



Rankings

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1. NEW YORK, NY

If NYC forgot about how bad life can get, the past 18 months were a hellish reminder.

POPULATION
METRO: 19,294,236

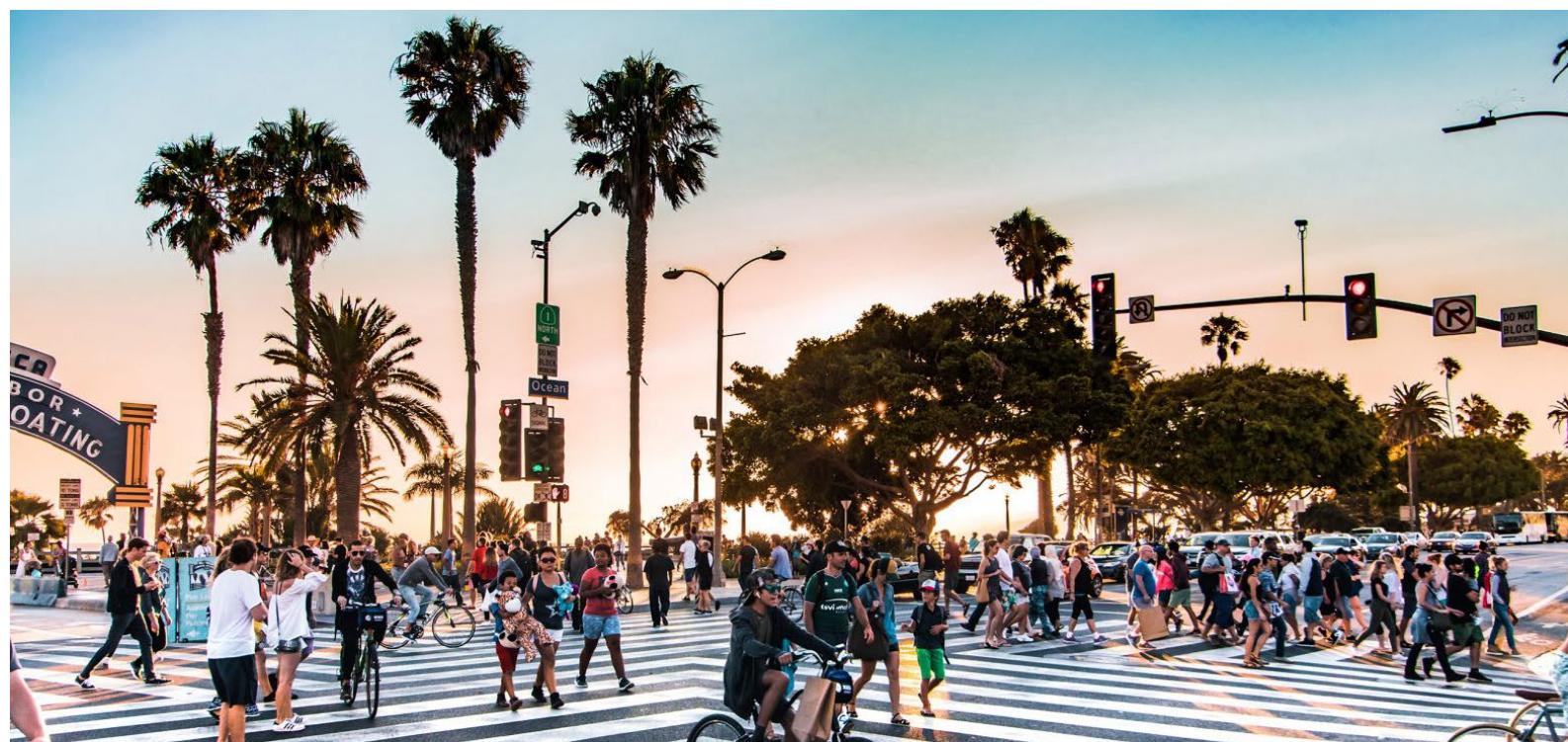
HIGHLIGHTED RANKINGS

 PLACE  PROGRAMMING

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The greatest city in America—lauded and crowned in our ranking for the past six years and countless others for many more—was a ghastly reminder during the pandemic of the vulnerability of even the colossal, the seemingly all-powerful; we saw here what awaited the rest of the country. And the world. As early cases spiked, Gotham became the nation's nightmarish coronavirus core. The economic scars are all over the city's 2021 rankings. New York still has the most Fortune 500 headquarters in the nation, but its ranking in this year's Change in Unemployment Rate subcategory is so low that it now ranks out of the Top 100, at #107. The city still ranks #1 in our Place category—tops in the subcategories it has always dominated, like Sights & Landmarks and Top 5 for its natural environs and parks. But its Safety subcategory, which tracks homicides—a point of pride for the city and its boosters in recent years—slipped to #7. But despite this unprecedented everything, some solace from the beforetime. "New York City is reawakening, with infrastructure upgrades, a packed cultural calendar, world-class hotels, a new outdoor dining scene, multicultural neighborhoods to explore and many more vibrant offerings on display across all five boroughs this year," Fred Dixon, president and CEO of NYC & Company, told Resonance in May.





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2. LOS ANGELES, CA

The City of Angels fell from great heights. But Angelenos are helping L.A. take flight once more.

POPULATION
METRO: 13,249,614

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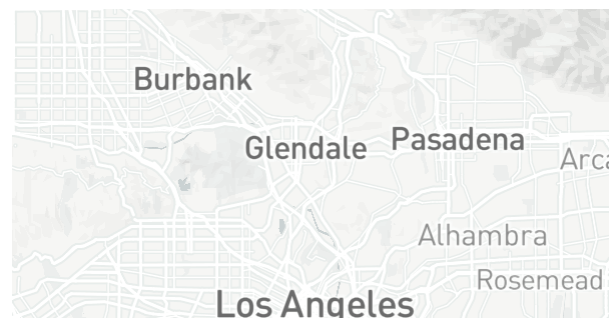


PLACE



PROMOTION

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In a city famous for hyperbole, it's not an overstatement to declare that L.A. teetered on the verge of the COVID-19 abyss multiple times in 2020 and early 2021. The city has a long, long way back. As of February 2021, the unemployment rate was almost 10%—among the worst numbers of all large U.S. cities, and the city sits toward the bottom of this year's Change in Unemployment Rate subcategory. But given the pent-up demand to get on with California dreaming, breaking tourism records and rolling out one multi-billion-dollar infrastructure project after another, L.A. will not be down for long, starting with its #2 Product ranking. The new SoFi Stadium, the largest in the National Football League at 3.1 million square feet, officially opened last fall to host the NFL's Rams and Chargers home games. In February 2022, it will host the Super Bowl. Adding to L.A.'s #2 Museums ranking is the opening of the visually stunning Academy Museum of Motion Pictures, punctuated with a temporary exhibit of acclaimed artist Hayao Miyazaki. Amazingly, all nine of LAX's terminals are in the midst of a \$14.3-billion modernization. You'll be hearing a lot more about L.A. this fall, when the city's inspiring "Your Comeback Starts Here" campaign is rolled out nationally, a first for the city.



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3. CHICAGO, IL

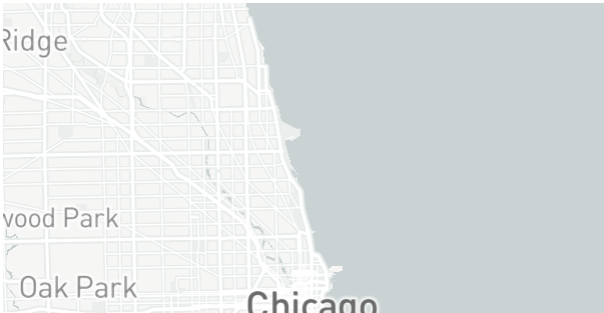
An abundance of programming and culture, with the deep infrastructure and affordability that eludes many other cities.

