a rooftop conference center with epic city views to admire during boring speeches. Recently opened and drawing visitor accolades are the AC Hotel Washington DC Capitol Hill Navy Yard and the Pendry Washington DC – The Wharf. And speaking of The Wharf, phase two of the massive Southwest Waterfront development just opened, creating yet another destination neighborhood in a city packed with them.

The city's top five Museums ranking is on full display these days, with the iconic

5 WASHINGTON D.C.

National Gallery of Art making up for lost time with a half-dozen high-profile exhibits scheduled over the next year, including what promises to be a showstopping Mark Rothko show. New and reopening museums include the 32,000-square-foot Rubell Museum DC in a historically Black public school in the Southwest neighborhood.

The National Museum of Women in the Arts reopens this fall and remains the world's only major art museum solely dedicated to championing women artists.

D.C.'s long run as America's "It" food city shows no signs of slowing, and the attention is surfacing Black chefs and purveyors with Market 7, a sprawling

food hall touting Black-owned businesses. Also creating a buzz is Chef José Andres' The Bazaar in the Waldorf Astoria (rescued from its previous life as a Trump Tower); this spot is sure to sate your Chesapeake Bay locavorism.

Walking off the capital's culinary bounty is easy in a city with a top five Walk Score, but why walk when you can experience the city's improving public transit, courtesy of last year's Silver Line expansion? There are six new subway stations, none more appreciated than the first-ever train station at Washington Dulles International Airport, which now provides an elegant way into town without shelling out for an Uber.



THE MODERNIST MASTERPIECE THAT IS THE D.C. METRO

POPULATION

METRO 6,138,000

HIGHLIGHTS



FOREIGN-BORN RESIDENTS



INSTAGRAM HASHTAGS

Miami's creativity is powered by its arms-wide-open acceptance of newcomers.

Miami's natural attributes have always captured the world's imagination and crystalized its hedonistic brand. The city ranks #3 nationally in our Outdoors subcategory, #5 for its walkability and #4 in our overall Place category.

But it's Miami's openness to immigrants (and, more recently, the LGBTQ+ community, and, even more recently than that, Silicon Valley migrants) that has people buzzing. The city has the highest percentage of foreign-born residents in America (which is saying something), and ranks #6 for the highest percentage of BIPOC residents, with all the epic Pride festivals and programming you'd expect, led by the Greater Miami Convention & Visitors Bureau and its initiatives like Rainbow Spring earlier this year. That event was designed to provide LGBTQ+ visitors with unique programming and promotional offers in Miami and Miami Beach leading up to Pride Month in June, effectively extrapolating a month into two quarters. It's the kind of productivity hack people come to expect in this town. And, increasingly, a new distributed workforce has taken notice and continues to arrive to work from home here (and, more importantly, to play in and around the city).

As a result, even with the tech and crypto meltdown last year, South Florida has shown no signs of slowing down, as 2022's third-quarter numbers proved. Companies in the Miami-Fort Lauderdale metro area pulled in nearly \$1.3 billion of venture capital across 74 deals, according to local data. The city ranks in the top three in the country

6 MIAMI FLORIDA

MIAMI SKYLINE AFTER SUNSET



in our Knowledge-Based Businesses subcategory, and #15 in our overall Prosperity category, including #17 for Fortune 500 head offices in town.

But it's not like Florida's largest city is some erstwhile economic rookie—its historic role as a crossroads of the Americas has long provided a business advantage few cities can claim. It's home to one of the largest concentrations of international banks in the U.S., as well as one of North America's largest hubs—outside of Mexico City, New York and L.A.—of Spanish-language media.

All that talent and down-payment money is looking to buy in and housing costs are defying gravity (and interest rates). Residential buildout is everywhere and two luxury projects in particular will change the skyline. The 1,049-foot Waldorf Astoria Hotel and Residences is predicted to be the tallest residential tower south of New York upon completion in 2027. The Residences, a 70-story luxury condominium tower, begins construction this year.

All that economic growth gets a hustler hungry, and Miami delivers in its title of Bon Appétit's 2023 Food City of the Year.

This announcement comes on the heels of additional culinary honors for Greater Miami and Miami Beach, including new stars awarded by the Michelin Guide, which only arrived in Florida in 2022, as well as local kudos at the 2023 James Beard Awards, which recently selected eight Miami restaurants, chefs and bakeries as semifinalists and one local bakery as a finalist. Expect America's second-most Instagrammed city to top that ranking, fueled by #foodporn, soon.



PRIDE SHINES BRIGHT IN MIAMI

POPULATION

METRO 4,942,000

HIGHLIGHTS

1 UNIVERSITY

3 WALK SCORE

America's oldest big city has never been more current.

A hub of higher education and home to the fourth-best-educated workforce in the nation, Beantown produces a steady stream of new talent to help attract start-ups and established companies alike. Future talent gravitates to Harvard, of course—the country's top school (and a big reason why the city is tied for #1 in our University subcategory and scored #4 in our overall Product category, which measures hard-to-build infrastructure in subcategories like Airport Connectivity)—as well as to Boston's density of other world-class universities and colleges. The city is bursting with lecture halls, labs and classrooms for the more than 75 institutions of higher learning in the area, and is energized by the estimated 200,000 postsecondary



NORTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY CAMPUS

7 BOSTON MASSACHUSETTS

THE CITY'S EVER-EXPANDING SKYLINE



students (many excitedly back in the city post-pandemic) creating stories, ideas, solutions and technologies that will help drive the economy and incubate innovation districts nationally and globally for decades to come. New students have resumed flocking here, to arguably the continent's largest university town, by the tens of thousands, becoming smitten with the crooked narrow streets (ranked #3 for their walkability) and storied pubs blended with American optimism and East Coast connections, like millions before them.

They're definitely hitting it at the right time because the city is getting back to its ambitious buildout as America's newest (oldest) urban destination, buoyed by billions in federal stimulus funds and (until recently, anyway) cheap interest rates.

Hotel inventory is projected to grow by almost 5,000 new rooms in the next five years alone, a 20% increase in supply, much of it planned or, in the case of the 1,055-room Omni Boston Hotel at the Seaport in the South Boston Waterfront near the Boston Convention & Exhibition

Center, already opened. Elsewhere, the 33-story Raffles Boston Back Bay Hotel and Residences, the first Raffles property in North America, is set to open any week now. Signature luxury includes a Raffles butler, Raffles spa and pool and a rooftop garden terrace and lounge serving up some of the best views in town. Downtown is also busy, with a half-dozen massive new properties on deck or completed, including the year-old 212-room Canopy by Hilton at Boston Haymarket, just steps from Faneuil Hall Marketplace and the Boston Public Market.

The city's cultural clout is also being reinforced courtesy of the Fenway Sports Group and Live Nation's new MGM Music Hall at Fenway, a 5,000-seat concert hall that extends the iconic ballpark, adding 91,500 square feet and four levels of new event space and amenities to the home of the Red Sox. Owners estimate that it will host up to 150 events annually.

The city's new tourism campaign hit it out of the park with its resonance: Boston Never Gets Old.

POPULATION

METRO 4,019,000

HIGHLIGHTS



COST-OF-LIVING-ADJUSTED EARNINGS



SHOPPING

America's growing tech hub is playing the long game, focusing on inclusive prosperity and urban vibrancy to win the war for talent.

Seattle's self-reliance was on full display during the pandemic's darkest days. The city saw the first outbreaks in the U.S. But as the New York Times noted a year later, "The Seattle area has the lowest death rate of the 20 largest metropolitan regions in the country. If the rest of the United States had kept pace with Seattle, the nation could have avoided more than 300,000 coronavirus deaths." The resilience wasn't just in public health. Despite an over-reported (and, as it turns out, temporary) exodus from the center to the suburbs, Seattle has avoided the economic impact that continues to hobble other U.S. urban centers. Population growth remains at just under



THE SEATTLE CONVENTION CENTER'S NEW SUMMIT BUILDING

8 SEATTLE WASHINGTON

ENJOYING THE SKYLINE VIEWS FROM KERRY PARK



1% annually, fueled by talent (not all from California, mind you) looking for (literally) greener pastures and pulled by the influential titans of industry in town, from Amazon to Starbucks to Zillow. Q1 employment grew by 4% and even commercial vacancy is holding on at 15%. Seatown's #6 Prosperity ranking is powered by its well-paid citizens, who rank third in America in our Cost-of-Living-Adjusted Earnings subcategory, trailing only Silicon Valley and Austin, respectively. Given their #11 ranking for Educational Attainment, combined with specialized talent being recruited to the city, it's no surprise. Despite the optimized economic engine that Seattle has become (or, rather, *because of it*), its long-lauded stewardship of the land and its citizens is equally ambitious. In addition to ranking as the seventh-best biking city in America, to go along with its top 10 Walk Score, Seattle is also doing its best to further reduce cars in town with Sound Transit's Link light rail. The new and extended lines are opening over the next year, reaching south to the

#17-ranked SeaTac Airport and east to the suburban tech centers of Redmond and Bellevue, combining work and pleasure like never before. Returning business travel has more options with the #11-ranked Seattle Convention Center's newest addition, Summit, welcoming groups to the Emerald City.

The city is also getting back to its elevated brand of arts and music festivals, led by the anticipated return of Bumbershoot on September 2 and 3, its 50th iteration after a three-year absence. Seattle's sports addiction is getting sated these days, too, with the NHL's newest team, the Seattle Kraken, winning on the ice and pulling in the league's Winter Classic Game on January 1, 2024, to say nothing of the Mariners hosting the MLB All-Star Game this summer.

Hotel openings are everywhere, from the forthcoming boutique property in Pioneer Square's historic RailSpur district to the 265-room new-build Astra Hotel, just steps from Amazon's campus in South Lake Union.

POPULATION

METRO 7,122,000

HIGHLIGHTS

4 RESTAURANTS

4 FORTUNE 500 COMPANIES

Educated, diverse and hard-working, Houston is America's stealthy powerhouse on the rise.

Austin may get the attention, but the promise of the Lone Star State drawing Californians and New Yorkers is quietly being fulfilled in Houston. In the past year, immigration both domestic and international has swelled the metro population to more than seven million, with new arrivals more educated and international than pre-pandemic. Houston today is one of America's most ethnically diverse big cities, with more than 145 languages spoken at home, according to the latest census—about even with New York. No wonder it ranks #7 for Culture and its prism of festivals, from international film festivals to some of the country's biggest Juneteenth celebrations. Next year, the city

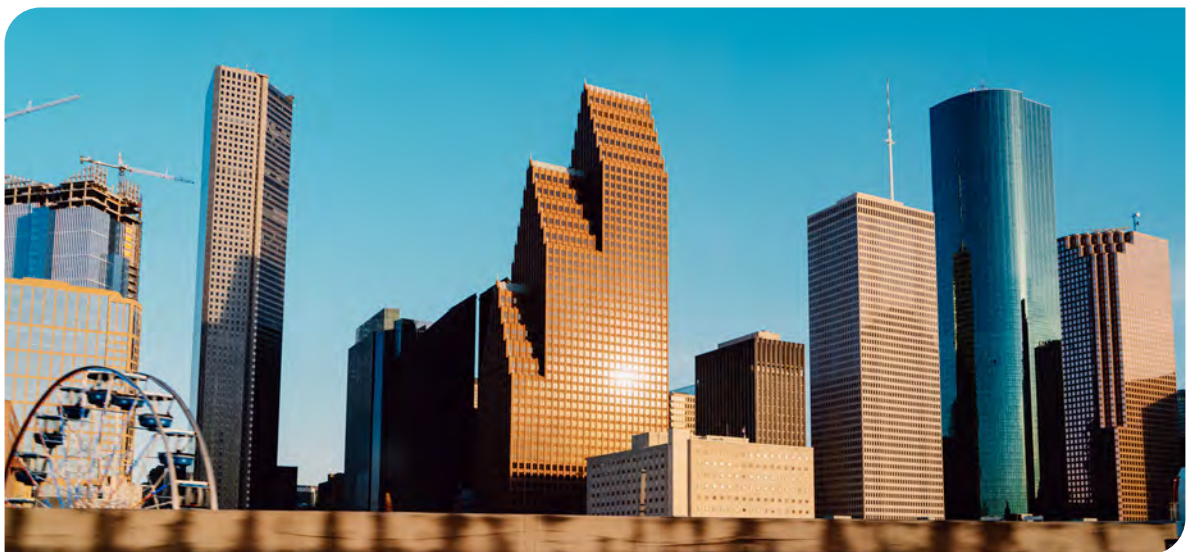
9 HOUSTON TEXAS

welcomes America's first Ismaili Center, commissioned by His Highness the Aga Khan as a place of dialogue between faith and the world, East and West, and humanity and nature.

The melting pot is hot these days, reaching an impressive #4 ranking in our Restaurants subcategory, with a flurry of post-pandemic launches—from food halls like Railway Heights and POST Houston to must-try Israeli cuisine at the year-old Hamsa to elevated Mexican at Casa Nomad and Urbe (few cities anywhere do Mexican better than H-Town). With tourism returning, the city's #8 ranking in our Attractions subcategory will float higher, lifted by next year's opening of HTX Surf, a wave park with perfect rides that peel for the length of two football fields.

"The city has more than recovered the jobs it lost early in the pandemic while employment in the leisure and hospitality sector, which makes up 10% of the region's jobs, is up 6% over this time last year," says Houston First Corporation CMO Holly Clapham. "Thanks to major events like the NCAA Men's Final Four and 29 major conventions, we expect to see significant growth in visitation totals this year."

But despite all its current bonafides, the fourth-largest city in the U.S. is aiming higher, way higher, with its ongoing evolution as Space City. Its Houston Spaceport is an FAA-licensed urban commercial spaceport offering unprecedented access to a thriving aerospace community. In addition to serving as a launch and landing site for reusable suborbital vehicles, it offers laboratory and office space including technology incubators and large-scale hardware production facilities. The head start the city has in building a cluster of aerospace companies manufacturing locally is staggering, especially considering that the spaceport can eventually serve as the country's takeoff point for passenger jets capable of flying at supersonic and hypersonic speeds. The future is already here: in the past year alone, tenant businesses have been awarded nearly \$4 billion in new contracts. Houstonians already enjoying top five Cost-of-Living-Adjusted Earnings in America better strap in for bigger paydays ahead at this trajectory. And the #4-ranked Fortune 500 community is sure to see a few more neighbors, soon.



HOUSTON IS RISING

POPULATION

METRO 2,000,000

HIGHLIGHTS

1 COST-OF-LIVING-ADJUSTED EARNINGS

1 EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

Talent, smarts and money are a potent mix that has insulated San Jose from economic uncertainty while empowering its citizens to be bold with recovery.

It's fascinating what a well-educated, well-paid and diverse population can do for a city's performance. In the case of San Jose, the economic, cultural and political capital of Silicon Valley and California's oldest civilian Spanish settlement, it's everything. The city's talent has propelled it to another top 10 overall finish in 2023, even amid a battered tech sector and the crescendo in tech circles that "everyone is leaving the Valley."

San Jose still boasts the most educated citizenry in the country. It's also home

10 SAN JOSE CALIFORNIA

to the second-most foreign-born talent (trailing only Miami). The combo puts the city tops in the country in our People category yet again this year.

This is also the second-most prosperous city in America (NYC is tops), with the highest Cost-of-Living-Adjusted Earnings and the lowest poverty rate in the country. It's all astonishing, and possible because of San Jose's moat: 2,500 high-tech companies in and around city limits.

It's why San Jose doesn't intend to lose its people—or jobs—for any sustained period of time. There's just too much support from America's—and the planet's—titans of industry and innovation. The institutional prosperity in the city is perhaps most obvious in the bounty of universities that are performance drivers all their own, creating symbiotic integrations with local tech companies and offering access to funding and innovation like few others. Given the optimal conditions of a lauded, coveted school and the on-ramp it provides to jobs in the city, San Jose will continue to stock its talent pipeline for decades.

The region, home to Google, Facebook, Apple, Cisco Systems, eBay and PayPal, ranks #3 for Fortune 500 Companies

in town, trailing only New York and Chicago. But those corporate headquarters don't just provide jobs: they're also reshaping the very city—and region—where their offices are based.

The city's 2014 adoption of the Diridon Station Area Plan to create a mixed-use urban destination near public transit was predicated on Google bankrolling things to bring the vision to life. The proposed project promises hundreds of thousands of square feet of office space next to an intermodal transit station that, if the transit and rail funding stars align, will be a transportation hub for the state. In addition to the tantalizing prospect of high-speed rail links to San Francisco and the Central Valley, Diridon Station is also planned to be the hub for San Francisco's Bay Area Rapid Transit when the connection is finished at the end of this decade.

Actually open is the Signia by Hilton, the city's newest and largest hotel, which took over the old Fairmont property right downtown. A five-minute walk away is Mama Kin, a new bar, restaurant and live-music venue that will hopefully keep the office crowd in town later on weeknights.