POPULATION
METRO: 9,508,605

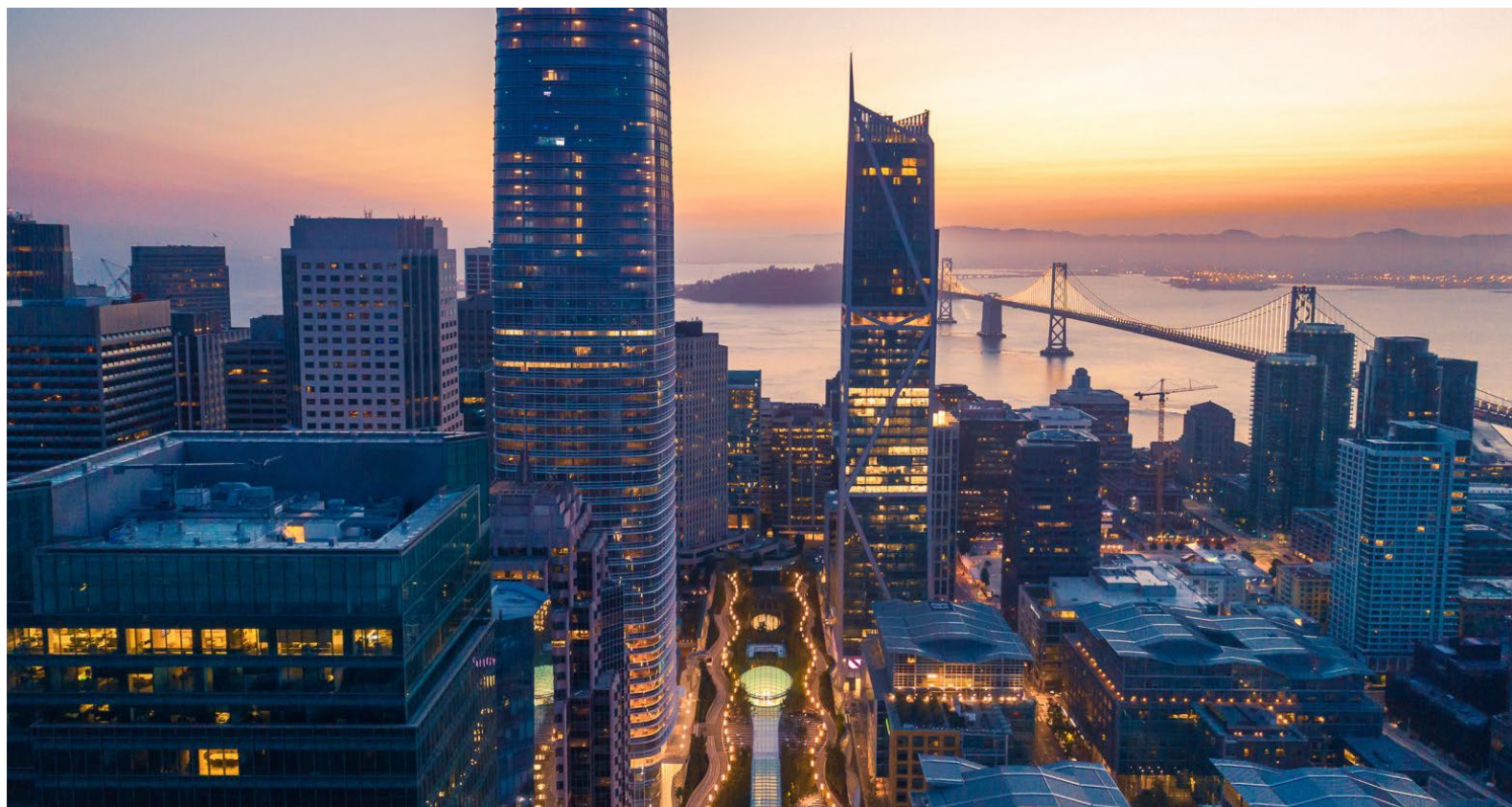
HIGHLIGHTED RANKINGS

 PRODUCT  PROGRAMMING

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Few American cities fell harder in visitor numbers in recent months than Chicago. Whether for business or pleasure, the city had been attracting tourism at record-breaking levels year after year. Its #3 ranking in our Programming category—including #5 in Shopping, #3 in Restaurants and #2 in Nightlife—speaks to the plentiful buzz that Chicago was perfecting before everything ground to a halt. And what a far fall it's been, with the city's residents and prosperity hit the hardest. Chicago suffered the worst one-year change in median family income between 2019 and 2020 in the Top 10, and ranks among the bottom of all 100 cities on our list. While real estate prices were left relatively unscathed in cities like San Diego, Phoenix and San José, Chicago hits near the lowest in our rankings for one-year change in median home prices between February 2020 and February 2021. It's a surreal real estate plunge for America's Top 3 city. The hardship of the past 18 months only means the city is spring-loaded to return to its quiet productivity. Of course the biggest news is the legacy of one family of proud Chicagoans: the Obamas. This year ground will be broken on the Obama Presidential Center in Jackson Park, a marquee attraction on Chicago's South Side.



4. SAN FRANCISCO, CA

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

POPULATION
METRO: 4,701,332

HIGHLIGHTED RANKINGS



PLACE



PROGRAMMING

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San Francisco has embraced seekers since the Gold Rush days. Along the way, these immigrants have sowed the seeds for the city's open-minded attitude toward, well, everything. No wonder it ranks #3 in the nation in our Educational Attainment subcategory. The promise of high salaries brings a torrent of global workers, who fuel the city's ambition and ideas and drive its #6 ranking for Fortune 500 companies. The Bay Area's entrepreneurialism is uniquely connected to its world-renowned universities, able to accommodate local knowledge and skills gaps and broker funding for nascent start-ups. Guidance and capital are rarely an issue for the right idea. Still, the city is deeply wounded. Companies are leaving for Austin and Miami, and San Francisco now sits near the bottom nationally (#96) in our Change in Civilian Labor Force subcategory. In what could be viewed as a silver lining, house prices have dropped significantly—the year-over-year plunge has been among the steepest in the country. Tourism, a golden goose that set records for the past decade, plunged. The pandemic shredded massive plans for 2020, including monumental anniversaries like Golden Gate Park's 150th and San Francisco Pride's 50th. But all of these delays have only filled a pipeline that will bring a flood of openings and opportunities this summer and visitation is anticipated to return to pre-pandemic levels by 2023.



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5. BOSTON, MA

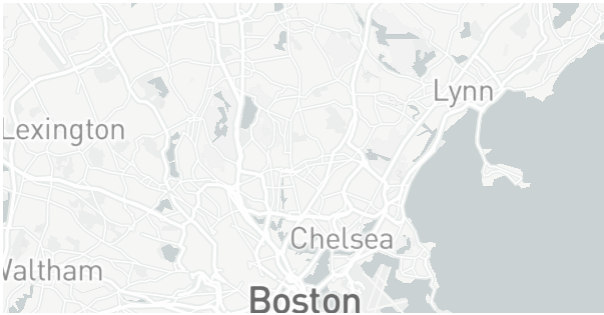
America’s oldest big city has never been more current.

POPULATION
METRO: 4,832,346

HIGHLIGHTED RANKINGS

 PRODUCT

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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 #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. Given this devotion to celebrating human potential, it's no wonder Boston ranks an impressive #2 in our People category, including #4 in our Educational Attainment subcategory. And in further confirmation that locals here are fiercely loyal to their city, Boston performed third-best this year in our Change in Civilian Labor Force subcategory among all Top 10 cities—and middle of the pack among our Top 100—meaning the big urban exodus we all read about last year didn't hit Boston quite so hard. The city is getting back to its ambitious buildout. Hotel inventory is projected to grow by almost 5,000 new rooms in the next five years alone, a 20% increase in supply, mostly planned for the South Boston Waterfront near the Boston Convention & Exhibition Center, while the area south of North Station will undergo transformative projects not seen in decades.





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6. SAN DIEGO, CA

Southern California's urban ideal offers free sunshine and keeps a good thing going—across two borders.

POPULATION
METRO: 3,316,073

HIGHLIGHTED RANKINGS

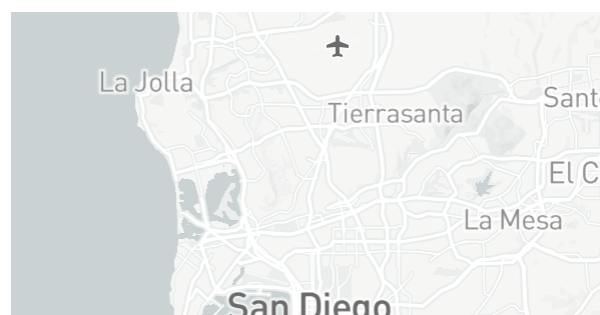


PLACE



PROGRAMMING

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You could say that San Diego is where California began. It was here that Spanish settlers established the region's very first mission in 1769. Today it's one of the fastest-growing in the U.S. It ranks #3 in our deep Place category—with an impressive finish for Parks & Outdoors, at #7 in the country. And, of course, there's its weather. San Diego is as naturally endowed as any place has a right to be—its sublime 263 full and partly sunny days annually help rank it in the Top 10 for Weather nationally, while the 23 beaches—70 miles of them—within city limits make it synonymous with SoCal surf culture. When residents do get back out of the house and into their beloved city, they'll beeline for the famous eponymous zoo—which is one year closer to the opening of its \$69-million children's zoo, to be named after Denny Sanford, a local philanthropist who donated \$30 million to this endeavor, the largest single gift the San Diego Zoo has ever received. The city's bounty of attraction, ranked #7 in the country, will also reopen, eager to show off millions in infrastructure investment. In what will surely be the exclamation point announcing that San Diego is back, Comic-Con will resume as an in-person event, just in time for the much-anticipated opening of the Comic-Con Museum in Balboa Park's former Hall of Champions building.



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7. WASHINGTON, DC

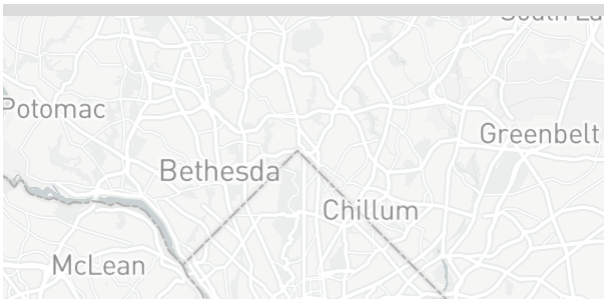
America’s intriguing capital city has the world’s attention and is working to keep it.