DOWNTOWN SAN JOSE



11 LAS VEGAS

NEVADA

POPULATION METRO 2,265,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 2 ATTRACTIONS
- 2 TRIPADVISOR REVIEWS

The revenge city will see you now.

Few places in America have been as supercharged by the return of the visitor economy as Vegas, which lives and dies by its #1 industry (by a mile). A visit in 2023, therefore, is a pilgrimage into American urban resilience. After all, this is Vegas, baby, home to nightlife that's second only to NYC and Chicago, and family-friendly attractions that trail only Orlando. Nearly 39 million visitors checked into town in 2022, and this past January was just 4% below the same month in 2019, according to local numbers. Welcoming them are properties like the two-year-old, \$4.3-billion Resorts World Las Vegas, comprising three hotels, the 27,000-square-foot Awana Spa and a 5,000-capacity theater. The fact that places like the Wynn were extensively renoed at a cost of \$200 million during the pandemic is almost lost in the gilded fog of Vegas construction, which still has at least \$15 billion of new investment in the pipeline, including the 2023 completion of the much-anticipated 25-acre Fontainebleau complex and the \$2-billion MSG Sphere that will be, at 516 feet in diameter, the largest spherical structure in the world when it opens later this year.



12 ATLANTA

GEORGIA

POPULATION METRO 6,090,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 4 AIRPORT CONNECTIVITY
- 5 CONVENTION CENTER

Ambitious and dripping with history, ATL is creating its future mid-flight.

Long a progressive beacon of diversity in Georgia, Atlanta and its rich legacy of American civil rights—the city is the birthplace of Martin Luther King Jr.—is increasingly in the national conversation as a new hometown. And people are walking the talk, with almost a quarter of a million relocating to the city over the past two years. Even more are mulling their options, indicated by ATL's #8 Google Search ranking nationally. Good thing the city—already home to the eighth-most Fortune 500 headquarters in America—is planning for the influx, with bold new projects downtown like the 50-acre Gulch redevelopment called Centennial Yards, featuring 12 million square feet of residential, retail and office space and 1,500 hotel rooms. Just east, along Peachtree, Mitchell and Broad streets, as well as Martin Luther King Jr. Drive, dozens of historic buildings are being revived with a focus on public spaces and walkability. Even Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport (from which 80% of the U.S. population resides within a two-hour flight) is renovating, despite already ranking #4 for Airport Connectivity. Its ATL Next project is pumping \$6 billion into modernization and connectivity.



13 PHILADELPHIA

PENNSYLVANIA

POPULATION METRO 6,245,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 4 UNIVERSITY
- 5 PRO SPORTS TEAMS

The City of Brotherly Love gives locals and visitors plenty of Americana.

Given its deep roots in the creation of the Union almost 250 years ago, Philadelphia is a dense, cataloged embodiment of American values and traditions, easily accessible and eagerly shared. Philly has always let its experiences do the talking, whether it's walking through history along the cobblestones of Old City or breathing in the urban green of Fairmount Park. The city's understated urban tapestry houses America's #7-ranked Sights & Landmarks, perfect for strolling. Philly's #9 Walk Score ranking will only improve with the extensive development of the central portion of the multiuse Delaware River Trail that links the city's waterfront destinations. Those in need of more regimented history will love some of the top museums in the U.S. (ranked #7), especially with recent investments like the 90,000 square feet of new public and exhibition space at the Philadelphia Museum of Art as part of the Frank Gehry-led expansion. Important exhibits are opening this summer and fall, none bigger than Disney100 and SPACE at The Franklin Institute, and Black Founders: The Forten Family of Philadelphia at the Museum of the American Revolution. The city's coveted University of Pennsylvania is an Ivy League icon, ranked #4 nationally.



14 DENVER

COLORADO

POPULATION METRO 2,964,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 4 BIKING
- 5 AIRPORT CONNECTIVITY

Light rail, legal pot and ascendant art shine bright.

With its secondary-city affordability and coveted lifestyle brand at the foot of the Rocky Mountains, Denver is an increasingly wealthy, healthy talent magnet. It ranks top 10 for educated citizenry, who ply their trades at large Fortune 500 companies (ranked #17) ranging from Western Union to Molson Coors Beverage, and at the hundreds of start-ups in the emergent cannabis and burgeoning wellness industries. All that commerce propels the city to #7 in our Knowledge-Based Businesses subcategory, and #9 in our overall Prosperity category. But Denver plays as hard as it works. Amid 300 days of annual sunshine, the obsession with the outdoors today is matched by a commitment to the arts. The Denver Art Museum is slowly emerging from an extensive, multi-year renovation that includes a new restaurant from award-winning Denver chef Jennifer Jasinski, and the return of the museum's Arts of Africa, Modern and Contemporary Art and Arts of Oceania collections to the public for the first time since construction started in 2016. Investments like the Crush Walls international street art festival and the arrival of the artist collective Meow Wolf are rapidly improving the city's #19 Culture ranking.



15 DALLAS

TEXAS

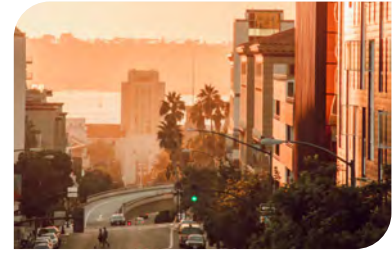
POPULATION METRO 7,637,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 2 AIRPORT CONNECTIVITY
- 5 FORTUNE 500 COMPANIES

"Big Things Happen Here" can refer to any one of investment, population growth or cultural ascent in the Big D.

It's not only city sloganeering that's big in Dallas. It's economic reality. Home to more than 10,000 corporate headquarters—the largest concentration in the U.S.—and ranking in the top five in the nation for Fortune 500 companies, the city is easy to get to. Dallas Fort Worth International Airport trails only JFK (and is ahead of Chicago's O'Hare) in our Airport Connectivity rankings. A planned \$3-billion Terminal F project could be back on the table, given DFW's rebound of 73.4 million passengers in 2022—an increase of 17% over a busy 2021. The #12 ranking in our Convention Center subcategory will ascend when a new \$2-billion, 2.5-million-square-foot facility is built next to the current one in 2028. But Dallas is big on fun and culture, too. This is the home of America's sixth-largest LGBTQ+ community. On 20 square blocks of mixed-use space, institutions like the Dallas Museum of Art, the Crow Museum of Asian Art, theaters, symphony and opera venues, restaurants and bars all power an improving #20 Programming ranking.



16 SAN DIEGO

CALIFORNIA

POPULATION METRO 3,299,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 2 OUTDOORS
- 7 INSTAGRAM HASHTAGS

Southern California's urban ideal offers free sunshine and the epic outdoors. Steps from home and office—across two borders.

You could say that San Diego is where California began. It was here that Spanish colonists established the region's very first mission in 1769. Today, it's one of the fastest-growing cities in the U.S., pulling in residents seeking 263 full and partly sunny days annually, the natural endowment of the #2-ranked Outdoors in America (trailing only, and understandably, Honolulu), whose 23 beaches—70 miles of them—within city limits make the city synonymous with the lore of SoCal surf culture. Speaking of storytelling, the sun-kissed backdrops coax locals to share the aesthetic bounty online, powering the city to a top 10 finish in our vital Promotions category, including #7 for Instagram Hashtags. Increasingly, the buzz is on local attractions, with the 3.2-acre, \$87-million Denny Sanford Wildlife Explorers Basecamp finally open and immersing visitors in the sights and sounds of ecosystems around the world, from balmy rainforests to dusty dunes. The city's #8 Museums ranking will improve when the San Diego Museum of Art in iconic Balboa Park unveils its 2026 west wing, courtesy of Foster + Partners, a firm that has built iconic structures at museums around the world.



17 ORLANDO

FLORIDA

POPULATION METRO 2,673,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 1 ATTRACTIONS
- 3 CONVENTION CENTER

The Mouse’s house embraces hometown dynamism.

Being the largest city in a region that generates more than \$60 billion in tourism-related revenue every (non-pandemic) year gets you plenty of lift from a rising tide. That’s a lot of visitors with a story to tell if you give them the means to tell it. Orlando knows how to get people talking. Its #3 ranking in our Tripadvisor Reviews subcategory helped its overall ranking, along with its top spot in America in our Attractions subcategory. The city is gaining post-pandemic ground with the newly opened, \$4.2-billion South Terminal Complex at Orlando International Airport, featuring the state’s first high-speed rail, called the Brightline, which connects Orlando with West Palm Beach, Fort Lauderdale and Miami. Beyond the theme parks, you’ll find locals and visitors cheering for hometown pro soccer at the new Exploria Stadium—with plenty of place-making around the emerging neighborhood. Downtown culture is also ascendant with this fall’s opening of live music venue Judson’s, the fourth indoor performance space at downtown Orlando’s Dr. Phillips Center for the Performing Arts, joining Steinmetz Hall (opened last year), the Walt Disney Theater and the Alexis & Jim Pugh Theater.



18 AUSTIN

TEXAS

POPULATION METRO 2,283,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 2 COST-OF-LIVING-ADJUSTED EARNINGS
- 7 NIGHTLIFE

The American dream has a new hometown.

The rebellious Texas city—forged by can-do persistence cut with a university town’s progressive livability—is now a well-oiled talent-attraction machine. Talk to any entrepreneur leaving Silicon Valley, NYC or Seattle and chances are they’ve considered Austin. The capital and talent inflow, along with its second-best Cost-of-Living-Adjusted Earnings (behind only San Jose) keeps the party going. Since the pandemic, Austin has secured headquarters for giants like Oracle, Tesla, BAE Systems and dozens of others that have joined incumbents like Samsung USA, which itself is mulling a \$40-billion local investment into 11 manufacturing plants here. Dozens of ambitious tech firms (especially EV and superconductor manufacturers) are moving in monthly. New high-rises like the Waterline (the tallest building in Texas when it opens in 2026), along with Wilson Tower (the largest planned U.S. residential high-rise outside of New York City) will be just two of the biggest trophies on the city’s expanding skyline. The #20-ranked University of Texas at Austin is also a talent magnet, focusing on research and a growing skills pipeline to the symbiotic private sector. The local music scene is pretty good, too.



19 MINNEAPOLIS

MINNESOTA

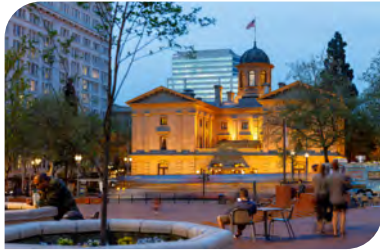
POPULATION METRO 3,690,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 1 BIKING
- 5 PRO SPORTS TEAMS

Bold city-building and post-pandemic prosperity beckon.

Minneapolis is now synonymous with George Floyd’s murder at the hands of local police, an event that sparked a global movement against systemic racism and police violence. In addition to their vital role in the fight for justice, residents have long advocated for their city, the results of which can be seen in a decade of visionary city-building called the Minneapolis Big Build. The city is in the thick of an unprecedented renaissance, with more than \$1-billion worth of annual construction permits issued for each of the past four years. The investment has yielded (so far) the redesign of Nicollet Avenue, the opening of U.S. Bank Stadium and the Commons Park, a major reno of Target Center (home of the NBA’s Timberwolves) and improvements to the Minneapolis Sculpture Garden and Walker Art Center. There are a dozen more projects that have opened or will soon, including the new Water Works Park on the Mississippi riverfront. This, on top of a #9 ranking for Fortune 500 Companies—the most per capita of any U.S. metro area—ranks Minneapolis #12 nationally in our overall Prosperity category, including top 10 for lowest poverty rate.



20 PORTLAND

OREGON

POPULATION METRO 2,513,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 1 BIKING
- 9 SHOPPING

America's Left Coast utopia is figuring it out.

Portland's blissful isolation, ambivalence toward established norms and self-sustainability have long made it one of the most earnest cities in the U.S. Portlanders are among the most engaged urbanites on the planet, and have always built it themselves if they couldn't find anything to their liking—from performance outdoor apparel like Columbia and Nike (based in nearby Beaverton) to hospitality brands like Ace and McMenamins. But the urban utopia of recent decades was ravaged by the pandemic, with homelessness spiking by almost 70%, vehicle theft almost doubling and shootings tripling, all since 2019. The population contracted for the first time in decades in 2021. Portlanders are fighting for the city's inclusive livability and identity, one that still boasts almost 100 breweries (among the most per capita in the nation) and boundary-pushing nightlife and shopping that ranks in the top 10 nationally. New public projects prioritizing bikes and pedestrians are everywhere (the city is tied for #1 for Biking), none more Portland than the new Ned Flanders Crossing pedestrian bridge, in honor of native son and *The Simpsons* creator Matt Groening. A 35-story Ritz-Carlton, the city's first five-star hotel, will open any day now.



21 HONOLULU

HAWAII

POPULATION METRO 1,017,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 1 OUTDOORS
- 3 BIPOC RESIDENTS

An urban paradise blooms quickly.

Few cities cratered economically more than Honolulu in 2020 and 2021. But its visitor economy is back, with state numbers boasting tourist spending of late that matches 2019 levels. Hotel openings and renovations are everywhere, on the heels of last year's Mandarin Oriental Hotel and Residences, Honolulu, as well as the iconic Outrigger Reef Waikiki Beach Resort's new cultural center as part of its \$80-million refresh. The just opened Wayfinder Waikiki brings some buzz to the quieter Ala Wai Canal area, courtesy of a renovated destination property with a new café, pool bar and Redfish poke spot. Dozens of restaurants and bars (even breweries and a cidery) are rushing to open post-pandemic. The new LineUp at Wai Kai, just west of downtown, is Hawaii's first man-made deep-water standing wave—it's 100 feet wide and suitable for all levels. The grounds include a massive lagoon, bars, restaurants and other family attractions. Grander still is the 98-acre New Aloha Stadium Entertainment District, to be built on the University of Hawaii's old stadium grounds in Hālawā. A new, 25,000-seat multi-use stadium is part of the plan.



22 NEW ORLEANS

LOUISIANA

POPULATION METRO 1,272,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 2 SHOPPING
- 3 MUSEUMS

Few cities work as hard as the Big Easy to get back up.

In the face of poverty and injustice—and “natural” disasters compounded by both—NOLA has, over its three centuries, created a culture of presence, music and festivals that may pale in size but not in intensity to others in the world. It's why the city ranks #9 nationally for Programming, our category spanning shopping (for which it trails only NYC), dining and after-hours vibrancy. Given the need to celebrate, seize the day and revel in all that fusion of humanity and culture and sweaty new people and ideas, the city ranks #5 in our Nightlife subcategory. The French Quarter may be touristy, but the investment continues with the One11, the area's first new hotel in 50 years. A new Four Seasons Hotel and Residences opened in the former World Trade Center, followed by local icon and men's clothing store Rubensteins turning their second floor into a 40-room eponymous boutique property. The city's top three Museums ranking will improve with the Warehouse District's new Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience, along with this summer's massive new Audubon Aquarium of Americas and Insectarium opening right on the Mississippi adjacent to the French Quarter.



23 PHOENIX

ARIZONA

POPULATION METRO 4,846,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 12 PRO SPORTS TEAMS
- 13 KNOWLEDGE-BASED BUSINESSES

Rapid growth, ambitious architecture and a reverence for the outdoors blends a heady mix in the desert.

A thriving desert metropolis that's now just outside the top 10 nationally by population, Phoenix has seen the fastest growth of any major U.S. city in the past decade. According to the latest census data, it added 163,000 residents, bringing the core city's population to 1.6 million, with its metro on the cusp of five million. And what's not to love? A growing roster of fine museums, a vibrant artist community and 300 days of sunshine. Get a street-level view of the city's increasingly considered urban planning with a stroll through Roosevelt Row Arts District, or RoRo, as locals call it. Art galleries, studios, restaurants and bars sit side by side in this walkable creative district in the downtown core. The newest addition to the downtown arts district is Pemberton PHX—part art exhibit and part foodie magnet, where locally loved restos like Baba's Falafel and Saint Pasta host pop-up dinners year-round. Given the buzz emanating from the desert, hotel development is everywhere, with 25 projects that will yield more than 5,000 guest rooms, from the massive VAI Resort to the elemental luxury of the Global Ambassador.



24 BALTIMORE

MARYLAND

POPULATION METRO 2,845,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 4 UNIVERSITY
- 12 SIGHTS & LANDMARKS

Baltimore's historic subtleties and educated citizenry make for a beguiling hometown with some familiar struggles.

Less than an hour's commute from Washington, D.C., Baltimore offers a slower pace of life and significantly cheaper housing than the hyper-charged capital. But the window to buy into one of Baltimore's diverse, historic communities is closing fast—home prices in the city reached a 10-year record high a year into the pandemic and have only fallen slightly since. No wonder the city's beguiling urban pockets and dipping crime rate are attracting visitors and curious potential residents seeking unvarnished American urbanism and some of the country's best museums (#15). According to Q4 2022 numbers, the city's downtown is back to 95% of pre-pandemic activity. Good thing, too, because the signature placemaking investment is finally opening in phases in South Baltimore's industrial Warner Street district (since rebranded to The Walk @ Warner Street), with plans for a new entertainment district between M&T Bank Stadium and Horseshoe Casino Baltimore being implemented. The city also boasts one of the most educated citizenry in America (#16), partially the result of Johns Hopkins University, which ranks #4 in our University subcategory and is also Baltimore's largest employer.