POPULATION
METRO: 6,196,585

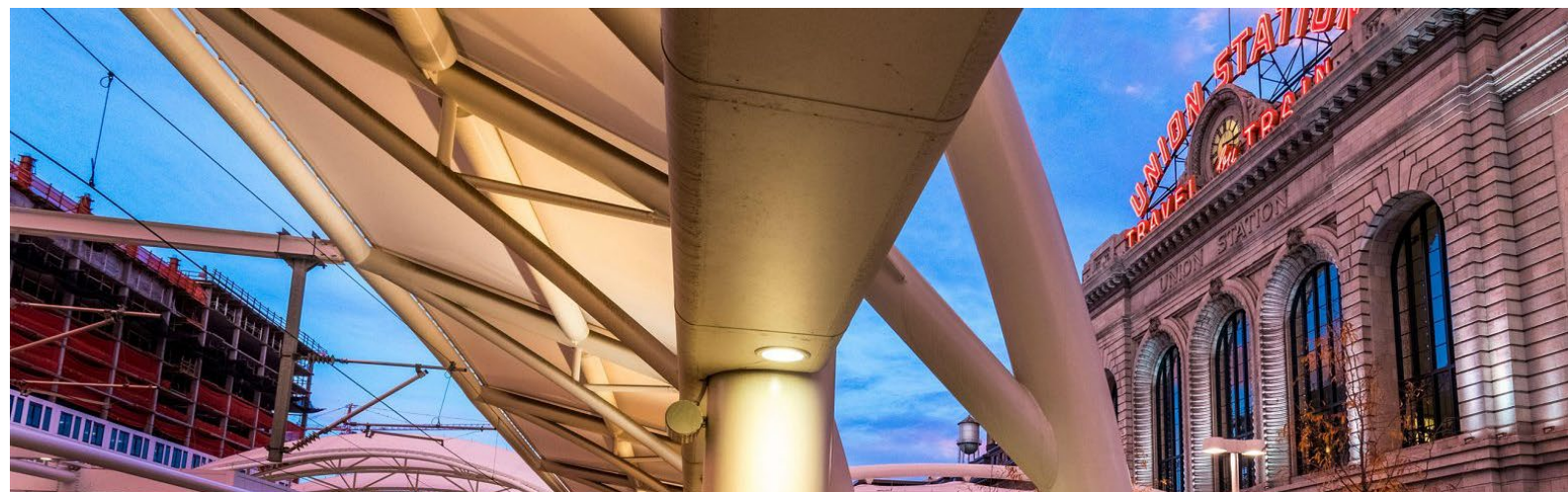
HIGHLIGHTED RANKINGS

 PRODUCT  PROMOTION


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The ubiquity of D.C. in dramas on screens small and large, combined with the shocking events of the past year—from the most-watched presidential election campaign in history to the insurrection at the U.S. Capitol—means we're all thinking about America's capital city. In fact, powered by its ranking as the most-Google'd U.S. city and the seventh-most checked-in on Facebook, Washington ranks #4 in our Promotions category this year. Given its residency in global consciousness and resonance in the zeitgeist, there are few cities so poised to build on the exposure of the past year and surpass its record 24.6 million total visitors arriving in 2019. Before COVID-19, 2020 was going to be one of the busiest ever for D.C. development, and a lost year will only accelerate the planned \$10 billion in the city-building pipeline. Food and dining is also helping D.C. pursue equity, starting in the city's Ward 7 and Ward 8, where the predominantly African American residents have had only three major grocery stores serving a population of 150,000. That's seeing change with Market 7, a sprawling food hall touting Black-owned businesses. The jewel in the city's culinary crown is the \$250-million RiverPoint, two blocks from Audi Field, between Capitol Riverfront and the Wharf, with piers, waterfront activity and plans for new restaurants. With all this culinary investment, the city's #17 Restaurants ranking will surely improve.





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8. DENVER, CO

Light rail, legal pot and buzzing 'hoods ATTRACT urban wanderers looking for a new post-pandemic home.

POPULATION
METRO: 2,892,066

HIGHLIGHTED RANKINGS



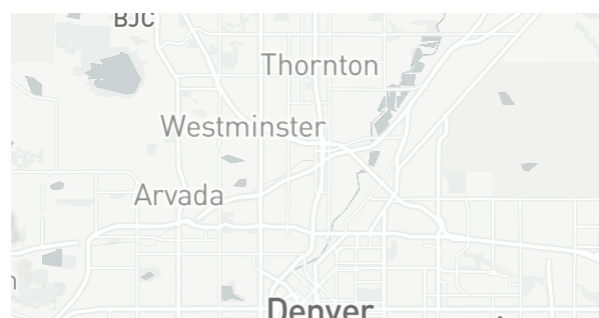
PRODUCT



PEOPLE



[See Methodology](#) ►



With its secondary-city affordability and epic location tucked at the foot of the Rocky Mountains, Denver is an increasingly wealthy, healthy Millennial magnet of a place. But the city is no undiscovered secret, ranking #1 in the country in our People category, which analyzes a combination of residents with at least a postsecondary degree (#10 nationally), as well as the one-year change in the civilian labor force (between Feb. 2020 and Feb. 2021), for which Denver ranks #4. The pattern here? Smart people standing by their city in a time of crisis—and the Fortune 500 companies in town (which include Western Union, health care giants DaVita and Centene, and Molson Coors Beverage) keeping things running. Denver ranks #15 nationally for Fortune 500 companies headquartered here. Perhaps not surprisingly, the city remained economically resilient through the pandemic, ranking #12 nationally this year for Change in Median Family Income. Blessed with 300 days of sunshine a year and surrounded by mountains, hiking paths and numerous indoor/outdoor spaces, the city is in the vanguard of the growing trend toward office wellness. Let's not forget, cannabis is legal in the Mile High City, and in the entire state of Colorado. Increasingly Denver's creative scene is something to behold. *Afar Magazine* even declared it the "Street Art Capital of the Country" recently—as good

a title as any for post-pandemic destinations welcoming tourists back slowly and, for the most part, outdoors.



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9. PHOENIX, AZ

Latin soul, daring architecture and a reverence for the outdoors blends a heady mix in the desert.

POPULATION
METRO: 4,761,603



HIGHLIGHTED RANKINGS



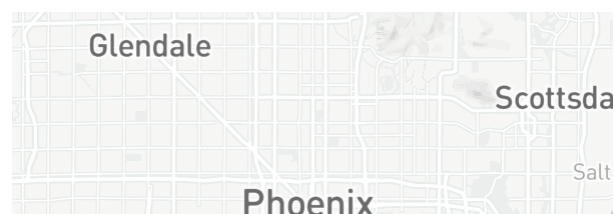
PLACE



PROSPERITY

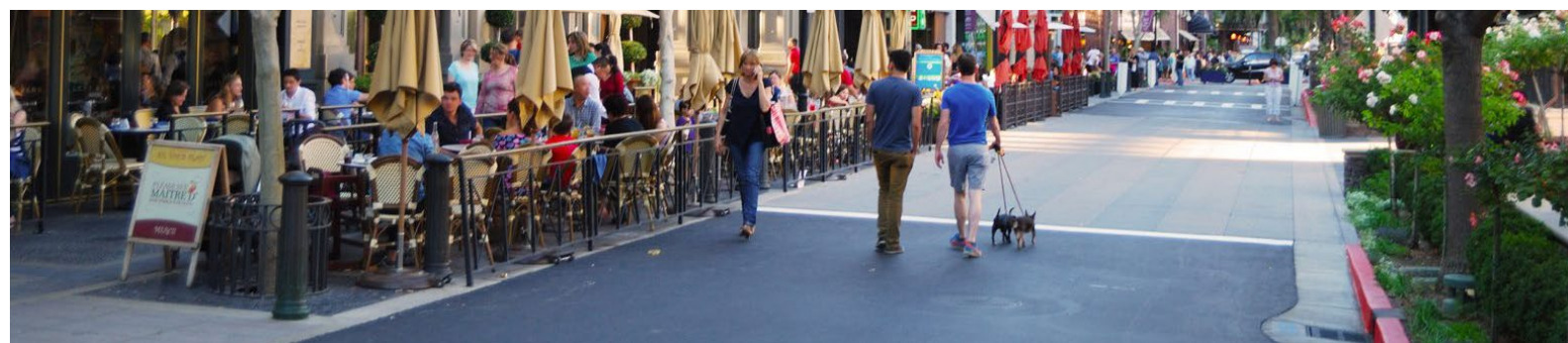


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A thriving desert metropolis, Phoenix offers some of the best Mexican food this side of the border, a growing roster of fine museums, a vibrant artist community and 300 days of sunshine—with the #6-ranked Weather in the nation. Get a street-level view of the city's increasingly considered urban planning with a stroll through Roosevelt Row Arts District, or RoRo, as locals have taken to calling it. Art galleries, studios, restaurants and bars sit side by side in this walkable creative district in the downtown core—helping the city to its #13 ranking nationally in our diverse Place category, which measures a city's sights and landmarks, quality of nature and parks, and safety. Despite the built environment's ascent, Phoenix is still an outdoor city, year-round, and ranks #29 in the nation for its Parks & Outdoors. Take a close-up look at Camelback Mountain, where summit trails are not for the faint of heart, especially in 100° Fahrenheit heat—though the base of the mountain also offers easier and equally beautiful trails for beginners. Phoenix's subdued balance of city living has insulated it somewhat from the economic ravages of the pandemic. The city ranks #2 nationally for Change in Median Home Prices, trailing only Boise, Idaho. Locals are also staying put (which means so are the jobs), with Phoenix ranking #11 nationally in our Change in Civilian Labor Force subcategory.





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10. SAN JOSÉ, CA

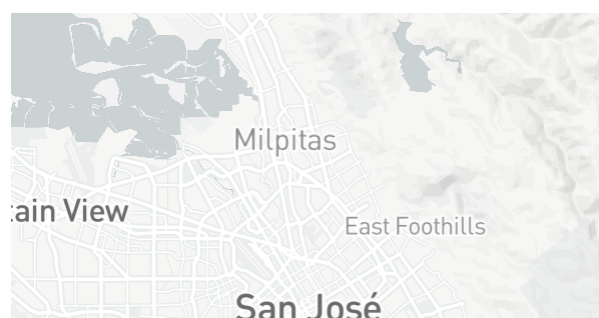
Talent, smarts and money insulated San José from economic devastation while allowing its citizens to be bold with recovery.