25 SALT LAKE CITY

UTAH

POPULATION METRO 1,258,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 3 BIKING
- 7 POVERTY RATE

The great outdoors—and high salaries—are calling, and Salt Lake is doing its best to keep you in town.

Combining spectacular natural and built environments, Salt Lake City is no longer just a gateway to the great outdoors—it's also a welcoming destination with ascendant culture (#31), new museums, and... local breweries, which, over the past three years, have multiplied due to relaxed local potency limits (and public health measures). The transformation began with the arrival of the XIX Olympic Winter Games 20 years ago, as the city thawed its reputation as an über-conservative cowboy town with Mormon family values to become the lifestyle magnet of quaint cafés and stylish restaurants that it is today. SLC continues to pour millions into development projects and the beautification of its downtown, and the city has matured into an urban experience as much as an outdoor one. Of course, the proximity of the Wasatch Range's stunning canyons and 11,000-foot peaks is still the reason many adrenaline junkies travel and move here. And they work hard, too: Salt Lake ranks an impressive #16 nationally in our Prosperity category—led by its low poverty rate (#7) and growing knowledge-based professional sector (#21).



26 ST. LOUIS

MISSOURI

POPULATION METRO 2,820,000

HIGHLIGHTS

9 UNIVERSITY

15 GOOGLE SEARCH

One of America’s music capitals is an energetic crossroads of the nation.

America’s gateway to the West has always been an understated city of neighborhoods and cultural elegance. It performs well for Nightlife (#18)—in fact, Miles Davis is a native son—and ranks #21 for Programming, led also by a top 20 finish in our Restaurants subcategory. This was always a stealthy food town, too, but no longer, with recent openings like the Mediterranean-forward Casa Don Alfonso, the first in the U.S. for Mario Iaccarino, a Michelin-starred Italian restaurateur, in the Ritz-Carlton St. Louis. More accessible is the newish City Foundry STL food hall, serving an atlas-worth of goodies. The city is also investing in its infrastructure, especially as it pursues meetings and events once more. The AC Next Gen project that will update and expand the America’s Center Convention Complex downtown should be open early next year, improving the #17 Convention Center ranking. Recently opened downtown hotels offer sweet perches from which to explore new placemaking—like the non-motorized Brickline Greenway connecting to city parks, and Laclède’s Landing, a converted warehouse district overlooking the Mississippi that boosts the city’s nightlife and dining ranking even more.



27 TAMPA

FLORIDA

POPULATION METRO 3,175,000

HIGHLIGHTS

10 ATTRACTIONS

13 OUTDOORS

Florida’s outdoor wonderland has a taste for the finer things.

In Tampa, the natural and built environments are as in sync as Point and Kucherov. The city has a low crime rate, 361 days of annual sunshine and sprawling and diverse parks and outdoor areas (garnering a #13 ranking), including nearby beaches like Fort De Soto Park and Clearwater. Chief among the parklands is the Tampa Riverwalk, a 2.6-mile continuous waterfront corridor along the banks of the Hillsborough River and Garrison Channel. From the newly renovated Florida Aquarium you can stroll to the Tampa Bay History Center, the Florida Museum of Photographic Arts, the convention center and other spots contributing to Tampa’s #10 ranking in our Attractions subcategory. The city is also flexing its downtown investment these days, with last fall’s phase one opening of the multi-billion-dollar Water Street Tampa in the heart of the city, spearheaded by The Tampa EDITION, a truly five-star luxury property with Michelin-starred Chef John Fraser feeding guests. The project also boasts a new promenade and a dozen high-end bars, restaurants, condos and hotels that you’d expect from a place bankrolled by Bill Gates and Tampa Bay Lightning owner Jeff Vinik. (And you thought that hockey player reference earlier was random.)



28 NASHVILLE

TENNESSEE

POPULATION METRO 1,990,000

HIGHLIGHTS

7 UNIVERSITY

15 FACEBOOK CHECK-INS

The hospitality and revelry that defined Nashville for decades has finally returned.

The home base for artists like Jack White, Kings of Leon and the Black Keys reclaimed its live-music glory with a full slate of before-times festivals like the CMA Fest and Bonnaroo, as well as new shows and attractions. The buzziest is the duet between the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and the historic Ryman Auditorium that created the Rock Hall at the Ryman exhibit celebrating one of America’s most revered stages, including stories about Elvis Presley, James Brown, Dolly Parton, the Foo Fighters and dozens more. The 2021 opening of the National Museum of African American Music, a vital center to educate the world, preserve a legacy and celebrate African Americans in creating the American soundtrack, is just one reason why Nashville ranks #16 in our overall Programming category. Massive developments like the new home of the Nashville SC Major League Soccer team in Wedgewood-Houston—a 30,500-person soccer-only facility with double-tiered stands—join the city-building ambition behind the opening of more than a dozen hotels over the next two years, as well as the massive expansion of the city’s #20-ranked airport.



29 DETROIT

MICHIGAN

POPULATION METRO 4,392,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 8 CONVENTION CENTER
- 11 COST-OF-LIVING-ADJUSTED EARNINGS

America’s comeback story is writing its next chapter.

Detroit has been on top of the world—“the arsenal of democracy” in the 1950s, as Motor City revved—and in the depths. But while the bulldozing of 20,000 (and counting) vacant structures since 2016 is ongoing, the city is expanding, with more residents seemingly arriving than leaving (finally!). The city even ranks #15 for Instagram Hashtags and top 25 in our economically key Promotion category. Claude Molinari, CEO of Visit Detroit, says the city’s recent “Detroit Wins” campaign aims to communicate the message that Detroit is “an authentic region of the country.” Approximately \$7 billion in investment means more than 200 projects are ongoing or complete, seen in places like the redevelopment of historic Eastern Market, with its massive food halls and office space. Motor City is also thinking beyond the car, with vital infrastructure like the 6.6-mile QLINE streetcar loop connecting the Woodward Corridor. Work on the \$240-million, 27.5-mile Joe Louis Greenway is in full swing and will improve Detroit’s #57 Outdoors ranking. So will the massive, city-spanning RiverWalk pedestrian and park development that will eventually connect the city’s two iconic bridges by foot and bike paths.



30 SAN ANTONIO

TEXAS

POPULATION METRO 2,558,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 6 ATTRACTIONS
- 8 RESTAURANTS

Rich in distinctly Texan attractions, San Antonio is a place for all seasons (and reasons).

The genius of San Antonio is its stewardship of its greatest urban asset and attraction: the River Walk. The pedestrian promenade along the San Antonio River, extended from three to 15 miles a decade ago, is a scenic link that connects self-propelled citizens and visitors with the city. On one end there’s the five colonial missions, a UNESCO heritage site just enhanced with the new Alamo Exhibition Hall & Collections Building. On the other, the San Antonio Zoo—and, in between, the San Antonio Museum of Art, the Texas Golf Hall of Fame and dozens of other eclectic stops and riverside cafés. No wonder the city ranks #6 in our Attractions subcategory, a number that is likely to improve given the steady announcements about new sites ranging from “a world-record-setting themed roller coaster” to the “world’s tallest and fastest screaming swing.” Three gigantic hotels have just opened along its path, including the innovative Artista San Antonio Hotel, the InterContinental and the Thompson Hotel. After all that walking, make sure to feast in one of America’s only (along with Tucson) UNESCO Creative Cities of Gastronomy and its #8-ranked restaurants.



31 CHARLOTTE

NORTH CAROLINA

POPULATION METRO 2,660,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 10 AIRPORT CONNECTIVITY
- 17 FORTUNE 500 COMPANIES

Affluent, easy to love for its southern charm and open for business and pleasure.

America’s Old South is up to new tricks in Charlotte, a global banking powerhouse (the second-most important in the U.S. after New York) and ranked #17 in our Fortune 500 Companies subcategory. All that productivity comes with relative affordability, given Charlotte’s #17 spot in our Cost-of-Living-Adjusted Earnings subcategory. No wonder the city ranks #24 for Prosperity. The already walkable downtown just got a boost with the recently extended east-to-west hybrid streetcar system that runs an impressive four miles over 17 stops. The city is further investing in its economic innovation with massive projects like the medical school campus and an innovation district called The Pearl, funded by Atrium Health and Wake Forest Baptist—26 acres in Midtown that will help position Charlotte as a destination for research and innovation and create thousands of jobs this decade alone. But with 1,000 apartments, a hotel, restaurants and bars, the project will be a destination, too. As will a former Sears department store that reopened last year as the Visual and Performing Arts Center, a new home to dozens of galleries, studios, theaters and classrooms.



32 SACRAMENTO

CALIFORNIA

POPULATION METRO 2,397,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 12 BIKING
- 20 UNIVERSITY

Green, bountiful and affluent, California’s capital is big on local stewardship.

California’s state capital is prosperous and proud, ranking well for its natural attributes, including epic weather that nourishes this self-declared “Farm-to-Fork Capital” and its fertile surroundings. The City of Trees—residents have long claimed to have the most trees per capita in the country—was hit hard economically by the pandemic, but it isn’t exactly a stranger to cataclysms: the Great Conflagration of 1852 burned 40 square blocks of the fledgling city, leaving behind what is today called Old Sacramento, with its cobbled streets, historic buildings and horse-drawn carriages. With so many neighborhoods to explore, the city naturally ranks #12 for biking in the country. But Sacramento isn’t content with a quaint past. The just-completed \$200-million-ish renovation and expansion of Sacramento’s SAFE Credit Union Convention Center (currently ranked a middling #46) is part of the city’s C3 Project, along with the community theater and Memorial Auditorium. New hotels like The Exchange (an adaptive reuse and renovation of downtown’s iconic California Fruit Building), as well the Hyatt Centric hotel (constructed behind the century-old brick facade of the Marshall Hotel), are vital guest room additions to a downtown core that needed them badly.



33 RALEIGH

NORTH CAROLINA

POPULATION METRO 1,414,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 6 EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT
- 15 COST-OF-LIVING-ADJUSTED EARNINGS

A booming economy and a global intellect poise this Carolina powerhouse for the future.

The City of Oaks is part of North Carolina’s Research Triangle, one of the country’s largest and most successful research parks—think high-tech and biotech, along with advanced textile development. The city also boasts three major research universities, which supply a pipeline of young, cheap, brilliant talent that ranks #6 for Educational Attainment nationally. Is it any wonder, then, that Apple recently announced a \$1-billion, 281-acre Raleigh campus that will open later this decade? Forecasts indicate it will house more than 3,000 employees. Good thing, too, because new arrivals are increasingly drawn to Raleigh for its affordable housing, and the city ranks #15 for Cost-of-Living-Adjusted Earnings. With all of the residents pouring into town to try before they buy, exciting hotel openings are plentiful, from this fall’s long-stay focused Tempo by Hilton Raleigh Downtown to the new Kimpton opening in late 2025. Place-making matters here, too. The North Carolina Freedom Park should be open by now, honoring the African American struggle for liberty. Raleigh’s already improving Outdoors ranking (#53) will keep climbing as a result.



34 BRIDGEPORT

CONNECTICUT

POPULATION METRO 957,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 5 EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT
- 9 FORTUNE 500 COMPANIES

History and smarts come together in Connecticut.

Connecticut’s largest city is also one of America’s oldest: it was first colonized in the mid-1600s and local entrepreneurialism grew exponentially (and industrially) once the railroad link was established in 1840. With its 90-minute, 60-mile train ride from New York City, Bridgeport maintains a wealthy and educated citizenry (ranked #5 for Educational Attainment and #12 for Foreign-Born Residents), as it did when entrepreneurs like P.T. Barnum (of circus fame) not only ran businesses but also the town itself (Barnum was mayor). In these days of WFH and secondary and tertiary cities, Bridgeport is attracting talent from priced-out cities like New York and Boston—with these new residents trading in the shoebox condo for a large Cape Cod-style house (and tidy lawn) for around \$500,000. Or for any one of the historic lofts in the dozens of warehouse conversions underway. The two-year-old, 5,700-seat Hartford HealthCare Amphitheater (known locally as the Amp) is a joint venture with the City of Bridgeport in association with Live Nation. And it shows, with artists stopping by that would otherwise have skipped the town altogether.



35 PITTSBURGH

PENNSYLVANIA

POPULATION METRO 2,371,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 14 UNIVERSITY
- 14 FORTUNE 500 COMPANIES

Good things brewing.

It's Steel City, City of (440!) Bridges, Andy Warhol's birthplace and home of the NFL's "Stillers." Sports tourism is huge in a city that is also home of the Penguins and the Pirates (tied for a #17 ranking in our Pro Sports Teams subcategory). Not surprisingly, sports tourism contributes more than a billion dollars annually in visitor spending and almost \$15 million in state and local tax revenues, according to local numbers. There's art, too: Pittsburgh is home to #23-ranked museums, including one dedicated to local son Warhol (which just unveiled its six-block Pop District) and another to the steel industry, called Rivers of Steel. Carnegie Mellon and the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center power the city's #14 University ranking and an overall sense of practicality and stewardship (a reason why urbanist and author Richard Florida launched his career here). New Pittsburgh residents often marvel at the city's joyful walkability (#24) and hills everywhere, made more fun by Mount Washington's funiculars—the last such operating inclines in America and remnants of a system that once contained 17 around the city. Pittsburgh Brewing is writing the city's next sudsy chapter with a 40-acre destination site along the Allegheny River in an 1883 complex.



36 NEW HAVEN

CONNECTICUT

POPULATION METRO 865,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 1 UNIVERSITY
- 13 WALK SCORE

A history-packed town that knows how to create the powerful.

Five U.S. presidents studied and lived here, as well as countless members of Congress, Supreme Court justices, Hollywood stars and captains of industry. Yale University (tied for tops in our University subcategory), founded in 1701 and one of America's oldest institutions of higher learning, has educated many of the country's best and brightest, but it's also the cultural and economic center of this leafy, seaside city, whose residents take full advantage of all the resources on offer in a capital of power and prestige. The fact that more than a third of adult residents have at least a bachelor's degree earns New Haven a #36 ranking for Educational Attainment. Yale (including its medical center) is also the city's largest employer and largest taxpayer, making this effectively a company town. The school also attracts and retains international talent, and ranks an impressive #32 in our Foreign-Born Resident subcategory. New Haven's living museum vibe (including some of the stealthiest examples of American architecture in the nation) can be appreciated by foot, given the #13 Walk Score ranking, or by bike (#14), with a requisite picnic at 350-year-old parks like New Haven Green (now with free wifi!).



37 TUCSON

ARIZONA

POPULATION METRO 1,043,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 14 BIKING
- 14 MUSEUMS

Arizona's second city is ascending fast, with bold city leadership and placemaking.

Fast-growing Tucson is getting its sun-kissed, well-toned arms around its distinct sense of place. Take its unique culinary attributes: America's first UNESCO City of Gastronomy boasts citizens like Barrio Bread's James Beard Award-winning Don Guerra, who serves up baked perfection using locally grown heritage grains, and local favorites like Borderlands Brewing retooling its hefeweizen with white Sonora wheat. Buzzy newcomers are also launching locally first, whether it's the newly opened BATA (where 90% of all ingredients are sourced within 400 miles of your table), or new hot spots by Maria Mazon, of Top Chef fame, whose BOCA Tacos y Tequila has long been required eating. Tucson's #34 Restaurant ranking will rise. Local stewardship has also embraced Tucson's urban bounty, especially with the 150-acre Barrio Viejo neighborhood, sprinkled with Pueblo Revival architecture dating back to the 1800s. New creative businesses have opened in the historic buildings; the iconic 108-year-old Teatro Carmen is being restored (an investment sure to bolster Tucson's Top 25 Programming ranking); and there are whispers that a National Historic Landmark designation for the district is imminent.



38 MADISON

WISCONSIN

POPULATION METRO 681,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 4 POVERTY RATE
- 7 EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

This oft-cited example of livability, job creation and millennial magnetism checks all the boxes.

Madison's enviable position as both capital of Wisconsin and the site of the state's largest university (ranked #20 in the nation) has certainly fueled its livability in previous rankings (ours and seemingly everyone else's). The city is firing on all cylinders, buoyed by high-paying work that's long evolved from academia and public service to splinter into ascendant tech start-ups and satellite offices eager to recruit U of W talent in health care, IT and manufacturing... all amid an unprecedented talent shortage. Case in point—Madison gained more technology sector jobs in the first year of the pandemic than in the prior half decade, according to a report by Brookings Institution. The employment boom is powering Madison to #18 in our overall Prosperity category. Even big dogs like American Family Insurance have arrived in town, lured by its smarts (#7 for Educational Attainment) and relative, but fleeting, housing affordability. The city even seems to have that riddle solved for the time being, boasting the fourth-lowest poverty rate in America. The ability to get around without paying for a car may help the city's cause: it ties at #14 for Biking.



39 CLEVELAND

OHIO

POPULATION METRO 2,088,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 12 CONVENTION CENTER
- 17 PRO SPORTS TEAMS

Where second-tier-city cool meets affordability.

Few American cities boast a rebirth story like Cleveland's. Fifty-four years after the Cuyahoga River infamously caught fire in 1969, the "City of Champions" walks taller. Increasingly diversified universities and colleges welcome students with open arms... and with 40-plus breweries, growing urban wineries (you read that right) and lauded restaurants that don't just fill bellies but also mission statements. Take the EDWINS Leadership and Restaurant Institute in the Buckeye-Shaker neighborhood, which teaches former prisoners culinary trades and gives them a professional footing. It's just one reason why the city's #41 Restaurants ranking is poised to ascend. The city is full of this kind of practical ambition and doing the right thing: from the newly renamed MLB Cleveland Guardians to the work of the new Cleveland Talent Alliance that aims to make the city "one of the fastest growing and most diverse, inclusive and welcoming metro areas in the Midwest by 2030," according to David Gilbert, president and CEO of Destination Cleveland. Young talent has plenty of reasons to stay, from affordable housing to a revitalized, walkable downtown with an impressive cache of 19th-century architecture and stately streetscapes.



40 PORTLAND

MAINE

POPULATION METRO 552,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 11 BIKING
- 13 RESTAURANTS

Under the radar and on top of a warming world.

It may be Maine's capital, but at just over half a million people, the *other* Portland is the smallest city in our top 100 that ranks as high as it does. It offers a special blend of post-pandemic urban attributes: smart people (#13 for Educational Attainment), Biking (#11) and natural endowment (#14 for Outdoors)—the latter two powering its impressive #15 finish in our important Place category. Expect to hear more about "Forest City" soon, given local investment and, um, more global factors. Let's start macro: the New York Times cited numerous climate change experts that chose Portland as a highly resilient city, not prone to seawater flooding (it's high up), air pollution (remote!) or wildfires, with plenty of fresh, clean water. The city is building for the coming climate migrants (or at least the WFH ones) and is undergoing unprecedented development, led by the Old Port's Portland Foreside, the largest development project the city has seen in decades, to be completed by 2026. The mixed-use neighborhood will consist of more than 60 businesses and 600 housing units in a 10-acre, eight-block district where trains were built for more than a century.



41 ALBUQUERQUE

NEW MEXICO

POPULATION METRO 917,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 13 BIPOC RESIDENTS
- 15 SHOPPING

Natural beauty and a life-time of outdoor pursuits blend perfectly in ABQ.

Diverse cultures, authentic art and dynamic traditions have shaped a centuries-old story in Albuquerque. There's the vintage neon glow of Route 66, the pink hues of the Sandia Mountains at sunset and the cottonwood bosque of the Rio Grande. ABQ ranks #39 in our Product category—indicative of deep infrastructure and local investment—including a #19 ranking in the Museums subcategory. In a city rich in cultural heritage from Spain, Mexico and local Indigenous Peoples, the architecture is as diverse as the cuisine, inspired by a colorful (and spicy) palate: green and red chiles are staples—even in desserts. Despite this daring gastronomy, people still won't believe that Albuquerque ranks #37 for Restaurants in America. 'Burque, in local parlance, is also a cultural hot spot, stacked with more than 100 galleries, a symphony orchestra, theaters and even an opera scene. Its shopping, ranked #15 in the country—ahead of places like Boston and D.C.—may be even more surprising than the restaurants. New hotels are opening, and the Avanyu Plaza is destined to be a business and cultural corridor in the heart of the city.



42 COLUMBUS

OHIO

POPULATION METRO 2,139,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 21 COST-OF-LIVING-ADJUSTED EARNINGS
- 25 RESTAURANTS

A Midwest masterpiece.

Setting it apart from many Midwest metros, Ohio's capital and largest city is one of America's fastest-growing places—an economic powerhouse that's also home to Ohio State University (#25 in our University subcategory). And Buckeye football isn't the university's only contribution to the local economy: with more OSU graduates deciding to stay in town, Columbus is an emerging tech mecca with a thriving arts scene. The city is buoyed by a growing number of start-ups, as well as by top employer Ohio State and Fortune 500s (for which Columbus ranks #26) like Nationwide Mutual Insurance and L Brands. Urban reuse and development is everywhere, from small bets on branding retail strips like the new Common Thread fashion district to doubling down on fortifying historic places like the Trolley District with its craft breweries and restaurants. The Peninsula neighborhood is a new-build destination anchored by the 198-room Makeready property called The Junto, stacked with 13,000 feet of event and meeting space, restaurants and cafés. For lovers of the outdoors, the nearby Quarry Trails Park is going to be the site of the country's first urban via ferrata, a popular style of fixed-rope and rung climbing.



43 RICHMOND

VIRGINIA

POPULATION METRO 1,314,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 14 FORTUNE 500 COMPANIES
- 26 EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

Mellow and understated by design, Richmond is a quiet influence on the union.

Richmond has always radiated a "genteel and understated nature," as the New York Times observed in a sugar-coated acknowledgment of the cruel history of this capital of the Confederacy. The city today is a radiant blood diamond stepping bravely toward confronting a past that slavery built, and becoming stronger and more vital to the union for it. Its #27 ranking in our Sights & Landmarks subcategory is indicative of Richmond's legacy and its fight to do right by it. The Richmond region has always embraced green space, with gems like the James River Park system a destination for both the active (kayaking and rafting) to the pensive who just want to read under the shadow of a willow oak. The city's Outdoors ranking of #49 will improve as Confederate monuments are reimaged as inclusive public spaces across the city. Speaking of education, the city's #28 Museums ranking just got a boost with the \$30-million reno of the Virginia Museum of History and Culture, including regional partnerships with institutions around the state—such as one with the Black History Museum and Cultural Center of Virginia.



44 CHARLESTON

SOUTH CAROLINA

POPULATION METRO 800,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 7 OUTDOORS
- 8 MUSEUMS

The Holy City boasts historic elegance by day and all kinds of revelry by night.

A beguiling fusion of built environment and coastal transition landscapes—golden islands, channels and marshes—Charleston is one of North America’s most architecturally significant destinations, drawing design pilgrims and sharing its own, too (artist Shepard Fairey is a local). Post-pandemic Charleston is reclaiming its place on elevated travel itineraries and in the hearts of investors. The anticipated Moxy Charleston Downtown should be open by the time you read this, joining devoutly local The Palmetto, which just opened in the city’s French Quarter. Its traditionally strong Place ranking is led by its #7 spot for its sublime parks and outdoors. A city rich in cultural, natural and military heritage, Charleston is #8 for Museums, and will improve that ranking with the recent opening of the vital, \$100-million International African American Museum on the former site of Gadsden’s Wharf, the horrific disembarkation point into American slavery for an estimated 30,000 African people over centuries—the largest such port in the country. It illuminates the influential, underreported histories of Africans and their descendants in South Carolina, highlighting their diasporic connections throughout the nation and the world.



45 MILWAUKEE

WISCONSIN

POPULATION METRO 1,575,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 17 FORTUNE 500 COMPANIES
- 24 NIGHTLIFE

Milwaukee is rebuilding as an honest hometown for everyone.

Milwaukee threads the needle on post-pandemic magnetism, offering economic opportunity, courtesy of its Fortune 500 Companies (#17) and urban authenticity with big-city excitement. Located on America’s third coast, Wisconsin’s largest city combines cherished traditions and open arms (and housing affordability). It celebrates its beer heritage (ranking #24 for Nightlife) and a vibrant farm-to-table culinary scene—built from a century of feeding and brewing for a continent. Try the Milwaukee Public Market for a quick bite, or Braise for an indulgent one. Plans to expand the downtown Milwaukee convention center are proceeding, building on a downtown renewal kickstarted by the Northwestern Mutual Tower and Commons in 2017, Fiserv Forum (home of the NBA Bucks) in 2018 and the BMO Tower. Milwaukee’s freshest news is the rebirth of Bronzeville, a vibrant African American district from the early 1900s that was bulldozed in the 1960s when freeway construction (and racist urban policy) removed more than 8,000 homes and businesses. Organizations led by people of color have contributed \$400 million so far, with the reopening of America’s Black Holocaust Museum last year drawing praise and even more curious tourists—and prospective talent—for years to come.



46 HARTFORD

CONNECTICUT

POPULATION METRO 1,214,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 15 WALK SCORE
- 19 EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

Connecticut’s capital is prosperous, safe and delightfully bookish.

With deep roots as an original American town—first as a Connecticut River trading post in 1633 that colonized Podunk settlements and then today as one of the country’s most prosperous and well-educated cities—Hartford’s investment in placemaking is paying off. It has America’s oldest public park, respects visionaries with honors like a sculpture park dedicated to Abraham Lincoln and is home to Katharine Hepburn’s gravesite. It revels in its role nurturing Mark Twain’s childhood imagination, which would fuel the celebrated author for decades. And, yes, you can visit his home (now the Mark Twain House & Museum). It’s #15-ranked Walk Score speaks to a pre-car urban grid. But Hartford doesn’t dwell in the past, even as it plans for its 400th anniversary in 2035: ranking #28 for Fortune 500 companies in town, this “insurance capital of the world” is investing in its thriving arts and entertainment scene, a revitalized riverfront and even more parks and public gardens, especially as the Hartford400 investment is secured. With a #19 ranking for Educational Attainment by its citizenry, it seems like the smart thing to do.



47 CINCINNATI OHIO

POPULATION METRO 2,257,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 12 FORTUNE 500 COMPANIES
- 17 PRO SPORTS TEAMS

An urban patina elevates overlooked gems.

Cincinnati has simmered with vibrancy for a few years now, and as second-tier cities ascend, its time has come. Already an economic force—with a Fortune 500 Companies ranking of #12 and a top 25 finish in our Cost-of-Living-Adjusted Earnings subcategory, the city is investing in its ability to get business done. A new downtown district surrounding the Duke Energy Convention Center should be completed by 2025, which will drastically improve the city’s already impressive #19 Convention Center ranking. A new, colossal business hotel is also part of the plan, joining notable new properties like the Lytle Park Hotel on the stunning grounds of its eponymous urban park, and the Kinley Hotel, which restored a stately 1910 building downtown. The 21c Museum Hotel bridges hospitality with the city’s emergent arts and culture clout, and the reopening of the architecturally glorious 140-year-old Music Hall means a proper home for the symphony, ballet and opera. The expanded Ensemble Theatre Cincinnati is also the new home for the Cincinnati Shakespeare Company and gives the Over-the-Rhine neighborhood real cultural chops, while nearby sub-subterranean hot spot Ghost Baby helps its #28 Nightlife ranking.



48 INDIANAPOLIS INDIANA

POPULATION METRO 2,111,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 15 ATTRACTIONS
- 24 CULTURE

Experiences, events and eye-popping housing affordability (still!).

Come for the red-hot economic growth, stay for affordable neighborhoods where the median sale price of a single-family home hovers around \$250,000, according to local numbers. Even the bougie houses near Northside can be snagged for under \$400,000. True to its reputation as the capital of speed, Indianapolis is home to workers who fuel a diverse economy anchored by Fortune 500s that rank #34 nationally—and some of the shortest commutes of any metro area. Indy is calling 2023 “The Year of the Build,” led by projects like the Bicentennial Unity Plaza, anchored by restaurants, event spaces, a community basketball court, outdoor spaces and local art. The Pan Am Plaza will add much-needed new downtown meeting space and hotel rooms when it opens in 2026. This follows the \$300-million transformation of the world’s largest Coca-Cola bottling facility into the Bottleworks District, featuring the new Bottleworks Hotel and Garage Food Hall, the city’s new culinary hub. Play is big here, too. Spots like the Canal Walk promenade and the Children’s Museum of Indianapolis (the largest institution of its kind in the world) helped earn Indy an impressive #15 ranking in our Attractions subcategory.



49 DURHAM NORTH CAROLINA

POPULATION METRO 650,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 6 UNIVERSITY
- 7 COST-OF-LIVING-ADJUSTED EARNINGS

The ascendant college town regains its flight path.

Durham is one of America’s top college towns—anchored by Duke (ranked #6 in our University subcategory), a private research university with a global academic reach and alumni like Melinda Gates and Apple CEO Tim Cook. After several semesters of lockdowns and with fewer students to fuel Durham’s usual vibrancy, the city is getting back up off the mat. Making up for lost time is everywhere, led by Raleigh-Durham International Airport, a 20-minute drive from campus and a vital part of putting this small North Carolina city on the flight paths of almost a dozen carriers pre-pandemic. A \$650-million upgrade, including an expanded terminal, is funded by the 2021 federal infrastructure program and will improve the city’s already impressive #30 Airport Connectivity ranking and help bring the world back to town. After all, a citizenry that boasts a #8 ranking for Educational Attainment and that enjoys the seventh-best Cost-of-Living-Adjusted Earnings in America is increasingly a magnet for site selectors. Take Google, which opened its Google Cloud office in town last year as part of the plan to hire 1,000 when its engineering hub is operational.



50 KANSAS CITY

MISSOURI

POPULATION METRO 2,192,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 17 PRO SPORTS TEAMS
- 23 COST-OF-LIVING-ADJUSTED EARNINGS

The Paris of the Plains is growing into an affordable, artsy tech hub with a taste for barbecue.

Affordable yet packed with ascendant culture (ranked #26), pro sports (tied for #17) and plenty of delectable food (that KC 'cue!), Kansas City offers a perfect balance of big-city amenities like great jobs and a healthy economy combined with an easygoing Midwestern vibe. Routinely ranked as one of the best cities for working women, KC ranks an impressive #23 in our Cost-of-Living-Adjusted Earnings among residents, as well as in the top 25 in the nation in our Knowledge-Based Businesses subcategory. All those paychecks go far here, with one-bedroom downtown rentals hovering around \$1,000, free high-speed Internet and a trolley system (also free) that together nurture a low-key tech talent influx in a place that was the first home of the Google Fiber network. The city is brimming with ambition. It was here, after all, where in the late 1800s city leaders promised "more boulevards than Paris, more fountains than Rome." Today there are 200 fountains, 48 open to the public. A newly opened Kansas City International Airport terminal boasts 39 gates, and has set the bar globally for inclusivity, with women- and minority-owned businesses, and services for all travelers.



51 PROVIDENCE

RHODE ISLAND

POPULATION METRO 1,677,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 7 UNIVERSITY
- 8 WALK SCORE

Fresh air and ideas blow through one of America's oldest state capitals.

The smallest state in America has a capital city with plenty of smart and creative people and a happening nightlife. Home to an Ivy League school, one of the best design schools in the country and a major culinary institute, Providence sure packs a big punch. The city boasts Brown University, ranking #7 nationally in the University subcategory. Another source of boasting: plenty of fresh air to go along with the fresh perspectives of academia and serious cultural clout, which ranges from the Rhode Island School of Design Museum of Art to the WaterFire Arts Center. Bring a warm coat and comfy shoes, though, because this walkable city dazzles with its pocket urbanity and eighth-best Walk Score in America, from Brown's historic campus on 18th-century College Hill with its stunning Georgian-style homes to 30 miles of waterfront and some of the most illuminating walking tours in the country to spotlight the #40-ranked Sights & Landmarks. Fortunately there are an incredible 400+ restaurants in the city, including Farm Fresh RI's new, 60,000-square-foot food hub, or Italian must-try Bellini Providence on the rooftop of the Beatrice, Providence's first boutique property in a decade.



52 OMAHA

NEBRASKA

POPULATION METRO 968,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 15 POVERTY RATE
- 29 NIGHTLIFE

The discreet economic powerhouse of the Midwest lives large while keeping it small.

Nebraska's largest city has always worked overtime to carve out its place on the banks of the Missouri River in pretty much the middle of the (contiguous) country. Billionaire Warren Buffett never left, but this financial industry fun fact about the Berkshire Hathaway CEO's loyalty doesn't surprise Omaha locals, who know that their city is one of the best spots in the country to start a business, raise a family and let your hair down on a Saturday night. Thanks in no small part to Buffett, Omaha is #28 in the nation for Fortune 500 firms in town, boasting the most (seven) of any city with fewer than a million people. The city has been on a tear economically throughout the pandemic, with the 15th-lowest poverty rate in the nation. But it's not just stalwarts like Berkshire, Union Pacific, Mutual of Omaha, Kiewit or Werner that keep this city bustling: a growing tech sector has earned Omaha the nickname "Silicon Prairie," and its #29 ranking for Nightlife rocks, often fueled by hometown musicians. Many of those are from local record label Saddle Creek, and are inspired by the path once forged by artists like Bright Eyes and The Faint.