POPULATION
METRO: 1,987,846

HIGHLIGHTED RANKINGS

 PEOPLE  PROSPERITY

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It's fascinating what a well-educated, well-paid and diverse population can do for a city's rankings. In the case of San José, 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 a Top 10 overall finish in 2021, even amidst the pandemic and the crescendo in tech circles that "everyone is leaving the Valley." Despite crushing housing costs and a temporarily battered tech sector, San José still boasts the most educated populous in the country, ranking tops in our Educational Attainment subcategory. An undeniable area of concern, however, is the fact that the city performs poorly this year among both our Change in Civilian Labor Force subcategory, as well as in its unemployment rate (both in the bottom 20th percentile). But San José doesn't intend to lose its people—or jobs—for long. There's just too much support from America's titans of industry and innovation. The institutional prosperity in the city has minimized the economic devastation of the pandemic seen almost everywhere else in the nation, with San José ranking #13 in

this year's Change in Median Family Income subcategory, part of the city's overall Top 3 finish in our Prosperity category.



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11. PHILADELPHIA, PA

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

POPULATION
METRO: 6,079,130

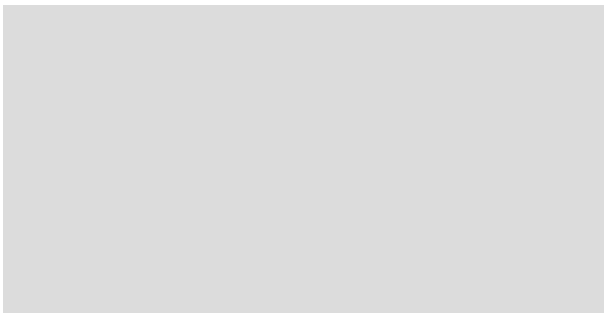
HIGHLIGHTED RANKINGS

 PRODUCT

 PROGRAMMING

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Given its deep roots in the creation of the Union 240 years ago, Philadelphia is a dense, cataloged embodiment of American values and traditions, easily accessible and eagerly shared. Small wonder, then, that it ranks an impressive #6 nationally in our Sights & Landmarks subcategory, ahead of places like Boston and San Diego, and Top 10 in our sprawling Product category (comprised of difficult-to-build big city infrastructure like airport connectivity and museums). Speaking of which, the city ranks #7 in our Museums subcategory. Joining icons like the Liberty Bell Center this year is 90,000 square feet of new public and exhibition space at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, as part of the Frank Gehry-led expansion. The city is also investing outdoors, with the central section of the Delaware River Trail opening this year for those not ready to mingle quite yet. No wonder National Geographic and Condé Nast Traveler are heaping accolades. The City of Brotherly love ties with Seattle for the 12th-most Fortune 500 companies in the country and features a growing population—somewhat waylaid by a pandemic exodus—and a glittering skyline heading ever upward.

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12. DALLAS, TX

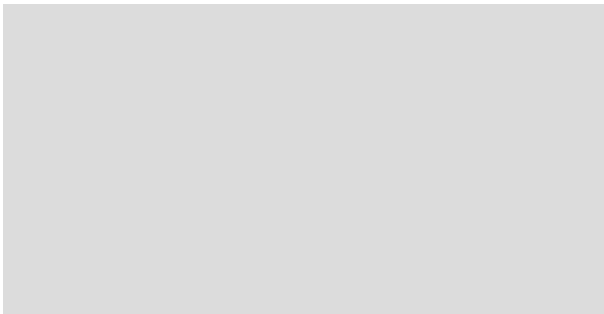
Dallas-boosters like to say that “Big Things Happen Here.” We’d have to agree.

POPULATION
METRO: 7,320,663

HIGHLIGHTED RANKINGS

 PRODUCT  PROMOTION


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It’s not only city sloganeering that’s big in Dallas. It’s an economic reality, too—The

Big D is home to more than 10,000 corporate headquarters—the largest corporate head office concentration in the U.S.—and ties with San José for third-most Fortune 500 companies located in the city. Of course, a city with lots of corporate headquarters is a city that's easy to get to: Dallas tops the nation in our Airport Connectivity subcategory, a measure of direct flight access into a city's principal airport. The Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport's planned \$3-billion Terminal F project is on hold until travel rebounds, which, given the city's trajectory pre-pandemic, shouldn't take long. But Dallas isn't just big on money; it's 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 and the renowned Nasher Sculpture Center—as well as theaters, symphony and opera venues, plus restaurants and bars—all contribute to a #16 ranking in our Programming category, which includes the 11th-best restaurants in the country.

13. ATLANTA, GA

Affluent, charming and dripping with history, ATL is creating the future on its own terms.

POPULATION
METRO: 5,862,424

HIGHLIGHTED RANKINGS



PRODUCT



PROMOTION



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Long a progressive beacon of diversity in Georgia, Atlanta's rich legacy of American civil rights—the city lays claim as the birthplace of Martin Luther King Jr.—powered the long-conservative state to flip to the Democrats in the 2020 election. The eyes of the world were on Atlanta in November and January and saw the city's embrace of a rich, living history, from the must-see Center for Civil and Human Rights to the King Center for Nonviolent Social Change. Small wonder, then, that ATL performed well in our Promotions category, including #6 nationally for Google Searches, Google Trends, and Instagram Hashtags. This bodes well for the city once travel returns. Atlanta has always been a crossroads—open to new ideas, and to the new arrivals who came to this lush, hot, rolling land when the city rose as a railroad terminus. Today, it's still a transportation hub, with Hartsfield–Jackson Atlanta International Airport one of the busiest airports in the world (80% of the U.S. population resides within a two-hour flight). It's why the city ranks Top 5 for Airport Connectivity nationally, as well as #12 in our Attractions subcategory, resulting in an overall #11 ranking for Product.

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14. SEATTLE, WA

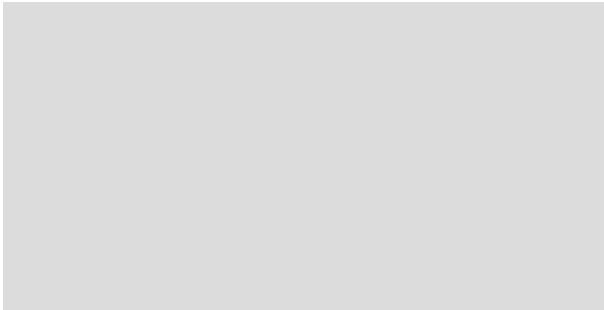
America’s boomtown is playing the long game to keep the (supervised) party going.

POPULATION
METRO: 3,871,323

HIGHLIGHTED RANKINGS

 PROGRAMMING  PEOPLE

[See Methodology](#) ►



Seattle’s self-reliance and dedication to taking care of its own has fostered over 150 years of city-building on the far-flung northwest coast of the U.S., setting the stage for its nearly decade-long run as America’s boomtown. That resilience was on display after the city became among the first in the U.S. to experience runaway

COVID-19 outbreaks. But as the New York Times noted this past March, “One 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.” In many ways, Sea Town reverse engineered its success. Keeping the talent pipeline stocked has always been Seattle’s secret—and it’s paid off. Today, it ranks #9 in our important People category, and #11 for Educational Attainment of its citizenry. The reopening will showcase the city’s ascent in our Programming category, including #6 in the Shopping subcategory and #9 for Nightlife. The #15 Product ranking will also improve with new museum openings and the debut of the National Hockey League’s Seattle Kraken this fall.


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15. AUSTIN, TX


The home of SXSW is quickly becoming America’s new hometown.

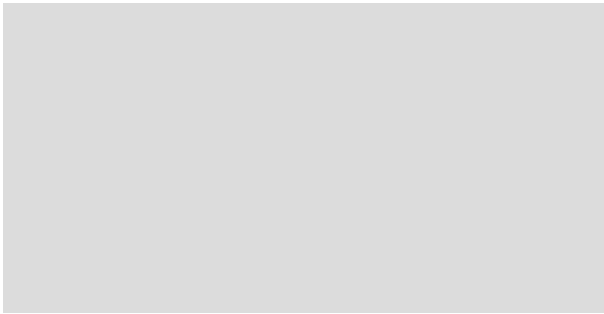
POPULATION
METRO: 2,114,441

HIGHLIGHTED RANKINGS

 PROGRAMMING

 PEOPLE

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The rebellious Texas city—forged with the Longhorn State’s can-do persistence cut with a university town’s political activism and social diversity—has long attracted the misfits who don’t quite fit into the American south’s expectations. Today, it’s attracting everyone else—from Silicon Valley, New York—even Seattle. The result is a housing boom (#11 in our Change in Home Prices subcategory), and a net gain in Change in Civilian Labor Force (#34). As a result, the city ranks #7 in our People category, including #9 for Educational Attainment. A lot of the brainpower arrives for the #22-ranked University of Texas at Austin, and many never leave. That foundation of thinking differently drew dreamers for decades. Local marketer Visit Austin trademarked the city as “the Live Music Capital of the World.” Post-pandemic, the city’s entertainment districts will be fêted like never before. South by Southwest, the annual summit of business, music and creativity, has seeded the area’s magnetism for new ventures. As such, monikers like “Silicon Hills” have followed campus openings by Apple, Facebook, Google, Oracle, Dell, Cisco and Hewlett-Packard. A skills shortage is being mitigated somewhat by a steady flow of graduates pouring out from UT Austin and new talent from both coasts.

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16. LAS VEGAS, NV

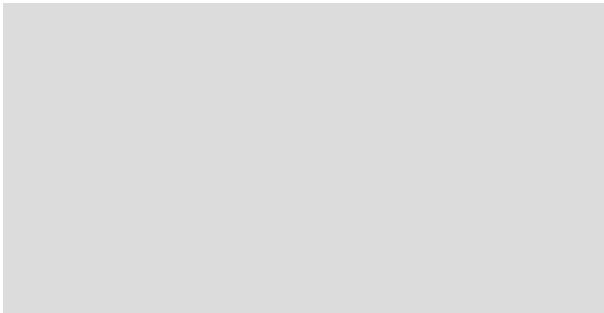
COVID-19 decimated Sin City, but its resilience and response will define it for decades.

POPULATION
METRO: 2,182,004

HIGHLIGHTED RANKINGS

 PROGRAMMING  PROMOTION

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The story of Las Vegas blossoming into a “real city” has been told of late with breathless praise for its economic success. Tourism—the #1 economic driver for Southern Nevada—has long paid for Las Vegas’ roads, parks, school construction and teachers’ salaries. According to the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority, more than 41% of Southern Nevadans are employed directly or indirectly because of tourism. But this single reliance on the visitor economy also means that

the COVID-19 outbreak decimated Las Vegas like few other American cities. House price decline and the exodus of the labor force here both list in the bottom 10% of our 2021 ranking. But this is Vegas, baby, home of the best weather in the nation and the second-best attractions, and America—and the world—can't wait to return. Need proof? The city is Top 5 in our key Promotions category, with the second-most TripAdvisor reviews and third-most Facebook check-ins during a year when travel was cancelled. It also ranked #5 for Google Trends, signalling deep intent. The city is ready, with dozens of massive new openings that will entice visitors back for the next decade.

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17. HOUSTON, TX

Smart, skilled and soulful, Houston is the American city of the future.

POPULATION
METRO: 6,884,138

HIGHLIGHTED RANKINGS



PROGRAMMING



PROMOTION

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International immigration in the past decade has contributed to explosive population growth here, making Houston one of the most ethnically diverse big cities in America, with more than 145 different languages spoken at home, according to the latest census—about even with New York. No wonder it's dining is ranked #4 in the country, with a flurry of post-pandemic launches happening now—from food halls like Railway Heights and farmers' markets to elevated Texan at Wild Oats. The fifth-largest city in the U.S. is also home to the fourth-largest concentration of Fortune 500 companies in the country, and ranks an impressive Top 5 nationally for HQs that call it home. But the city's ambitious plans are driving rebirth. The recent development of the Houston Spaceport, a hub for innovation, education and commercial spaceflight, is the future of the region's space industry—and brings us all a step closer to space tourism. For now, Houston's 22.3 million annual visitors (2018)—of which 3.28 million were international travelers—arrive and depart by more conventional means—at least they did before the city's #6 most connected airport ground to a halt last year.


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18. COLUMBUS, OH

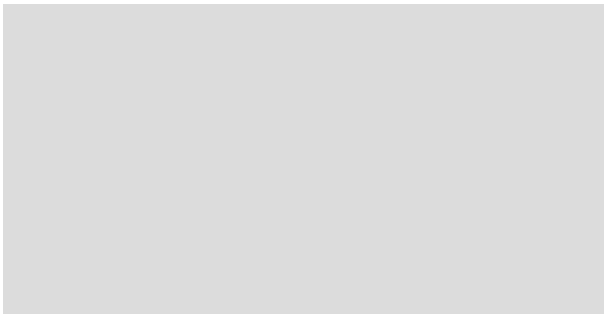
A business heart beats strong, which means plenty of money to support innovative city design and local commerce.

POPULATION
METRO: 2,077,761

HIGHLIGHTED RANKINGS

 PLACE  PROSPERITY

[See Methodology](#) ▶



Setting it apart from many Midwest metros, Ohio’s capital and largest city is one of America’s fastest-growing places—a forward-thinking economic powerhouse that’s also home to one of the largest college campuses, Ohio State University (#26 in our University subcategory). And Buckeye football isn’t the university’s only contribution to local culture: with more OSU graduates deciding to stay in town, Columbus is an emerging tech mecca with a thriving arts scene. The city earns a remarkable #8 ranking for Prosperity nationally in 2021, powered by historically low unemployment and its #19 ranking in our Change in Civilian Labor Force subcategory. Even amidst the pandemic, locals stayed put and insulated, as evidenced by the city’s #8 ranking

for Change in Family Income between 2019 and 2020. The well-rounded economy, it seems, is resilient—buoyed by a growing number of start-ups, as well as top employer Ohio State and Fortune 500s (for which Columbus shares a #21 ranking) like Nationwide Insurance and L Brands. So what do locals do when they're not working? Pre-pandemic, the first Saturday of the month meant Gallery Hop, when galleries would stay open late and performers and artists hit the streets of Columbus' Short North Arts District.

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19. BOISE, ID

Promises of plentiful jobs and after-work outdoor adventure creates a boomtown.

POPULATION
METRO: 710,743

HIGHLIGHTED RANKINGS



PLACE



PROSPERITY



[See Methodology](#) ►

Boise, with an almost 20% population spike in the past decade, is an American West boomtown, where access to the outdoors, a strong economy (thanks to its booming tech sector), and a lower cost of living than many other cities similar in size is drawing people in from all over the country. It's also the highest-ranking city in our index with the smallest population, so it's clear things are only starting to roll for what many are calling the "Austin of the North." It ranks #4 in our Prosperity category, led by the #1 ranking in the nation in our Change in Home Prices subcategory. No other U.S. city's real estate has appreciated more during the pandemic than in Boise. That makes it not so surprising that the city ranks #16 in our Change in Civilian Labor Force subcategory. The city is a net attractor of the urban exodus from other urban centers. Boise's tech scene has a lot to do with this population boom, anchored by the tech giant Micron Technology and blossoming in all sorts of interesting start-ups. Also adding to its allure are mountains, a desert and a river all within striking distance.

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20. TUCSON, AZ

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

POPULATION
METRO: 1,027,207

HIGHLIGHTED RANKINGS



PLACE



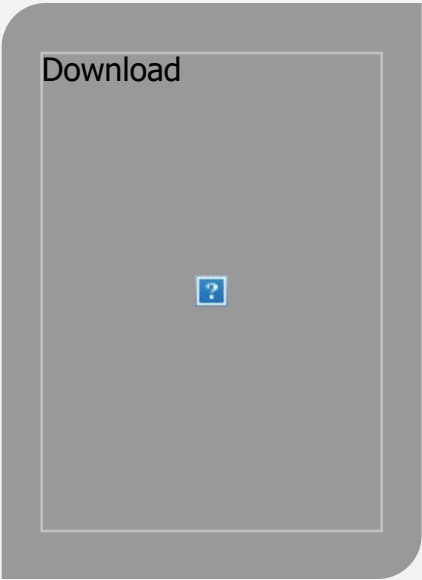
PROSPERITY



[See Methodology](#) ▶

Fast-growing Tucson is buoyed by its sense of place, ranking #10 in both our Weather and our Parks & Outdoors subcategories. The city is poised to ascend up future national rankings, due to a torrent of new investment in all manner of green and common space. Its new Sun Link LRT is sure to improve quality of life, creating a focus on fewer cars and more walkability that's designed to pull the sprawling population together, closer to downtown. Urban innovation that taps its outdoor bounty by increasing access to it is not a hard sell for a town where almost 25% are aged between 20 and 34. You can thank the University of Arizona (ranked #42 nationally in our University subcategory) for the city's youthful bounce. The desert city is also blooming economically. House prices are rising fast as the post-pandemic migration from larger urban centers powers Tucson to a Top 5 ranking in our

Change in Home Prices category. Citizens are also hanging in despite the pandemic's economic impact, ranking #21 in our Change in Family Income subcategory. All this places the city in the Top 10 in our overall Prosperity category. Good thing, too, given that the local shopping ranks an impressive #17 nationally.



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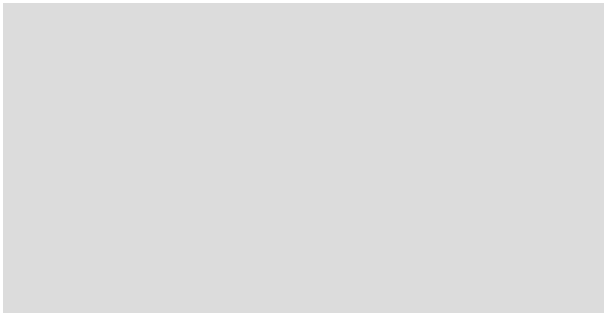
21. PROVO, UT

An outdoor paradise prepares for take-off.

POPULATION
METRO: 616,791

HIGHLIGHTED RANKINGS

 PLACE  PEOPLE
 [See Methodology](#) ▶



With the Wasatch peaks to the east and Utah Lake to the west, Provo—which punches high in our rankings for its small population—is an outdoor enthusiast’s playground. It’s home to Brigham Young University (ranked #34 in our University subcategory) and forms part of Silicon Slopes, Utah’s start-up and tech community. It’s easy access to hiking, river rafting, mountain biking and ski resorts, plus the city’s own 53 green spaces (totaling 2,000 acres, plus 33 miles of trails), earned Provo an impressive #12 overall ranking in our Place category. Provo also ranks Top 3 among the nation’s safest cities. But the real driver of its impressive finish, just outside the Top 20, is the city’s talent and economic performance. Technology, healthcare, 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 (with nearly 43% having earned a bachelor’s degree or higher). Supported also by its #2 ranking in our Change in Civilian Labor Force subcategory, Provo ranked #3 in our People category. And talent continues to stream in, as indicated by Provo’s #7 ranking in our Change in Home Prices subcategory.