53 BUFFALO

NEW YORK

POPULATION METRO 1,167,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 15 WALK SCORE
- 25 PRO SPORTS TEAMS

Understated urban revival in one of America’s architectural bounties.

Long and erroneously viewed as a faded Rust Belt afterthought overshadowed by Toronto’s global ascent and the tourist magnetism of Niagara Falls, Buffalo has quietly gone about its work of reinvention. The second-most populated city in the state behind New York City has invested too much capital—intellectual, economic and especially architectural—over the past two centuries to not strive for its former prosperity as home of the Erie Canal and one of America’s largest steel, grain and banking centers. It is the only city in America where the country’s three most iconic architects have buildings still standing: Frank Lloyd Wright’s Martin House, plus the recently restored Graycliff; Louis Sullivan’s Guaranty Building; and, perhaps most impressive, the Henry Hobson Richardson-designed “Buffalo State Asylum for the Insane,” with grounds by landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted. The complex’s 13 buildings are slowly being repurposed—into a luxury hotel and co-working spaces to start. Is it any wonder that the city ranks #26 nationally for Sights & Landmarks? Or #35 for Instagram Hashtags? The rebirth is also walkable, with Buffalo ranking #15 for its Walk Score.



54 OXNARD

CALIFORNIA

POPULATION METRO 844,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 14 FOREIGN-BORN RESIDENTS
- 18 BIPOC RESIDENTS

Rich, rugged and sunny, Oxnard’s pull as a coveted hometown has never been stronger.

Oxnard, sandwiched between more famous Malibu and Santa Barbara, is an increasingly poorly kept secret, an hour north of L.A. and spreading out into California’s Gold Coast. With direct access to seven beaches (four of them state beaches), clichéd California sun and the coastal mountains, it’s a coveted bedroom community for those who can work remotely most of the time, as well as an easy weekend trip from the big city. The latter just got more tempting with the recent renovation and rebrand of Southern California’s only all-suite oceanfront resort, now called Zachari Dunes, with 250 rooms right on the beach. The city’s diversified economy, including agriculture, oil, shipping, and business and financial services, contributes to Oxnard’s affluence and its low, #25-ranked Poverty Rate. The city also ranks #14 for foreign-born locals seeking opportunity in a high-growth California powerhouse. Port Hueneme, right next door, is the only major navigable port in California between Los Angeles and the San Francisco Bay. Oxnard also scores high for its BIPOC Residents (#18).



55 PROVO

UTAH

POPULATION METRO 671,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 3 POVERTY RATE
- 15 EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

Sometimes good cities come in small packages. Welcome to Utah’s urban gem.

One of the smallest cities by population in our Top 100, Provo is only the fourth-largest city in Utah. Still, with the Wasatch peaks to the east and Utah Lake to the west, Provo is an outdoor enthusiast’s playground. It’s home to Brigham Young University (ranked #39 in our University subcategory) and forms part of what’s become known as Silicon Slopes, Utah’s start-up and tech community that’s largely responsible for almost 60,000 new residents coming to the metro area over the past two years. Easy access to water sports and ski resorts, plus the city’s own 53 green spaces (totaling 2,000 acres, plus 33 miles of trails), means people work to live their best life (often on two wheels, given the city’s #19 spot in our Biking subcategory). But the real driver of this small but mighty city is its entrepreneurialism and #19-ranked Prosperity in the country, including the third-lowest Poverty Rate in the nation. Technology, health care and education are among the city’s major industries, with an economy that’s propelled by a highly educated population: Provo ranked #15 for Educational Attainment.



56 ALBANY

NEW YORK

POPULATION METRO 899,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 19 COST-OF-LIVING-ADJUSTED EARNINGS
- 22 WALK SCORE

Central, prosperous and sophisticated, New York’s state capital knows its worth.

Anchored on the shore of the Hudson River, state capital Albany holds the political power despite being overshadowed by that other New York city downriver. Incredibly connected by road, rail and the #68-ranked airport in America, Albany offers a prosperous place to put down roots. Not surprisingly, the state capital attracts an educated citizenry (#23 in our Educational Attainment subcategory) and is home to a dozen schools, led by the #26-ranked University at Albany, SUNY. It has also attracted talent throughout the pandemic, many from New York City, and has grown by more than 20,000 new residents over the past two years. Albany is a capital of culture, too, boasting an enviable location, with the Berkshires, Adirondacks and burgeoning Finger Lakes wine region—and, yes, the Big Apple—all just a few hours away. The city prides itself on its history, and its 18th- and 19th-century homes and compact, walkable core (ranked #22 for Walk Score) let people take to the streets, enjoying an emergent dining scene that’s poised for big things as the city emerges in both its old and (given the influx of new residents) new forms.



57 COLORADO SPRINGS

COLORADO

POPULATION METRO 755,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 18 ATTRACTIONS
- 20 POVERTY RATE

A haven that fuels the appetites of both adventure seekers and culinary hounds is recovering.

Situated at the base of Pikes Peak, Colorado Springs is a wonderland for those who love their freedom and adventure. But it’s the urbanism that surprises many, with a love for terror and local sustainability exuding a palpable pride of place. Places like Ivywild School, a local community marketplace for groceries or coffee to go, share good vibes with newly opened spots like The Well food and beverage hall. The city is also magnetic, even during—or more likely *because of*—the pandemic’s urban exodus from larger centers, as it grew by more than 30,000 people over the past two years. And they’re bringing their smarts along with their \$8,000 mountain bikes. The city ranks #23 in the nation for Educational Attainment, and the influx of new businesses and entrepreneurs, combined with the return of tourism to family-friendly attractions that rank #18 in America, will mean a reversal of stubbornly high unemployment. Of course no hardship here comes even close to the horror of November 19, 2022, when a gunman opened fire at Club Q, the city’s popular LGBTQ+ nightclub and community hub, murdering five people and wounding more than a dozen.



58 EL PASO

TEXAS

POPULATION METRO 869,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 2 BIPOC RESIDENTS
- 7 FOREIGN-BORN RESIDENTS

A border town taps into its strategic attributes to create a prosperous sanctuary.

Safe (the “Safest City in America!” if you listen to loud and proud former mayor Dee Margo), progressive and proudly Latino, this West Texas city bordering New Mexico and Mexico is today still collecting on its 2012 \$500-million bond initiative that funded a children’s museum, a new arena, a cultural center and more—all downtown. A quintessential minor-league downtown ballpark and a reborn transit system mothballed in the ‘70s demonstrate an innovative pride of place that more small cities should endeavor to emulate. Today, that streetcar travels a five-mile route in two loops, servicing the city’s recently expanded medical schools, and through El Paso’s uptown and downtown areas, inspiring self-propelled urban exploration that reveals the city’s #40-ranked restaurants in America. Suffice it to say that EP’s steak and Mexican joints can hold their own against those anywhere. The city benefits from its direct cultural and economic ties to Mexico and Latin America, with its population mostly of Hispanic origin (80%) and ranking #7 in our Foreign-Born Residents subcategory, and #2 for its BIPOC population. Given the city’s ascent, it’s a good thing downtown hotel capacity has doubled over the pandemic.



59 LOUISVILLE

KENTUCKY

POPULATION METRO 1,285,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 7 CONVENTION CENTER
- 23 SHOPPING

A bourbon boom, a culinary hot spot and the heart of The Greatest.

It's easy to love Louisville. These days, the city is loving itself back, with ambitious projects to enhance its finest attributes. Start with the Churchill Downs renovation that has the country talking: the legendary racetrack just unveiled a new grandstand and visitor improvements in time to celebrate next year's 150th anniversary of the Kentucky Derby in style. The epicenter of bourbon culture is home to 2,500 restaurants, several manned by James Beard honorees, that are responsible for the city's #36 Restaurants ranking. With 1.8 million Louisville Slugger bats made locally every year—the lumber of choice for legend Babe Ruth—it's no surprise that the eponymous Hitting Science Center's newly opened hub for exercise scientists, athletes and curious ball fans is swinging. If your idea of legendary is The Greatest, there's the three-level Muhammad Ali Center, a powerful ode to the Louisville native son. With all the investment in its iconic history and industry, the city's #39 ranking for Attractions will improve quickly in the coming years. The seven-acre mixed-use historic Paristown redevelopment that just opened, anchored by Old Forester's Paristown Hall (the city's newest entertainment venue), will see to that.



60 ROCHESTER

NEW YORK

POPULATION METRO 1,090,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 19 UNIVERSITY
- 25 BIKING

The faded industrial Great Lakes titan has a lot of work to do.

Rochester was one of the country's first boom towns. The fertile Genesee River Valley powered rampant entrepreneurship in flour mills, then manufacturing, then world-rattling innovation, from Kodak to Western Union to Xerox. Today, the third-largest city in New York State may no longer boast the head offices it once did, but the stately homes—now so affordable, with a median single-family house price around \$190,000—remain. And so does the city's legacy of research and development. The region's universities (including the #19-ranked University of Rochester and Rochester Institute of Technology) have renowned research programs. The pipeline of talent could turn the trickle of companies opening up in the city into a torrent as the war for skilled talent intensifies. Its #38 ranking in Educational Attainment speaks volumes about the good hands that steer this former industrial titan, especially these days. Fresh off of hosting the 2023 PGA Championship in May, Rochester is also unveiling its newly expanded children-focused Strong National Museum of Play, which anchors the newly developed "Neighborhood of Play" district, built on the former Inner Loop area that will include housing, commercial space, retail, a brewery, restaurants and a hotel.



61 JACKSONVILLE

FLORIDA

POPULATION METRO 1,606,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 24 OUTDOORS
- 24 ATTRACTIONS

One of Florida's fastest-growing cities is the next destination for talent and nature lovers.

Jax has jobs and a low cost of living, which together have lured more than 50,000 new residents over the past couple of years. And it's delivered for that new talent, even throughout the pandemic. The Wall Street Journal, working with Moody's Analytics, declared the city one of the top three strongest job markets in America earlier this year, and the city ranks #34 for Fortune 500 Companies and #37 for Knowledge-Based Businesses. The region also boasts supply-chain resiliency as a logistics hub with a seaport, two major interstate highways and plentiful rail and air connections. Also compelling is the homegrown talent pipeline filled by the University of North Florida as well as by Florida State College at Jacksonville. Downtown development is hot, with the new Shipyards district and naval museum leading the way. But nature is the true payoff here, with just a short drive to beaches and the country's largest urban parks system (the city ranks #24 for Outdoors). The newly consolidated 7 Creeks Recreation Area offers adventure opportunities across 5,600 uninterrupted acres and represents one of the most expansive new networks of parks in America.



62 MEMPHIS

TENNESSEE

POPULATION METRO 1,338,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 17 BIPOC RESIDENTS
- 24 COST-OF-LIVING-ADJUSTED EARNINGS

Creativity, civil rights and a bright future.

Tennessee's second-largest city is an American icon that has been quietly adding to the national lore from the bluffs and floodplains that line the eastern bank of the Mississippi River for more than two centuries. The heart of the Delta Blues and famously home to Graceland, the "spiritual birthplace" of Elvis, it is the lesser-known Music City, USA. But those two honors can't hold a pick to Memphis' contributions to the civil rights movement. Or to its barbecue. With so many stories to tell (most recently in the starring role of its native son's biopic), the city ranks #27 nationally in our Museums subcategory—home to the National Civil Rights Museum as well as the aforementioned Graceland—and #17 for its BIPOC citizenry. It's not surprising that others are telling the city's stories these days: Memphis ranks a notable #27 in the nation for Tripadvisor Reviews, #30 for Instagram Hashtags and #31 in our overall Promotions category. And business is good, with a #28 ranking for Fortune 500 Companies, with corporate titans including FedEx and AutoZone headquartered here. Affordable housing and new downtown investment—from Memphis Central Station to the magnetic Tom Lee Park—have Memphis buzzing.



63 GRAND RAPIDS

MICHIGAN

POPULATION METRO 1,089,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 19 POVERTY RATE
- 37 WALK SCORE

A cool urbanism runs through Michigan's second city.

Sure, it gets cold in Grand Rapids, but that doesn't keep residents of Michigan's laidback second city from living all four seasons outdoors. That might mean picnicking or paddling along the Grand (the state's longest river), pursuits soon to be even more fruitful once the \$55-million Grand River Greenway Project revitalizes the locally loved waterway with a network of parks and trails that will surely improve the city's #61 Outdoors ranking—which already considers the city's 1,200 acres of green space. A string of nearby Lake Michigan white-sand beach towns also adds to the freshwater bounty. But it's in its urbanism that Grand Rapids shines brightest. With the existing Rust Belt palette of stately homes, ornate downtown warehouses and Edwardian mid-rises, it blends reuse (an inspiration for many of the 40+ breweries in town) with walkable, safe streets (it ranks #37 for its Walk Score). A hotel boom over the past decade means 15+ downtown properties, including the recently opened boutique gems Morton Hotel and The Finnley. The city is economically buzzing, with the 19th-lowest Poverty Rate ranking in the country, as well as a #41 ranking for its Cost-of-Living-Adjusted Earnings.



64 RIVERSIDE

CALIFORNIA

POPULATION METRO 4,600,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 9 BIPOC RESIDENTS
- 14 FOREIGN-BORN RESIDENTS

Great weather, multiculturalism and, soon, the engine of the Golden State.

They call it the City of Arts and Innovation, but Riverside, an hour's drive east of L.A., also lays claim to being the birthplace of the California citrus industry, a fact honored at the 248-acre California Citrus State Historic Park. Living up to its nickname, Riverside is also home to the Riverside Metropolitan Museum (helping raise its Museums ranking to #75) and, as of last year, the Cheech Marin Center for Chicano Art and Culture. The city boasts one of the nation's most ethnically diverse populations (ranked #14 for Foreign-Born Residents), with citizens of Hispanic descent making up 53% of the local population, while nearly 44% of citizens speak a language other than English. The city's BIPOC population ranks #9. Like a reflection of the community around it, University of California, Riverside (ranked #39 in our University subcategory), is one of the nation's most ethnically varied postsecondary institutions. Expect to hear a lot more about Riverside (or, as its region is called, "the Inland Empire"). Projections say that over the next 25 years it will grow twice as fast as the rest of California—by 20% and up to almost 5,700,000 people.



65 VIRGINIA BEACH

VIRGINIA

POPULATION METRO 1,800,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 18 OUTDOORS
- 28 ATTRACTIONS

Big-city amenities (and residents) lap the golden sand in Virginia’s largest city.

Few East Coast cities blend the urban and natural like Virginia Beach. With 38 miles of coastline at the mouth of Chesapeake Bay, it has long been a respite from D.C.’s sweltering summers. Nature abounds, with an appropriate #18 ranking for Outdoors. The pristine, endless sandy beach, charmingly framed by a three-mile, 140-year-old boardwalk, is the city’s top draw, both for locals in the know and for returning visitors who flock here to reinvigorated post-pandemic events like the country’s longest-running surf contest. The iconic boardwalk is home to a treasure trove of family-friendly attractions that rank #28 in the country in our Attractions subcategory. Much of the nationally top 50-ranked shopping and dining can be found here, too. The massive visitor economy is humming post-pandemic with headline-grabbing investment from local international superstar and Grammy-winning artist Pharrell Williams, who not only relaunched the star-studded Something in the Water Festival in April, but is also working with the city to build The Wave, a four-acre surf park. It’s part of a massive \$330-million development project called Atlantic Park.



66 OKLAHOMA CITY

OKLAHOMA

POPULATION METRO 1,426,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 24 CONVENTION CENTER
- 30 MUSEUMS

Oklahoma City is building on a good thing—and shoring up its future.

In this long-time business center for the energy, biosciences and aerospace sectors, binary thinking just doesn’t cut it. Yes, a new \$288-million downtown convention center boasting 200,000 square feet of exhibition space and a 35,000-square-foot ballroom resulted in a #24 ranking in our Convention Center subcategory. But there’s also the only urban whitewater-rafting facility in the world—an official Olympic and Paralympic training site the city is building as the globe’s finest rowing racecourse while investing \$25 million in a public whitewater-kayaking facility for all skill levels. This builds on the 2016 opening of the city’s whitewater-rafting facility, Riversport OKC, one of only six man-made whitewater courses in the country. No wonder the city ranks #62 Outdoors and recently received a multi-year grant from the Outdoor Foundation, dedicated to equitable outdoor access for all. Local sports and events will get even better with next year’s opening of the \$100-million OKC Fairgrounds Coliseum. The city is increasingly a new hometown for thousands of families, too, drawn by its affordable housing and #42 spot in our Knowledge-Based Businesses subcategory.



67 LANCASTER

PENNSYLVANIA

POPULATION METRO 553,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 4 WALK SCORE
- 13 POVERTY RATE

From the Amish to protons, a borough diversifies.