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22. TAMPA, FL


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


POPULATION
METRO: 3,097,859

HIGHLIGHTED RANKINGS

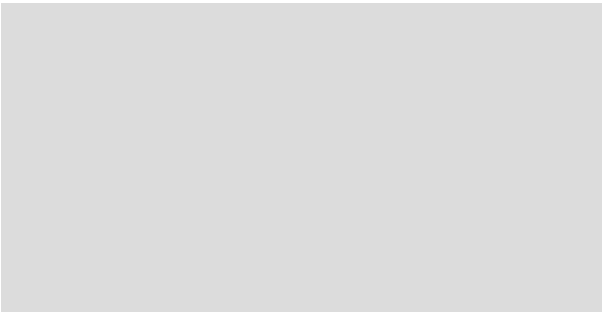
 PLACE

 PROMOTION





See Methodology ►



In Tampa, the natural and built environments are as in sync as Brady and The Gronk. The city has low crime (an impressive #8 in the nation), pleasant weather in

its 361 days of sunshine per year, and sprawling, diverse outdoor attractions, including, of course, nearby beaches like 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 the Garrison Channel. It's bookended by the Florida Aquarium and the popular Ulele restaurant; in between, there's the Tampa Bay History Center, the Florida Museum of Photographic Arts, the convention center and other stops of interest that contribute to Tampa's #10 ranking in Attractions. The pandemic hasn't slowed the city's investment into its visitor economy or its cultural infrastructure. The newly opened Peninsularium is a multi-artist, multi-million-dollar effort to provide Tampa with its first and only permanent, immersive arts installation experience. Tourism numbers are rebounding quickly, too. Good thing, considering more than 1,000 new hotel rooms were added since 2019, and another 1,000 are coming online over the next two years.

23. PORTLAND, OR

America's Left Coast runs deep in this ambitious city on the edge of the wilderness.

POPULATION
METRO: 2,445,761

HIGHLIGHTED RANKINGS



PROGRAMMING



PEOPLE



[See Methodology](#) ▶



Portland's blissful isolation, ambivalence toward established norms and legacy of cooperation and neighborliness—to hew trees and carve out one's place among the encroaching wilderness—makes this one of the most earnest cities in America. It's also one of most beautiful, ranking #11 for Sights & Landmarks and #8 for Parks & Outdoors. One of the zingers in the popular TV show Portlandia identified its lampooned target as “a place young people go to retire.” But it's more like reinventing themselves, taking what was there all along, finding its best parts and doubling down on what works. The proof of its people is in Portland's performance: its citizenry ranks #17 for Educational Attainment. After a healthy population growth pre-COVID (almost 8,500 people moved to town in 2018 and 2019), the city held on to those citizens during the pandemic, ranking #38 nationally in our Change in Civilian Labor force category. Portlanders work hard to play hard. The city ranks Top 10 in the country for its lively Programming, including its restless restaurant scene. But Stumptown (referring to a logging past) isn't a hedonistic pacifist. As the eyes of the world focused on the city's battle against shadowy federal military deployed there to quell Black Lives Matter and social justice protests, Portlanders once again forged their reputation as an uncompromising citizenry.

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24. RALEIGH, NC

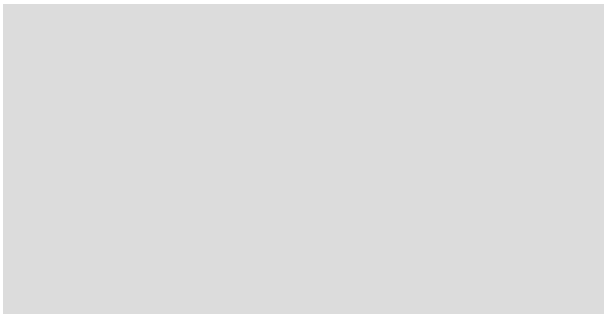
A booming economy and global intellect poise this Carolina powerhouse for the future.

POPULATION
METRO: 1,332,311

HIGHLIGHTED RANKINGS

 PLACE  PEOPLE


[See Methodology](#) ►



The City of Oaks checks all the boxes for a bright, ambitious city of the new American South. Raleigh 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. Ranked #6 in our People category, with the sixth-smartest citizenry in the nation, Raleigh has been magnetic for talent, delivering on its promise of competitive salaries for most of the past decade. But similar to so many high-flying urban centers, the pandemic hit the region hard. Fortunately, the region is well-positioned for recovery, with its three research universities getting back to recruiting young talent to Raleigh; there's also been a flurry of hiring in the area, including Amazon as it looks to bring its new delivery facility, in nearby Cary, online. It's also a great hometown, Top 10 in the nation for Safety and boasting a vividly imaginative culinary scene: Bon Appétit granted one of its coveted Top 10 America's Best New Restaurants for 2017 to a quirky and beautiful combination brewery, bookstore, flower shop and dim sum restaurant called Brewery Bhavana.

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25. MIAMI, FL

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

POPULATION
METRO: 6,090,660

HIGHLIGHTED RANKINGS



PRODUCT



PROMOTION



[See Methodology](#) ▶

Miami's natural attributes have always captured the world's imagination and crystalised the city's hedonistic brand. 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 Miami ranking #6 in our Promotion category. From prominence on Instagram (#2 nationally) to trending on Google (#7), the city where more than 100 languages are spoken across its households also wants to be the place where the new distributed workforce comes to work from home. Take tech-lustling mayor Francis Suarez: last year he helped erect a billboard near Twitter's San Francisco headquarters that read "Thinking of moving to Miami? DM me." Below was his handle. Miami's historic embrace of a crossroads of the Americas has long provided a business advantage few cities claim. It's home to one of the largest concentrations of international banks in the U.S., as well as North America's largest hub—outside of Mexico City, New York and L.A.—of Spanish-language media. It's also at the crossroads of Latin America, both in geography and in culture: Miami intends to promote its connectivity and globalism, and the region's selection as a host city candidate for the 2026 World Cup will help.

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26. CHARLESTON, SC

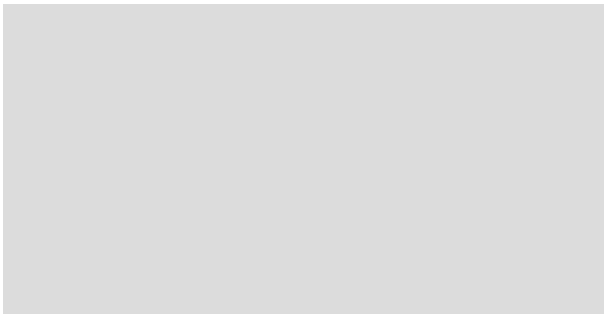
The Holy City boasts European elegance by day, and all kinds of revelry by night.

POPULATION
METRO: 774,508

HIGHLIGHTED RANKINGS

 PLACE  PEOPLE

[See Methodology](#) ►



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 pilgrims from all over the world, propelled by global travel media and the promise of legendary Southern hospitality from an era almost forgotten. In 2020, that hospitality was put to the test:

Charleston's unemployment rate soared while housing prices ended their rapid ascent. The Holy City holds strong, though: it comes in just outside the Top 25. The city comes in at #9 in our important Place category, including an incredible #2 for Parks & Outdoors—trailing only Honolulu among all American cities (with hundreds of thousands fewer residents). A city rich in cultural, natural and military heritage, Charleston nabs a Top 10 spot in our Museums category (#9). Set to open next year, the International African American Museum will illuminate the influential, under-reported histories of Africans and their descendants in South Carolina, highlighting their diasporic connections throughout the nation and the world. The museum's defining feature will be its location at the historic site of Gadsden's Wharf. Nearly half of captive Africans forced to North America in the slavery era arrived through Charleston, and today millions of Americans can trace their ancestors here.


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27. CHARLOTTE, NC


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


POPULATION
METRO: 2,545,560

HIGHLIGHTED RANKINGS

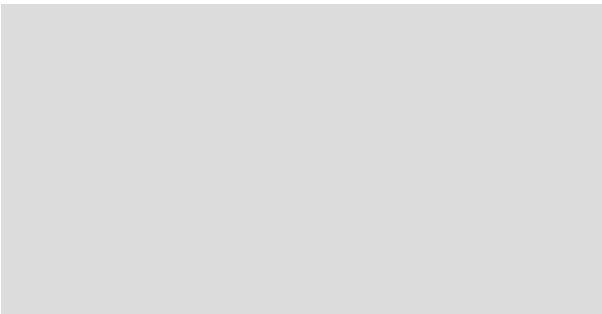
 PRODUCT

 PROGRAMMING





[See Methodology](#) ▶



The 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 tied for the #18 spot in our ranking for Fortune 500 companies in town. Locals in the Queen City are smart, too: Charlotte ranks #36 in our Educational Attainment subcategory. The prosperity is easily accessed and distributed, powered by Charlotte’s #7 ranking for Airport Connectivity. People call their downtown Uptown, but the good news is that it’s all walkable. Beneath its bankerly surface, Charlotte offers unexpected attractions: the NASCAR Hall of Fame, for instance, where you can trace the sport from its moonshine-running roots to today’s multi-billion-dollar powerhouse. Glory Road is a banked ramp featuring historic cars and tracks, and racing simulators let you become a pitstop crew member and see the world from the driver’s point of view. An impressive #22 ranking in our Restaurants subcategory will improve further once the more than three dozen new eateries open in town, including Vaulted Oak Brewing, appropriately housed in a former bank.


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28. SALT LAKE CITY, UT


The Great Outdoors are calling, and Salt Lake is doing its best to keep you in town.


POPULATION
METRO: 1,201,043

HIGHLIGHTED RANKINGS

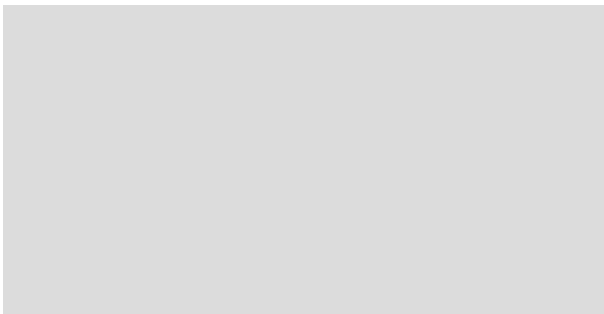
 PLACE

 PROSPERITY





[See Methodology](#) ▶



Combining spectacular natural and built environments, Salt Lake City is no longer just a gateway to the great outdoors but also a welcoming destination with a high cool quotient. The transformation began with the arrival of the XIX Olympic Winter Games in 2002, as the city thawed its reputation as an über-conservative cowboy town with Mormon family values and instead presented a slew of quaint cafés and stylish restaurants. 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 the reason many adrenaline junkies travel and move here. And they work as hard as they play: Salt Lake ranks #13 in our overall Prosperity category, led by its relative resilience to the pandemic's economic devastation. The city is in the top 10% in our Change in Home Prices subcategory and ranks #26 for Change in Family Income. It's citizenry brings the smarts as much as the snowboards, ranking #38 globally for Educational Attainment. The University of Utah ensures the brainpower keeps flowing, with its #42 ranking nationally in our University subcategory.


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29. NASHVILLE, TN


Music City lets you worship your idols, and toast them frequently.


POPULATION
METRO: 1,871,903

HIGHLIGHTED RANKINGS

 PRODUCT

 PROGRAMMING





[See Methodology](#) ▶

Nashville and its citizens have always taken care to invest their money wisely, including for the preservation of historic buildings and to revitalize neighborhoods like Germantown, which was established in the 1850s by European immigrants. Such focus on placemaking and tactical urbanism will put the city on the map globally in future years. Until then, the music scene thrives here, particularly as a younger generation of musicians—Jack White and the Black Keys come to mind—have chosen to live and set up recording studios in town. With a #18 ranking for Programming, the city is finally getting the recognition it deserves for its long but subtle influence on the American fabric. Should you need a respite from culture and the #12-ranked Nightlife, Nashville also offers a sprawling park system with more than 12,000 acres to explore by bike (B-Cycle rental stations are located at greenway trailheads), or by kayak and canoe on the Harpeth River. With a Top 10-ranked university (Vanderbilt sits at #8 in the nation), Top 25 ranking for Fortune 500 companies in town, and its high COVID-19 infection rates in its past, Nashville is poised to return to its pre-pandemic upward trajectory.


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30. MINNEAPOLIS, MN


Culture, affordability and a low pre-pandemic unemployment rates beckon.


POPULATION
METRO: 3,573,609

HIGHLIGHTED RANKINGS

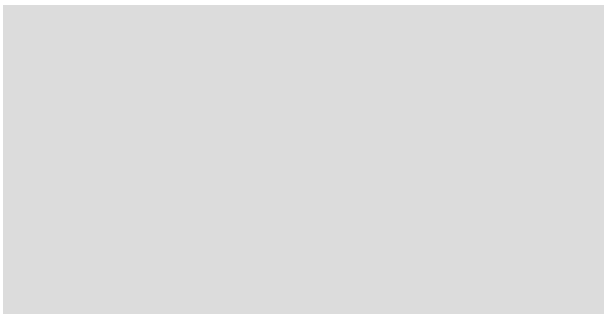
 PRODUCT

 PROMOTION





[See Methodology](#) ▶



As the site of the George Floyd murder at the hands of local police officers that sparked a global movement against systemic racism and police violence, Minneapolis has become a household name. In addition to their vital role in a fight for justice, residents have long advocated for their city, the results of which can be seen in numerous parks, bike trails and placemaking along a prime location on the mighty Mississippi. With 18 Fortune 500 companies—the most per capita of any American metro area—Minneapolis scores an impressive #9 in our Fortune 500 subcategory. The highly educated workforce (ranked #12 in the country for Educational Attainment) enjoys easy access to the rest of the world via Minneapolis–Saint Paul International Airport (#13 for Airport Connectivity). With a #30 ranking for

Programming (including #23 for Nightlife), the city’s heart still belongs to beloved hometown recording artist Prince, whose suburban home and studio, Paisley Park, opened as a museum in 2016. The city has a long way back from a trying 18 months, with its ranking in our Change in Civilian Labor Force subcategory sitting in the bottom 10% nationally, and the subsequent sag in demand for housing pushing real estate prices lower.



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31. KANSAS CITY, MO

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

POPULATION
METRO: 2,124,518

HIGHLIGHTED RANKINGS



PRODUCT



PEOPLE



[See Methodology](#) ▶

Affordable yet packed with culture, sports and plenty of delectable food, 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 boasts strong showings in healthcare and government, but it also has a burgeoning tech scene, which is in large part thanks to it being the first home of the Google Fiber network. The economic resilience of the city meant that it avoided the pandemic's full impact on its labor force. Kansas City ranks #33 in the nation for Change in Unemployment Rate and an impressive #13 in our Change in Civilian Labor Force subcategory, meaning locals stayed in the city. This city is tough to leave, and reopening means more opportunities to visit the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art or the American Jazz Museum. Besides the good weather (which ranks at #33), Kansas City also makes a perfect nesting spot for young professionals and families of all shapes and sizes due to its affordability, increasingly diverse population and world-class universities like Kansas City Art Institute and UMKC. The city ranks #27 for educated citizenry.



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32. SACRAMENTO, CA


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

POPULATION
METRO: 2,315,980

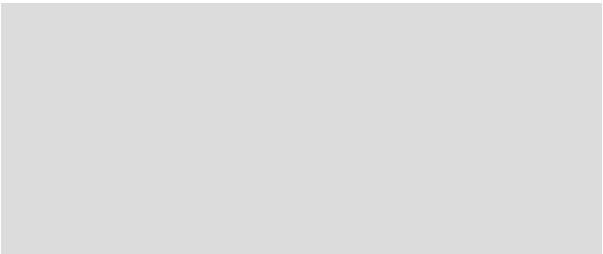
HIGHLIGHTED RANKINGS

 PLACE

 PEOPLE







[See Methodology ▶](#)

California's state capital is peaceful and beautiful, ranking well for its natural attributes, including epic weather (#13) courtesy of its Mediterranean temperatures. Although traditionally one of the Golden State's wealthiest cities, the pandemic has ravaged it economically. The city ranks #83 in our Change in Unemployment Rate subcategory and, not surprisingly, household income plummeted (ranking #68 in Change in Family Income). The City of Trees—residents claim more trees per capita here than anywhere besides Paris—isn't a stranger to cataclysms: the Great Conflagration of 1852 burned 40 square blocks of the fledgling city, leaving what is today called Old Sacramento, with its cobbled streets, historic buildings, steam-hauled trains, horse-drawn carriages and the western terminus of the Pony Express. Hokey? Maybe, but it undoubtedly contributes to the city's rising visitor numbers—at least before COVID-19 hit. Some help from Mother Nature has stewarded the city toward declaring itself America's "Farm to Fork Capital," surrounded by fertile farms. Sacramento's restaurants are only happy to tap the localism. Taste it for yourself at La Cosecha in Cesar Chavez Plaza and discover why Time magazine recently declared Sacramento "America's most diverse city." With its highly educated citizenry, California's capital ranks an impressive #25 in our key People category.

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33. COLORADO SPRINGS, CO

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

POPULATION
METRO: 723,498

HIGHLIGHTED RANKINGS



PLACE



PEOPLE



[See Methodology](#) ►

Situated at the base of Pikes Peak, Colorado Springs is a wonderland for those who love adventure, unsurprisingly ranking #12 in our Parks & Outdoors subcategory nationally. But after you've hit the trails, there are plenty of opportunities to refuel. Today, the fare is increasingly raised and grown locally, and the long-standing brewing tradition adopted by start-ups is thriving. Even the springs in Colorado Springs are being marketed for their terroir. It all comes together—or will come back together, fully, once the effects of social distancing have passed—during mornings at Ivywild School, a local community marketplace for groceries or coffee to go, and during evenings at new spots that seem to open monthly pre-COVID-19, and will once again. The city is also magnetic, even during—or more likely because of—the pandemic's urban exodus from larger centers, ranking Top 3 in the country in our Change in Civilian Labor Force subcategory and #12 in house price increases during that time. That's what happens when a citizenry had some of the lowest COVID-19 infection rates in the country, despite enduring a grim economic toll. Colorado Springs ranked third-last in our rankings for both Change in Unemployment Rate and

Change in Family Income.

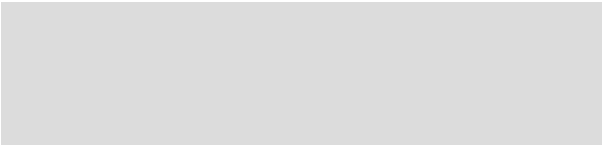


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34. ALBUQUERQUE, NM

Where transcendent natural beauty and a lifetime of outdoor pursuits meet.