Welcome to America’s oldest Amish settlement. Pennsylvania Dutch Country—or Red Rose City, as Lancaster is also known—is further distinguished for having been the state capital for a single day, by its 29 covered (or “kissing”) bridges and for the country’s oldest continually running theater (the circa-1852 Fulton Opera House), along with its central location on the New York–Washington distribution corridor 80 miles west of Philadelphia. From 1700s architecture to modern art galleries, there’s history in every step here. With a #31 ranking for Shopping (vintage clothes, country quilts, antiques, contemporary jewelry and more), it landed at #68 overall in our Programming category. It’s also safe and walkable, ranking #4 for its Walk Score. Business is very good, too. Manufacturing, food processing (Kellogg Company operates here), finance and insurance are major employers. So is health care, a sector that’s growing: the Penn Medicine Lancaster General Health Ann B. Barshinger Cancer Institute’s \$48-million Proton Therapy Center opened two years ago. The economic activity has propelled Lancaster into the top half of America’s most prosperous cities (#46) and is reflected in the 13th-lowest Poverty Rate in the nation.



68 HARRISBURG PENNSYLVANIA

POPULATION METRO 592,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 13 WALK SCORE
- 30 BIKING

An economic dynamo with a youthful swagger.

For centuries, the capital of Pennsylvania has been making American history on the banks of the Susquehanna River with views of the Appalachians' Blue Ridge Mountains. Today, this is the economic heart of about 400 surrounding communities, including Hershey, with the government as the main employer, and more recent key arrivals like health services and IT. Home to City Island, a mile-long, 63-acre oasis accessible by car or walking bridge that was used as a resting spot for soldiers during the Civil War, historic Harrisburg ranks #13 in our Walk Score category and is best explored on foot. It's also humming economically, boasting an impressive group of Fortune 500 firms (#43) that rely on the six local college campuses in and around town for smarts to fill the pipeline for the 40,000+ government jobs alone. Fortunately, Harrisburg residents rank #59 in the nation for Educational Attainment of its citizens. Appropriately, Harrisburg University will soon reap the rewards of a new \$130-million, 386,200-square-foot UPMC Health Sciences Tower, which houses its many health-care programs.



69 DES MOINES IOWA

POPULATION METRO 709,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 18 POVERTY RATE
- 22 COST-OF-LIVING-ADJUSTED EARNINGS

Affordability brings the soul, while entrepreneurs and new offices serve up plenty of jobs.

As young talent reconsiders big cities, Des Moines is increasingly part of the conversation. Iowa's state capital is a business mecca—financial services and insurance businesses hold corporate court here—with an artsy side, bustling late into the evening with a blend of daring nightlife (ranked a surprising #49), culture and heartland hospitality. Add in the low, low cost of living, where average rents are well under a grand and houses list under \$250,000 (although that real estate has spiked more than 8% in the past year), and is it any wonder that prairie-cool Des Moines, which welcomed more than 30,000 new residents in the past two years alone, is one of the fastest-growing cities in the Midwest? With billions being invested into data centers by the likes of Apple, Amazon and Microsoft, expect even more arrivals. Des Moines also ranks #32 for Educational Attainment among its citizenry—always a good sign for paving the way for future talent. Equally impressive are the city's major corporate outposts of Nationwide and Wells Fargo that round out a thriving finance and insurance sector that powers the city to #22 in our Cost-of-Living-Adjusted Earnings category.



70 FRESNO CALIFORNIA

POPULATION METRO 1,009,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 4 BIPOC RESIDENTS
- 17 FOREIGN-BORN RESIDENTS

The urban heart of central California is also the state's breadbasket.

Often overshadowed by its coastal peers, Fresno, central California's largest inland city at more than one million people for the first time in its history, is much more than a farming town. The city is also a hub for manufacturing, education and health care. Its central location, about halfway between Los Angeles and Silicon Valley, has long drawn entrepreneurs seeking connection to California's power centers. Of course, farming has contributed to the economic resiliency. Fresno County's economic output from agriculture adds up to more than \$8 billion annually, providing ample opportunity for its large foreign-born population (ranked #17 in the nation). Fresno also ranks #4 in our BIPOC Residents subcategory. The city's revitalized downtown is poised to transform even more within the next decade with the arrival of California's high-speed rail system and hundreds of new condo and loft units. A vibrant farm-to-table dining scene (#47) is rising, with new restaurants, breweries and even a long-anticipated downtown wine bar that's sure to improve the city's culinary ranking. Near-perfect weather and easy access to Yosemite and Sequoia national parks mean plenty of outdoor adventure to work off the local feasting.



71 POUGHKEEPSIE NEW YORK

POPULATION METRO 697,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 27 WALK SCORE
- 43 FOREIGN-BORN RESIDENTS

An urban jewel shines upstate.

Known as “The Queen City of the Hudson,” Poughkeepsie, a two-hour drive or 90-minute train ride north of New York City, is one of the nation’s oldest cities, founded in the idyllic Hudson Valley on the banks of the Hudson River more than three centuries ago by Dutch colonists. It has all the magnetism that would tempt a big-city cash-out: a peaceful, safe downtown (with a population of about 30,000) that’s a joy to walk (with a Walk Score ranking of #27); a college-town levity (Marist is right in town, with Vassar and another handful of schools nearby), and historic architecture that contributes to a top 50 ranking in our overall Place category. It also boasts 22 parks within its MSA, as well as the Walkway over the Hudson State National Park, the world’s longest elevated pedestrian bridge. Despite its diminutive size and population, Poughkeepsie, perhaps fueled by New Yorkers with the means for a second property or full relocation, is buzzing like it hasn’t in 50 years, with redevelopment and densification along Cannon Street, anchored by the Academy, a mixed-use hub with residential above and a food hall, brewery, bar and the farm-to-table Kitchen restaurant at street level.



72 TULSA OKLAHOMA

POPULATION METRO 1,015,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 28 FORTUNE 500 COMPANIES
- 40 CONVENTION CENTER

Livability, with a public space for the ages.

After the 2019 opening of the \$465-million, 66.5-acre Gathering Place urban park, funded by Tulsa philanthropist George Kaiser and named one of Time magazine’s World’s Greatest Places, Tulsa’s city-building went into overdrive. In 2020, Greenwood Rising opened, a new history museum and memorial marking a century since the city’s race massacre, when dozens of Black Tulsans were murdered and hundreds more injured by a deputized white mob that destroyed what was at the time the wealthiest Black community in the country—known as Black Wall Street. Confronting a tragedy that was kept quiet for decades has earned the city respect across the planet. Projects scheduled to open this year include the Williams Crossing bridge across the Arkansas River, and the OKPOP Museum, celebrating Tulsa’s stealthy contributions to American culture. Tulsa has been working the secondary city angle to perfection well before pandemic-necessitated digital nomadism, playing up its affordability and the fact that it is the smallest American city with its own ballet, opera and symphony. The Tulsa Remote program also promised a \$10,000 stipend and resettling help to talent who would relocate for a year. To date, more than 2,000 people have made the move.



73 MCALLEN TEXAS

POPULATION METRO 871,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 1 BIPOC RESIDENTS
- 6 FOREIGN-BORN RESIDENTS

An affordable economic engine, powered by Mexican-American talent.

A border city with a strong automotive industry, McAllen has seen a recent economic bump with the ratification of the USMCA trade deal. The metro area boasts 42 automotive suppliers employing 40,000 people, mostly highly skilled workers. It’s also attracting companies from across the border, and the city saw major success with the opening of a new facility for the Mexican manufacturing company Tetakawi. McAllen’s airport, one of the state’s busiest, received almost \$35 million in upgrades, and improvements to the Anzalduas International Bridge are allowing cargo to cross for the very first time. This diverse city welcomes newcomers (it’s #6 in our Foreign-Born Residents subcategory; BIPOC residents top the nation), attracting people from near and far with its strong manufacturing economy. And, it must be noted in this era of escalating house prices, incredible home ownership affordability. In fact, the city was lauded as the most affordable city for first-time homeowners by Move.org in 2021, with a regional median home value of \$87,100. New residents arrive for the quality of life that locals love: the town is safe, warm and sunny, with a vibrant theater scene, including local troupes and touring Broadway productions, which are thriving again.



74 BOISE

IDAHO

POPULATION METRO 765,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 21 BIKING
- 34 FORTUNE 500 COMPANIES

Pacific Northwest vibes, plentiful jobs and after-work adventure boost a boomtown.

Boise, with an almost 20% population spike in the past decade (and a projected population of almost 1.4 million by 2060), is one of the fastest-growing cities in the nation, in one of America's fastest-growing states. But the torrent of new residents has slowed, and the once-ascendant house prices plummeted by almost 15% between March 2022 and 2023, selling for a median price of \$459,000. Still, as talent is freed to work remotely, few hometowns can offer ski resorts and epic wineries in such proximity. Not surprisingly, Boise ranks #21 in our Biking subcategory. A strong economy is still humming, with tech sector corporations over-regulated on the West Coast relocating to Idaho's more welcoming climes and emboldened by OGs like Micron Technology and the blossoming start-up ecosystem the tech giant has sown. The city also ranks #34 for in our Fortune 500 Companies subcategory, so it's not like lack of work is a deterrent for new residents, as indicated by the 15th-lowest Poverty Rate in America. Downtown development is poised for big things, led by the restoration of the historic Avery building by Michelin-starred chef and Boise native Cal Elliott.



75 LANSING

MICHIGAN

POPULATION METRO 541,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 28 COST-OF-LIVING-ADJUSTED EARNINGS
- 33 BIKING

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 hot spot, with auto manufacturing driving its growth. General Motors remains a major employer, but Lansing's economy has diversified into insurance, insurtech, medtech and IT businesses. Little wonder it ranks #43 for Fortune 500 Companies and #28 for Cost-of-Living-Adjusted Earnings. Downtown revitalization is bearing fruit, with two hotels—a Hyatt House and AC Hotel by Marriott—opening this year as part of the mixed-use Red Cedar development project that includes much-needed student, senior and market-rate housing, and a 20-acre public park and amphitheater overlooking the Red Cedar River. Charming character homes surround the Capitol Building, and trails line the banks of the Red Cedar and the Grand, yielding a #67 spot for Outdoors, with impressive biking infrastructure (#33). Leafy East Lansing is home to Michigan State University, ranked #35 nationally. MSU's 5,300-acre campus features three medical schools (two human medicine, one veterinarian)—the most in the country—and was the first to offer a graduate degree in nuclear physics. The new 194-room Graduate East Lansing hotel also just opened nearby.



76 STOCKTON

CALIFORNIA

POPULATION METRO 779,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 7 BIPOC RESIDENTS
- 9 FOREIGN-BORN RESIDENTS

From agricultural center to bedroom community to downtown hot spot.

A once-sleepy agricultural town, Stockton is an affordable bedroom community for Silicon Valley. But there's plenty going on within its city limits. Health care and education are the city's largest sectors, thanks in large part to the University of the Pacific, which helps support a #55 ranking in our University subcategory. Manufacturing and logistics are also major parts of the economy, providing opportunity for Stockton's diverse population. Despite its inland Central Valley location, Stockton has the unique advantage of a deep-water port connected to the San Francisco Bay courtesy of the San Joaquin River. Its revitalized downtown just welcomed its tallest building, the Stockton Courthouse, and is once again playing host to the numerous outdoor festivals and concerts that take advantage of the excellent weather. Stockton ranks in the top 10 in the country in our Foreign-Born Residents subcategory, as well as #7 for BIPOC Residents, and the city continues to grow, with more than 20,000 people moving here over the pandemic. An ambitious cultural might is on the rise, too, with a \$2.5-million renovation of the Haggin Museum's fine art galleries and local street murals that have never been more vibrant.



77 LEXINGTON

KENTUCKY

POPULATION METRO 517,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 25 EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT
- 45 COST-OF-LIVING-ADJUSTED EARNINGS

A small but mighty hometown is off to the races.

There's more to the Horse Capital of the World (450-plus local horse farms!) than thoroughbreds. The heart of bourbon country may be the second-smallest city by population in our ranking (after Pensacola), but ranks top 50 for Night-life, at #49, with everything from party-bike bar hopping to the Bluegrass Trail for craft beer lovers. With Kentucky's largest mall, the city also ranked #49 for Shopping. Those two subcategories contributed to Lexington's overall #66 spot for Programming. But it's the city's culinary scene that's boiling over (growth that will improve its current #69 Restaurants ranking soon). New openings include Italian spot Frank and Dino's, the NYC Korean hot pot chain and do-it-yourself ramen joint KPOT, and truly only-in-Lex picnicking-among-goats at the Horse Lodge. Culinary entrepreneurs (yes, we're including bourbon distillers here) also have a new home in the old Greyline Station bus terminal, opened recently as a year-round public marketplace featuring a farmers' market, local restaurants, retail shops, offices and an outdoor entertainment venue. Adjoining Julietta Market has stalls that start-ups can trial to serve as a stepping stone to a retail spot.



78 WORCESTER

MASSACHUSETTS

POPULATION METRO 979,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 20 POVERTY RATE
- 32 UNIVERSITY

Wicked smaht in so many ways.

Higher education thrives in Worcester, home to 10 colleges and universities and more than 35,000 students. New England's second-largest city ranks an impressive #32 for University, thanks to schools like Clark University and Worcester Polytechnic Institute drawing students from all over the country. Given the academic chops, it makes sense that the city ranks #39 for Educational Attainment among its citizenry (more than 30% of residents hold a bachelor's degree or higher). With manufacturing, education and health care driving economic performance, the city also has a growing professional, scientific and technical sector. Worcester is investing in its future, with multiple major projects in the works. One CitySquare is a part of a multiphase, \$565-million redevelopment downtown, with housing, hotels, parking, a hospital expansion and more. Main Street Reimagined is an \$11-million overhaul in collaboration with the Urban Culture Institute to increase walkability and placemaking on the city's main strip. The investments are prudent, as Worcester is poised, as many educationally endowed second cities around the country are, to capture new residents looking for affordability, space and local pride in more manageable urban centers.



79 ALLENTOWN

PENNSYLVANIA

POPULATION METRO 862,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 15 WALK SCORE
- 26 UNIVERSITY

Good fortune fuels an overlooked city's growth.

With storied Dutch roots, Pennsylvania's third-largest city boasts four major hospitals, 12 postsecondary institutions and (of course) the Lehigh Valley Iron-Pigs Minor League Baseball team. Health care, technology, energy, manufacturing, professional services and transportation dominate the city's robust economic scene. With major employers such as Air Products & Chemicals (an international industrial gases company with almost \$13 billion in 2022 sales alone) and PPL Corporation (one of the largest regulated utility companies in the country), Allentown ties at #34 nationally for Fortune 500 head offices. Walking among the historic homes and century-old industrial buildings is a joy in a streetscape boasting a Walk Score ranking of #15. The sense of place is growing with the local Neighborhood Improvement Zone's recent approval of \$21 million to upgrade downtown's outdoor Grand Plaza with a food hall, outdoor area and new retail and office space. And after a decade (and a billion dollars) in downtown improvements, the city is sharing the wealth, with a dozen buildings and an amphitheater planned for the formerly industrial Lehigh Riverfront area. The historic Allentown train station is also being revitalized and will provide heritage leases to local businesses.



80 OGDEN

UTAH

POPULATION METRO 695,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 2 POVERTY RATE
- 60 WALK SCORE

Economic ambition meets adventure in the epic outdoors.

Sitting nearly 4,300 feet above sea level along the northern end of the Wasatch Mountains just 35 miles from Salt Lake City, Ogden appeals mightily to the avid outdoor set and SLC’s swelling workforce of affluent, educated and tech-skilled people now able to avoid big-city headaches with hybrid WFH setups. Ogden is not only an enticing new hometown for urban escapees, it’s also a small but powerful economic dynamo decades in the works. Outdoor products form one of the city’s key industries, along with IT and life sciences (specializing in biopharmaceuticals and medical devices). Another is aerospace and advanced manufacturing, thanks to Ogden’s location two miles from Hill Air Force Base and its 25,000+ jobs. Local Weber State University ensures a robust talent pipeline and recently received a \$50-million grant to keep training young high-tech professionals. The quality of outdoor adventure matches the refined citizenry: Snowbasin (host of the 2002 Winter Olympics), giant Powder Mountain and Nordic Valley are some of the West’s most underrated ski resorts, and, come summer, the El Monte and Mount Ogden golf courses can satisfy even the most discerning player.



81 FAYETTEVILLE

ARKANSAS

POPULATION METRO 547,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 30 COST-OF-LIVING-ADJUSTED EARNINGS
- 35 POVERTY RATE

An outdoor gem in the Ozarks, powered by its university and a diversity of citizens.

Situated in the Ozark Mountains and soaking up more than 200 days of sunshine a year, Fayetteville has plenty of outdoor play to offer. Home to the University of Arkansas (ranked #60 in our University subcategory) and its nearly 28,000 students, the Natural State city is also considered the entertainment capital of northwest Arkansas, with everything from live music to street performances. The city is an economic powerhouse, with a top 50 overall ranking for Prosperity in America, at #48. And residents are taking part in the good times, ranking #30 in our Cost-of-Living-Adjusted Earnings subcategory. Fayetteville’s prosperity is even more impressive when you consider that the city is one of the smallest, by population, in our ranking. Key industries include education and technology, with civil engineering about to get a major boost: the U of A’s recently opened \$13.8-million, 37,4000-square-foot Civil Engineering Research and Education Center at the Arkansas Research and Technology Park will enable testing of large-scale structural systems and will be a hub for research, academic, government and industrial partners throughout the state.



82 BIRMINGHAM

ALABAMA

POPULATION METRO 1,115,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 26 COST-OF-LIVING-ADJUSTED EARNINGS
- 38 CONVENTION CENTER

The South’s urban boom beats loud in Alabama’s largest city.

With a confluence of culinary talent (and awards), downtown revitalization and impressive economic projections, Magic City was on its way before the pandemic hit. But despite the crisis, the city’s economy—the one Forbes predicted as a top 10 promising job market based on net employment outlook in early 2020—is holding resilient, with the city ranking #26 in our Cost-of-Living-Adjusted Earnings subcategory. And the past three years have made Birmingham even more magnetic: the city attracted tens of thousands of new residents over the past year—many of them highly skilled folks who raised its Educational Attainment ranking to #68. The city has also resumed its vital work in educating the world about its history as the battlefield of America’s civil rights movement. (Barack Obama signed a proclamation naming the Birmingham Civil Rights District a national monument in one of his final acts as president.) The city’s long culinary simmer, with #70-ranked restaurants, is about to boil over globally, powered by dozens of new hot spots, including five-time James Beard finalist Rob McDaniel’s Helen and the Parisian-inspired Bar La Fête from local power duo Kristen Hall and Victor King.



83 SPOKANE

WASHINGTON

POPULATION METRO 586,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 31 POVERTY RATE
- 37 UNIVERSITY

Welcome to Washington’s livable wonderland.

Seattle’s real estate gold rush has as many losers as winners, yet those who missed out are continuing to head to this beacon across the Cascade Mountains, sparkling with big-city amenities and ambition—from breweries to placemaking. Few places in the nation have benefited from the work-from-home movement more than this eastern Washington city that provides year-round outdoor adventure at its doorstep. But the real action is in town, where the nightlife (#49 in the country) matches a feisty and growing culinary scene (#75 for Restaurants). Spokane is the urban heart of Washington’s Walla Walla, Yakima and Columbia wine regions, and the bounty of the land can be savored not only in restaurant wine lists but also at tasting rooms throughout the city. Speaking of Yakima, the region produces 75% of the country’s hops—more than enough to justify a craft beer boom that today includes 30-plus breweries (a number that’s rising quickly). The city’s surrounding wilderness is also woven through its urban grid—a river spanned by gondolas rushes right through downtown—delivering on a long-time motto of “Near Nature, Near Perfect.”



84 SYRACUSE

NEW YORK

POPULATION METRO 662,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 30 UNIVERSITY
- 34 WALK SCORE

A university town doubles down on sustainability and talent retention.

“The Cuse” is the economic hub of the central New York region. But after two centuries of industry, Syracuse is reinventing itself as—appropriately—the Green Apple. More than a decade after the founding of the Clean Tech Center, a clean energy business incubator program (one of the first of its kind in the country), the incubator today boasts 30 businesses—and growing. The commitment to cleaner industry and livability extends to daring city planning, with the city set to remove a 1.4-mile stretch of Interstate 81 that has cut through its downtown since the 1950s. Replacing it will be a “community grid” focused on reconnecting neighborhoods, easier mobility and placemaking. It’s all going to entice the thousands of University of Syracuse students (attending the #30-ranked university in the nation), as well as the legions of others attending the area’s college and professional schools to put down roots, especially now that they’re experiencing the campus once more. The city’s 150 parks, two hospitals and the two large summer jazz festivals that give the city its fast-improving #66 ranking in our Culture subcategory will only help the retention cause.



85 SPRINGFIELD

MASSACHUSETTS

POPULATION METRO 699,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 31 WALK SCORE
- 34 FORTUNE 500 COMPANIES

A history of basketball, a future in biotech.

If the fact that Theodor Geisel, aka Dr. Seuss, hailed from here doesn’t grab your attention (and if you’re not intrigued by Springfield’s The Amazing World of Dr. Seuss Museum), perhaps the fact that the city is within New England’s Knowledge Corridor (the region surrounding Springfield and Hartford, Connecticut, with 29 colleges and universities educating more than 170,000 students annually) will. The economic engine of western Massachusetts, which forms part of the biotech industry’s Super Cluster, is tied at #34 for Fortune 500s in town. The birthplace of basketball—don’t let Canadians tell you otherwise—is home to the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame, and Springfield is doubling down on its Hoop City brand, pursuing a state-of-the-art multi-sport complex next door. The city also shows well for smart citizens, with a #52 ranking for Educational Attainment (with nearly 19% of the population having a bachelor’s degree or higher). Manufacturing, health care, education and life sciences keep the economy robust. Since 2018, more than \$400 million in new projects has been announced and opened, including a \$14-million Educare school and an orthopedic surgery center at Baystate Health.



86 GREENVILLE

SOUTH CAROLINA

POPULATION METRO 928,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 35 UNIVERSITY
- 41 ATTRACTIONS

Naturally endowed and open for business.

The secret is out on this compact city nestled against the Blue Ridge Mountains, as the tens of thousands of new residents who've moved here since the pandemic can attest. They're drawn by Furman University (ranked #35 in our University subcategory), and a walkable, historic downtown packed with ornate 19th-century warehouses and repurposed mid-rises that radiate from stunning Falls Park on the Reedy and its 40-foot natural waterfall right by Main Street. The considered city-building of previous centuries is obvious in the engineering of the artfully cantilevered Liberty Bridge that spans the falls. The city's food scene eagerly replenishes pedestrians with almost 200 restaurants (a vast majority of them independent), like the Anchorage and Topsoil Kitchen & Market, both helmed by chefs with James Beard nods. More than a dozen craft breweries pour in town. Greenville is also flexing economically, with the ongoing \$1-billion redevelopment of University Ridge, a promontory that once housed a mall near downtown. The project, designed by Foster + Partners of 50 Hudson Yards fame, spans more than a dozen buildings over 37 acres and is expected to draw site selectors over the next decade.



87 MODESTO

CALIFORNIA

POPULATION METRO 553,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 15 BIPOC RESIDENTS
- 16 FOREIGN-BORN RESIDENTS

Sunny, diverse and soon connected to Silicon Valley.

The Central Valley city has long been the sunny hub for California's warm-weather agricultural products, including almonds (80% of the world's supply is produced nearby), tomatoes and grapes. (This is the home of E.&J. Gallo, the largest winery in the country based on sales volume.) All that agricultural labor has attracted a large foreign-born population (#16 in our Foreign-Born Residents subcategory). The city, currently a 90-minute drive from Silicon Valley, is pursuing a future where the commute from Modesto to the world's largest tech companies will get easier with a new rail service out of the city's historic train station that will catalyze downtown development. Modesto's middling Place ranking (#64) is set to ascend with a new downtown vision prioritizing pedestrian access. Given its focus on restaurants, shops and nightlife, the city's poor ranking in our Programming category (#99 nationally) will improve as well, especially as people catch on to the fierce locavorism at places like Camp 4 and Churchkey—spots that, along with a dozen more that have opened to feed locals and visitors in the know since the pandemic, will elevate the #91 Restaurant ranking.



88 WICHITA

KANSAS

POPULATION METRO 648,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 51 MUSEUMS
- 55 CULTURE

Development takes off in the cultural hub of Kansas.

The "Air Capital of the World" (named for its aviation heritage and for the largest concentration of aerospace manufacturing employees in the nation) performs consistently across all our categories, with Programming (#65), led by the city's impressive #55 ranking in our Culture subcategory, and Promotion (#69), given its #60 ranking in Google Search. But a bit more on Wichita's cultural clout: the largest city in Kansas is also an arts beacon—often cited as the coolest in the state—with big-city cultural icons like the Wichita Grand Opera and Ballet Wichita. The culinary scene, with its astonishing 1,200 restaurants and 30 food trucks, ranks #59. It got a boost earlier this year with the opening of the National Institute for Culinary and Hospitality Education at WSU Tech's new downtown culinary school, located inside a former department store. Development is everywhere: in the Historic Delano District (where cowboys caroused in the late 1800s) with a new extended-stay hotel, and downtown, where the \$75-million Riverfront Stadium for Minor League Baseball opened two seasons back and developers are turning four vacant buildings into a hotel, health school, culinary college and student housing.



89 BATON ROUGE

LOUISIANA

POPULATION METRO 871,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 38 BIPOC RESIDENTS
- 60 UNIVERSITY

Fill your soul with Louisiana’s capital.

Louisiana’s capital combines business with pleasure with an aplomb rarely seen elsewhere. It’s what you’d expect from a state capital that’s also home to one of the nation’s proudest student bodies (as seen on most school-year weekends around the #60-ranked Louisiana State University campus, especially during college football tailgating). The 102,321-seat LSU Tiger Stadium is the eighth largest in the world, with the city’s urban grid as the on- and off-ramp to the revelry (giving you a sense that, in the Red Stick, celebrating is almost dialed to 11). But the state’s second-largest city, located a 90-minute drive from New Orleans, is a 300-year-old portal into the American South, through its seemingly weekly festivals that span the diversity of its citizenry, from Irish movie circuits to a decidedly more considered Mardi Gras. Another cultural gateway is the ascendant culinary scene (#61). Classic soul food musts like Sammy’s Grill on Highland (try the gator) are today joined by elevated rooms like Supper Club, as well as modern twists on Cajun cooking like Spoke & Hub. Economically, \$11 billion of recently announced industrial projects are spotlighting the 30,000 job openings in drastic need of workers.



90 COLUMBIA

SOUTH CAROLINA

POPULATION METRO 829,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 36 BIPOC RESIDENTS
- 46 UNIVERSITY

Economic stewardship and urban investment power a stealthy state capital.

Like most state capitals, South Carolina’s Columbia is an economically diversified, highly livable jewel too often overlooked by tourists and potential residents. While Columbia’s #60 ranking in our Promotion category isn’t exactly making the city blow up online, its #49 spot in our Google Search subcategory means that curiosity is growing. So what’s the (nascent) buzz? There are plenty of perks to being in the capital, and the State House is a splendid tribute to Greek Revival architecture, situated in a sprawling garden filled with monuments. Six-year-old Segra Park (formerly Spirit Communications Park) is back hosting minor league Fireflies games, shows and public events. Speaking of residents, their Educational Attainment is ranked #62, a testament to the #46-ranked University of South Carolina, which adds a youthful dynamism to the historic urban stock here. The Vista warehouse district is just the latest example, where rehabbed architecture attracted the city’s first Aloft hotel a few years back and today is a good place to order a bourbon and get your bearings. If you’re lucky, you may get invited to a fashion week soiree or a USC event. You are in Southern hospitality country, after all.



91 AKRON

OHIO

POPULATION METRO 702,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 43 FORTUNE 500 COMPANIES
- 44 COST-OF-LIVING ADJUSTED EARNINGS

Water and wealth distinguish the storied Ohio metropolis.

Stan Hywet Hall & Gardens was once the family home of F.A. Seiberling, co-founder of the Goodyear Tire & Rubber Company. With five buildings dating back to 1912 and 10 gardens on 70 acres, it’s Akron’s first National Historic Landmark and the nation’s sixth-largest historic home open to the public. We bring this up because the estate symbolizes the wealth that persists in Akron today. One of the world’s leading polymer centers, the city is home to eight Fortune 500 firms, tying for #43 in that subcategory nationally. Not surprisingly, Akron talent benefits, enjoying the #44 spot for Cost-of-Living-Adjusted Earnings. The city is making the single-largest infrastructure investment in its 190-year history. Akron Waterways Renewed is a \$300-million project that includes the nearly \$200-million, 6,000-foot-long Ohio Canal Interceptor Tunnel, an integrated plan that could be in the works all the way to 2040. In other development news, downtown’s Bowery Project, a \$42-million renovation of six historic buildings, is projected to create 2,000 jobs and \$245 million in revenue over 20 years. The city is also buzzing culturally, with the Akron Art Museum turning 100 last year.



92 CAPE CORAL

FLORIDA

POPULATION METRO 761,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 20 OUTDOORS
- 26 FOREIGN-BORN RESIDENTS

Safe, naturally endowed, and no longer overlooked in favor of glowing neighbors Sanibel Island and Fort Myers.

Sure, there's southwest Florida's first Westin property—still gleaming from a \$15-million remodel two years back. As well as another big reno just completed at Boca Grande's historic Old Florida Gasparilla Inn. But people are coming here to live, drawn by the community's safety and natural beauty, with 400 miles of canals, among the most of any city on the planet. What Cape Coral lacks in the soft, sandy beaches of its neighboring islands it more than makes up for in riverfront vistas, abundant wildlife and outdoor pursuits galore. No wonder it ranks in the top 20 in the nation in our Outdoors subcategory. It's also one of the most accessible, with Southwest Florida International Airport (RSW)—ranked #36 nationally for Airport Connectivity—a mere 30-minute drive after baggage claim. But this place is a secret no longer, with housing that a couple of years ago would hover around \$250,000 today selling swiftly for the mid-\$400,000s and more. Rents are following suit, driven by the thousands of new residents who arrive every month, joining the annual student migration into the dozen colleges and community colleges within 50 miles of the city center.



93 DAYTON

OHIO

POPULATION METRO 814,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 39 COST-OF-LIVING-ADJUSTED EARNINGS
- 49 UNIVERSITY

The arts fly high in this aerospace hub.

The first thing Dayton might bring to mind is airplanes, being the place where the Wright brothers developed and manned the world's first flying machine. You can immerse yourself in all things aviation at spots such as Huffman Prairie Flying Field and the National Museum of the U.S. Air Force. However, the Gem City is also the state's epicenter of the arts. The Bach Society, Dayton Opera, Dayton Ballet, Dayton Philharmonic Orchestra, Dayton Contemporary Dance Company and the Dayton Playhouse are just some of the organizations that thrive here. The Contemporary Dayton and Dayton Art Institute are but two of several galleries. Dayton performs well in our Culture subcategory, at #55. Along with a #70 ranking for Nightlife, the city hit #74 overall for Programming, a category that also includes Restaurants and Shopping. Downtown is buzzing, too, with the new AC Hotel across from the city's ball park—it's just the second newly constructed hotel to open downtown in decades. With strong manufacturing, health care and IT sectors, Dayton is the state's aerospace hub today and in the future, with a ranking in our Cost-of-Living-Adjusted Earnings subcategory of #39 in the nation.



94 KNOXVILLE

TENNESSEE

POPULATION METRO 880,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 31 CONVENTION CENTER
- 34 ATTRACTIONS

A tradition of collaboration creates a food and drink scene to watch.

Downtown Knoxville's walkable heart features museums, vibrant murals, local music venues and historic sites. And investment is pouring in. A \$22-million hotel in the Old City joins a forthcoming publicly owned \$114-million multi-use stadium scheduled to open on the first day of the local Smokies minor league club's 2025 season. The Stockyard Lofts project has people moving in already. Instead of playing second fiddle to nearby Asheville and Chattanooga, Knoxville is finding its own groove as a destination for enlightened food lovers, with the state's first James Beard Award-winning chef, Joseph Lenn, running J.C. Holdway right downtown. What makes the food scene so spectacular is the collaboration, most recently activated at the new Marble City Market, downtown Knoxville's newest dining destination. Expect the #57 Restaurants ranking to improve soon. Knoxville's superpower isn't just pocket urbanism: the city features more than 150 miles of trails and greenways, paddle-friendly rivers and forest trails, all within a quick bike or drive. Or, in the case of the 1,000-acre Urban Wilderness park, right within city limits. No wonder Knoxville ranks #40 for Outdoors.



95 BAKERSFIELD

CALIFORNIA

POPULATION METRO 909,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 10 BIPOC RESIDENTS
- 18 FOREIGN-BORN RESIDENTS

A sunny, outdoorsy and affordable hometown finds its groove.

Just across the Tehachapi Mountains, a two-hour drive from Greater Los Angeles, Bakersfield has a vibrant economy and a culture distinctly its own. Economically dominated by agriculture, energy and transportation and logistics, it's a magnet for a large foreign-born workforce (ranked #18 nationally). Kern County is the top oil-producing county in the U.S., accounting for 10% of the nation's production. Bakersfield's amazing weather has made it a hub for solar power generation, with numerous commercial and utility scale arrays constructed or proposed. As the home of the Bakersfield sound, a unique country music genre made famous by Merle Haggard and Buck Owens, the city is no cultural slouch, with a #92 ranking for Culture that should rise as the city continues investing in a historic downtown arts district that's packed with murals, sculptures, galleries, theaters and stage houses. New restaurants have improved the #58 Restaurants ranking, while long-awaited redevelopment of the three-story, 44,000-square-foot mid-century modern icon known as the Woolworth's building is finally afoot. It will house offices and community space and is expected to expedite the ongoing return of financial and tech companies to Bakersfield's downtown.



96 PENSACOLA

FLORIDA

POPULATION METRO 510,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 22 OUTDOORS
- 57 GOOGLE TRENDS

A historic beach town is Florida's pocket-sized secret.

The smallest city in our ranking shines as bright as its Gulf of Mexico white-sand beaches. History and proximity to Alabama help explain the vibe: Southern hospitality, ironwork balconies and historic bars. Over the course of its 442-year history, 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.” It has rigorously preserved its historic architecture, ranking #73 in our Sights & Landmarks subcategory and #60 in our deep Place category. Of its 52 miles of sugar-white beaches, Pensacola Beach is the pearl, helping power the city to #22 in our Outdoors subcategory. Its pier is one of the longest in the Gulf and the nearby Gulf Islands National Seashore is the longest stretch of protected seashore in the U.S. No wonder every second home here seems to have a bike or a kayak on its porch. But people do work here. More than 500 companies in town specialize in aerospace and defence, cybersecurity, advanced manufacturing or professional services, with more remote talent arriving daily in pursuit of the beach and no state personal income tax.



97 LAKELAND

FLORIDA

POPULATION METRO 725,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 28 AIRPORT CONNECTIVITY
- 39 BIPOC RESIDENTS

Central Florida's easy living is getting noticed.

Located 25 miles inland from the Tampa Bay area, Lakeland has its own coastline—mainly in the form of its many lakes that have, from time immemorial, provided sustenance and a home to dozens of Native American tribes. Today, the same lakes and surrounding trails and parkland help lift the city's #59 ranking in our Outdoors subcategory. Their pedestrian access from the city's downtown, as well as the ability to fish, boat and birdwatch within minutes of leaving the house, have all contributed to the city's ascendant livability in recent years. Also notable is Lakeland's #39 ranking in our BIPOC Residents subcategory, and its relative affordability amid a national housing price surge, with a median home price hovering around \$300,000. Is it any wonder that the city's population has been growing by 2% annually? But it's not all leisure and outdoors in Lakeland: the area also draws Frank Lloyd Wright fans, who come to see a dozen of his buildings at Florida Southern College, the world's largest single site of the architect's work. Investment is pouring in, from the new Florida Polytechnic University's Citrus Innovation Center and Florida Southern College's Adams Athletic Performance Center to new health-care facilities.



98 GREENSBORO

NORTH CAROLINA

POPULATION METRO 777,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 60 ATTRACTIONS
- 66 RESTAURANTS

Where history and the land's bounty run deep.

A quest for diversity has long been part of Greensboro's legacy, and events that transpired in the city helped shape African American history. Today, Greensboro is a city that draws history buffs, antique furniture shoppers and foodies. In North Carolina, fertile farmland is a source of pride, and Greensboro residents have a strong connection to the land and to the food they put on the table. Locals and visitors come together around food—at places like Greensboro Farmers Curb Market, which has been around since 1874, and at unique experiences like the Barn Dinner Theatre. While the town may be steeped in historical significance, it continues to look forward, especially as it tends to its #66 Restaurants ranking. Greensboro's downtown nightlife (ranked #59) offers a special kind of charm, thanks to street corners humming with buskers and bands, and cafés vibrating with acoustic performances. But the city is also an economic engine of the region—one that's about to get more powerful with the recent news that Toyota plans to open a \$1.3-billion electric-vehicle battery plant near town in 2025, employing 2,000. Its well-connected airport is renovating, too, even adding a manufacturing facility for Boom Supersonic planes.



99 LITTLE ROCK

ARKANSAS

POPULATION METRO 748,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 50 SIGHTS & LANDMARKS
- 55 COST-OF-LIVING-ADJUSTED EARNINGS

Big ambition and political capital in Arkansas.

The largest city in Arkansas coaxes talent and investment with aggressive tax breaks and some of the most affordable housing among state capitals. In fact, Little Rock ranks an impressive #55 for our Cost-of-Living-Adjusted Earnings subcategory, indicative of a healthy local economy. A powerful and diverse corporate presence distinguishes Arkansas' capital city, situated on the banks of the state's namesake river—one that may surprise many and is more proof that city officials have sharpened their pencils on the economic development front. Dillard's Department Stores, Windstream Communications and Acxiom are just a few of the corporations founded in a city that has in the past suffered from an undeserved reputation as the capital of an underdeveloped state known mostly for the Ozark Mountains (and Bill Clinton). But the city is also an increasingly coveted hometown, with great weather and a top 50 national ranking for its diverse Sights & Landmarks. Surprises like the ESSE Purse Museum, focusing on "the evolution of the 20th-century American woman through the bags she carried and their contents," showcase the city's subdued irreverence. The recently reopened William J. Clinton Library & Museum, gleaming after its pandemic reno, helped the city finish #59 in our Museums subcategory.



100 CHATTANOOGA

TENNESSEE

POPULATION METRO 563,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 27 SHOPPING
- 33 OUTDOORS

Affordable living (for now) amid an outdoor bounty.

Tucked at the base of Lookout Mountain on the banks of the Tennessee River, Chattanooga has earned its Scenic City moniker, as well as its "Best Town Ever" accolades by Outside magazine... twice. The town certainly boasts the adrenal bonafides: from climbing the Tennessee Wall to all manner of self-propulsion just outside city limits. To say nothing of eight (and counting) craft breweries—like the year-old TailGate—to speed recovery time. No wonder it ranks #33 in our Outdoors subcategory. In addition to the natural bounty, Gig City boasts speedy Internet velocity supplied by the publicly owned Electric Power Board. It's also two hours from Nashville and from Atlanta. Corporations in town include Volkswagen and BlueCross BlueShield of Tennessee, and new start-ups are emboldened by the biggest business incubator in the state, as well as the largest downtown innovation district of any U.S. city its size. Oh, and the median price for a single-family home hovers around \$300,000. The #76-ranked restaurant scene continues to grow post-pandemic and, in addition to southern favorites like Easy Bistro, now includes spots like new restaurant incubator Proof, which provides low-barrier opportunities for chefs to test out their concepts.

America's

BEST CITIES PERFORMANCE BY CATEGORY

THE NATIONAL MALL IN WASHINGTON, D.C.



| RANK | CITY | STATE | PLACE | PRODUCT | PROGRAMMING | PEOPLE | PROSPERITY | PROMOTION |
|-------------|----------------|----------------------|--------------|----------------|--------------------|---------------|-------------------|------------------|
| 1 | New York | New York | 1 | 1 | 1 | 6 | 1 | 1 |
| 2 | Chicago | Illinois | 3 | 2 | 4 | 21 | 4 | 4 |
| 3 | Los Angeles | California | 10 | 3 | 2 | 5 | 10 | 2 |
| 4 | San Francisco | California | 2 | 6 | 6 | 2 | 5 | 9 |
| 5 | Washington | District of Columbia | 8 | 10 | 23 | 4 | 3 | 3 |
| 6 | Miami | Florida | 4 | 14 | 15 | 3 | 15 | 5 |
| 7 | Boston | Massachusetts | 7 | 4 | 18 | 14 | 7 | 11 |
| 8 | Seattle | Washington | 9 | 15 | 10 | 15 | 6 | 14 |
| 9 | Houston | Texas | 43 | 5 | 7 | 11 | 11 | 8 |
| 10 | San Jose | California | 34 | 46 | 44 | 1 | 2 | 37 |
| 11 | Las Vegas | Nevada | 23 | 11 | 3 | 27 | 79 | 6 |
| 12 | Atlanta | Georgia | 53 | 8 | 17 | 20 | 13 | 7 |
| 13 | Philadelphia | Pennsylvania | 12 | 7 | 14 | 33 | 23 | 16 |
| 14 | Denver | Colorado | 16 | 13 | 19 | 24 | 9 | 18 |
| 15 | Dallas | Texas | 51 | 9 | 20 | 17 | 8 | 12 |
| 16 | San Diego | California | 11 | 26 | 8 | 9 | 35 | 10 |
| 17 | Orlando | Florida | 28 | 12 | 5 | 22 | 54 | 13 |
| 18 | Austin | Texas | 26 | 29 | 11 | 13 | 14 | 15 |
| 19 | Minneapolis | Minnesota | 14 | 17 | 32 | 39 | 12 | 36 |
| 20 | Portland | Oregon | 6 | 33 | 12 | 38 | 21 | 23 |
| 21 | Honolulu | Hawaii | 5 | 44 | 22 | 7 | 58 | 46 |
| 22 | New Orleans | Louisiana | 13 | 16 | 9 | 46 | 85 | 21 |
| 23 | Phoenix | Arizona | 36 | 19 | 27 | 36 | 26 | 20 |
| 24 | Baltimore | Maryland | 25 | 20 | 30 | 29 | 43 | 26 |
| 25 | Salt Lake City | Utah | 17 | 30 | 53 | 45 | 16 | 47 |

| RANK | CITY | STATE | PLACE | PRODUCT | PROGRAMMING | PEOPLE | PROSPERITY | PROMOTION |
|-------------|--------------|----------------|--------------|----------------|--------------------|---------------|-------------------|------------------|
| 26 | St. Louis | Missouri | 21 | 21 | 21 | 78 | 33 | 30 |
| 27 | Tampa | Florida | 30 | 32 | 24 | 43 | 42 | 22 |
| 28 | Nashville | Tennessee | 91 | 22 | 16 | 56 | 25 | 17 |
| 29 | Detroit | Michigan | 42 | 18 | 52 | 63 | 34 | 25 |
| 30 | San Antonio | Texas | 56 | 37 | 13 | 30 | 69 | 19 |
| 31 | Charlotte | North Carolina | 102 | 23 | 28 | 41 | 24 | 24 |
| 32 | Sacramento | California | 32 | 42 | 40 | 23 | 63 | 28 |
| 33 | Raleigh | North Carolina | 90 | 38 | 41 | 19 | 20 | 39 |
| 34 | Bridgeport | Connecticut | 46 | 109 | 87 | 8 | 17 | 104 |
| 35 | Pittsburgh | Pennsylvania | 29 | 27 | 37 | 97 | 30 | 27 |
| 36 | New Haven | Connecticut | 24 | 24 | 94 | 35 | 77 | 81 |
| 37 | Tucson | Arizona | 19 | 49 | 25 | 34 | 94 | 41 |
| 38 | Madison | Wisconsin | 33 | 68 | 59 | 42 | 18 | 53 |
| 39 | Cleveland | Ohio | 37 | 25 | 47 | 80 | 51 | 32 |
| 40 | Portland | Maine | 15 | 66 | 33 | 82 | 32 | 88 |
| 41 | Albuquerque | New Mexico | 41 | 39 | 31 | 31 | 89 | 52 |
| 42 | Columbus | Ohio | 61 | 36 | 29 | 53 | 40 | 35 |
| 43 | Richmond | Virginia | 44 | 54 | 54 | 37 | 39 | 45 |
| 44 | Charleston | South Carolina | 27 | 43 | 38 | 54 | 76 | 43 |
| 45 | Milwaukee | Wisconsin | 40 | 45 | 36 | 52 | 55 | 42 |
| 46 | Hartford | Connecticut | 38 | 52 | 104 | 32 | 45 | 87 |
| 47 | Cincinnati | Ohio | 71 | 28 | 34 | 92 | 29 | 44 |
| 48 | Indianapolis | Indiana | 84 | 35 | 26 | 69 | 44 | 34 |
| 49 | Durham | North Carolina | 96 | 41 | 79 | 16 | 41 | 72 |
| 50 | Kansas City | Missouri | 92 | 31 | 45 | 65 | 28 | 33 |

| RANK | CITY | STATE | PLACE | PRODUCT | PROGRAMMING | PEOPLE | PROSPERITY | PROMOTION |
|-------------|------------------|--------------|--------------|----------------|--------------------|---------------|-------------------|------------------|
| 51 | Providence | Rhode Island | 20 | 47 | 75 | 61 | 65 | 76 |
| 52 | Omaha | Nebraska | 63 | 50 | 42 | 70 | 31 | 56 |
| 53 | Buffalo | New York | 18 | 48 | 63 | 89 | 84 | 38 |
| 54 | Oxnard | California | 50 | 108 | 105 | 18 | 61 | 100 |
| 55 | Provo | Utah | 45 | 85 | 97 | 64 | 19 | 102 |
| 56 | Albany | New York | 39 | 72 | 86 | 67 | 37 | 74 |
| 57 | Colorado Springs | Colorado | 68 | 69 | 39 | 51 | 47 | 49 |
| 58 | El Paso | Texas | 78 | 78 | 64 | 10 | 107 | 51 |
| 59 | Louisville | Kentucky | 77 | 34 | 35 | 95 | 53 | 40 |
| 60 | Rochester | New York | 31 | 62 | 49 | 74 | 82 | 55 |
| 61 | Jacksonville | Florida | 85 | 55 | 43 | 55 | 59 | 29 |
| 62 | Memphis | Tennessee | 83 | 51 | 46 | 50 | 75 | 31 |
| 63 | Grand Rapids | Michigan | 47 | 73 | 60 | 88 | 38 | 59 |
| 64 | Riverside | California | 65 | 57 | 81 | 25 | 96 | 75 |
| 65 | Virginia Beach | Virginia | 66 | 63 | 51 | 49 | 70 | 54 |
| 66 | Oklahoma City | Oklahoma | 88 | 40 | 48 | 71 | 68 | 48 |
| 67 | Lancaster | Pennsylvania | 22 | 96 | 68 | 104 | 46 | 85 |
| 68 | Harrisburg | Pennsylvania | 35 | 81 | 91 | 84 | 52 | 94 |
| 69 | Des Moines | Iowa | 82 | 67 | 73 | 73 | 27 | 78 |
| 70 | Fresno | California | 49 | 87 | 72 | 26 | 109 | 57 |
| 71 | Poughkeepsie | New York | 48 | 102 | 107 | 48 | 62 | 106 |
| 72 | Tulsa | Oklahoma | 69 | 56 | 56 | 86 | 66 | 50 |
| 73 | McAllen | Texas | 80 | 99 | 96 | 12 | 110 | 92 |
| 74 | Boise | Idaho | 57 | 93 | 110 | 94 | 36 | 68 |
| 75 | Lansing | Michigan | 52 | 95 | 88 | 90 | 49 | 97 |

| RANK | CITY | STATE | PLACE | PRODUCT | PROGRAMMING | PEOPLE | PROSPERITY | PROMOTION |
|-------------|--------------|----------------|--------------|----------------|--------------------|---------------|-------------------|------------------|
| 76 | Stockton | California | 62 | 107 | 100 | 28 | 105 | 82 |
| 77 | Lexington | Kentucky | 76 | 74 | 66 | 68 | 72 | 65 |
| 78 | Worcester | Massachusetts | 79 | 90 | 93 | 57 | 50 | 95 |
| 79 | Allentown | Pennsylvania | 58 | 86 | 90 | 77 | 67 | 98 |
| 80 | Ogden | Utah | 75 | 106 | 95 | 102 | 22 | 105 |
| 81 | Fayetteville | Arkansas | 94 | 88 | 89 | 60 | 48 | 99 |
| 82 | Birmingham | Alabama | 100 | 60 | 57 | 76 | 56 | 67 |
| 83 | Spokane | Washington | 54 | 76 | 61 | 107 | 74 | 70 |
| 84 | Syracuse | New York | 55 | 71 | 84 | 99 | 88 | 73 |
| 85 | Springfield | Massachusetts | 59 | 70 | 101 | 72 | 102 | 101 |
| 86 | Greenville | South Carolina | 89 | 59 | 58 | 91 | 86 | 63 |
| 87 | Modesto | California | 64 | 110 | 99 | 44 | 103 | 93 |
| 88 | Wichita | Kansas | 86 | 75 | 65 | 87 | 80 | 69 |
| 89 | Baton Rouge | Louisiana | 81 | 91 | 78 | 79 | 83 | 61 |
| 90 | Columbia | South Carolina | 95 | 83 | 70 | 58 | 92 | 60 |
| 91 | Akron | Ohio | 72 | 92 | 80 | 98 | 64 | 96 |
| 92 | Cape Coral | Florida | 97 | 65 | 85 | 47 | 91 | 90 |
| 93 | Dayton | Ohio | 67 | 82 | 74 | 101 | 78 | 80 |
| 94 | Knoxville | Tennessee | 98 | 53 | 50 | 108 | 60 | 58 |
| 95 | Bakersfield | California | 87 | 104 | 82 | 40 | 108 | 62 |
| 96 | Pensacola | Florida | 60 | 80 | 67 | 103 | 95 | 71 |
| 97 | Lakeland | Florida | 73 | 58 | 83 | 93 | 101 | 89 |
| 98 | Greensboro | North Carolina | 103 | 89 | 62 | 62 | 90 | 66 |
| 99 | Little Rock | Arkansas | 99 | 79 | 69 | 85 | 81 | 77 |
| 100 | Chattanooga | Tennessee | 93 | 77 | 55 | 106 | 73 | 64 |



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