POPULATION
METRO: 912,108



HIGHLIGHTED RANKINGS



PLACE



PROGRAMMING



[See Methodology](#) ►

Diverse cultures, authentic art and dynamic traditions have helped shape 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 #46 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, of course, its Indigenous Peoples, the architecture is diverse. The cuisine is also influenced and 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 you when you tell them that Albuquerque ranks #38 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 that's getting national attention. It's shopping, ranked #16 in the country ahead of places like Boston and D.C., may be even more surprising than the culinary scene. Small wonder new residents are pouring in, pushing ABQ's ranking for Change in Home Prices to #17 nationally, just slightly ahead, and directly influenced by, the #14-ranked Weather.

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35. DURHAM, NC

A leading college town is growing from within while welcoming the world.

POPULATION
METRO: 626,695

HIGHLIGHTED RANKINGS



PEOPLE



PROSPERITY

[See Methodology](#) ▶

Durham is one of America's top college towns and at the heart of it is Duke, a private research university that has a global academic reach and counts among its game-changing alumni Melinda Gates and Apple Inc. CEO Tim Cook. Duke ranks #7 in our University category. In a city that ranks #8 for Educational Attainment and #35 for Weather, it's not surprising that the 55-acre Sarah P. Duke Gardens and lively neighborhoods like Rockwood and South Square are mere steps away from campus. And just as Duke University connects Durham to the world, Raleigh-Durham International Airport, a 20-minute drive from campus, puts this small North Carolina city on the flight paths of nine carriers. With 400-plus nonstop flights per day to more than 50 destinations (before the pandemic) and its Refresh improvement program in full effect, this facility earns Durham the #29 spot among American cities in our Connectivity subcategory. Middle of the pack in terms of Fortune 500 companies that call the city home, Durham performed admirably amidst the pandemic lockdown, ranking #19 in our Change in Family Income subcategory and in the top half of the country for Change in Unemployment Rate (#46).



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36. NORTH PORT, FL

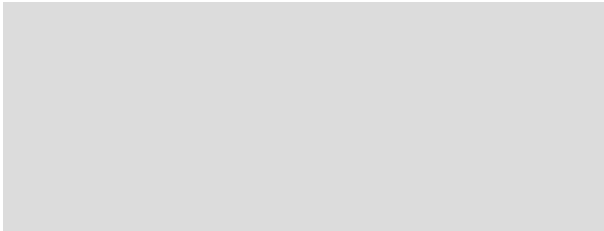
New homes and opportunities bloom in this naturally stunning Florida city.

POPULATION
METRO: 803,709



HIGHLIGHTED RANKINGS

 PLACE  PROSPERITY





[See Methodology](#) ▶



Sarasota County's North Port has the distinction of being the only metro in Florida to have an entire state forest within city limits. When they're not hiking, biking or horseback riding in the 8,600-acre Myakka State Forest or in the city's other 400 acres of parkland, residents are canoeing or kayaking along the Myakka River or North Port's 80 miles of freshwater canals. Then there's Warm Mineral Springs Park, a peaceful pond with up to 51 minerals and a year-round temperature of 85 degrees. Combine North Port's natural attributes with a balmy clime (ranking #46 for Weather), plus one of the lowest crime rates in the nation, at #2 (behind only the fellow Floridian city of Cape Coral), and the Sunshine State city lands in our Top 25 for the important Place category (#16). Its finances are healthy: the 2019 opening of CoolToday Park, the Atlanta Braves' spring training facility, is expected to pump millions into the economy over the next decade, while the West Villages community is an economic mainstay. The city is a mini economic dynamo, ranking #5 for Change in Unemployment Rate (basically adding jobs during the darkest days of the pandemic), while growing incomes (ranking #9 in the country for Change in Family Income).

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37. CINCINNATI, OH

From “Banks of the Ohio” to Over the Rhine, Cincinnati knows entertainment.

POPULATION
METRO: 2,201,741

HIGHLIGHTED RANKINGS



PROGRAMMING



PROSPERITY



[See Methodology](#) ▶

Cincinnati has been simmering just under the surface of mainstream urban vibrancy for a few years now, but in 2018 it leapt into the Top 10 on the list every place wants to be. At #8 on the New York Times 52 Places to Visit in 2018, Cincinnati earned some enviable and well-deserved awareness, particularly for its programming strengths. It ranked high in our 2021 report as well: the city is #32 for Programming, led by #27 for Restaurants and #28 for Nightlife. The architecturally glorious 140-year-old Music Hall recently reopened and is home to the symphony, ballet and opera; it joins an expanded Ensemble Theatre Cincinnati and a new home for the Cincinnati Shakespeare Company to give the Over the Rhine neighborhood real cultural chops. The city ranks #31 for Attractions and, post-pandemic, it's poised for continued ascent, starting with the new home of MLS team FC Cincinnati in the West End as the anchor for a destination neighborhood—a new Wrigleyville or D.C.'s The Wharf. The city's impressive #7 Prosperity ranking nationally proves the power to deliver on its new hometown aspiration, led by the 10 Fortune 500 companies that call it home and that help rank Cincinnati #16 in that category.

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38. ALBANY, NY

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

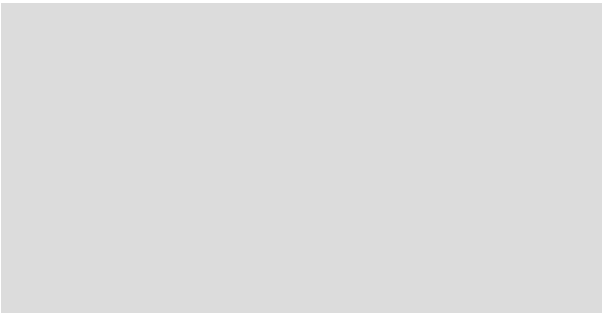
POPULATION
METRO: 880,736

HIGHLIGHTED RANKINGS

 PEOPLE

 PROSPERITY

See Methodology ►



Anchored on the shore of the Hudson River, Albany holds the political power despite being overshadowed by that other New York city downriver. Incredibly connected by road, rail and the #63-ranked airport in America, Albany offers a prosperous place to put down roots, resulting in the second-best national ranking in our Change in Family Income subcategory. Not surprising, the state capital attracts an educated citizenry (#24 in our Educational Attainment subcategory). It has also attracted talent throughout the pandemic, likely from New York City, which ranked it #14 nationally in Change in Civilian Labor Force. But Albany is not all politics, though—it's also a capital of culture, and it boasts an enviable central location, with the Berkshires, Adirondacks and burgeoning Finger Lakes Wine Region—and, yes, the Big Apple—all just a few hours away. Running the Empire State may be big business, but Albany's also a college town, home to a State University of New York campus that helps the city earn a #26 ranking in our University subcategory. Albany prides itself on its history, and its 18th- and 19th-century homes and compact, walkable core let visitors and locals take to the streets, enjoying an emergent dining scene that's poised for big things post-pandemic.

39. PORTLAND, ME

This Maine gem punches above its weight for talent attraction.

POPULATION
METRO: 532,075

HIGHLIGHTED RANKINGS



PEOPLE



PROSPERITY



[See Methodology](#) ▶

In 2014, Portland, Maine, decided to officially declare what pretty much everyone knew. “Yes. Life’s good here” is a patented city brand that some might interpret as a little smug, if it weren’t for the fact that Portland keeps on working to make life even better. It being the smallest city, by population, among the Top 50 in our ranking is just one more confirmation. The city ranks #9 for our Parks & Outdoors subcategory, as part of its #42 ranking in our Place category, a measure of the natural and built environment. There are six unfairly picturesque lighthouses in the area, and the city’s weathered wharfs, cobblestone passageways and historic buildings thrive in the fresh salt air, so much so that its waterfront Commercial Street was declared one of the 10 best streets in the country by the American Planning Association. That this classic American urbanism can be enjoyed without looking over your shoulder (the city is the 22nd-safest in the nation) just adds to Portland’s magnetism. And people are coming, even during the pandemic. This mighty mite ranks #12 nationally in our diverse Prosperity category despite a lack of Fortune 500 companies, and home prices are rising (#14 nationally).




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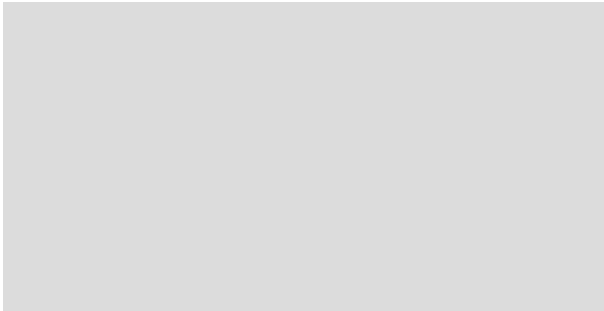
40. MADISON, WI

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

POPULATION
METRO: 653,725

HIGHLIGHTED RANKINGS

 PLACE  PEOPLE

[See Methodology](#) ►



Madison’s enviable position as both capital of Wisconsin and the site of the state’s largest university has certainly fueled its livability in previous rankings, buoyed by

high-paying work, middle-class power and low unemployment. Unfortunately the city has been decimated by the pandemic, tumbling out of the Top 100 for our key Prosperity category (#102), skewed by falling family income and subsequent falling home prices. The good news is that most of the population has remained in the city, riding out the nightmare in a place that had one of the nation's lowest urban infection rates in the early days of the pandemic. The students will be back for the start of the 2021 school year, and this hive of healthcare, IT and manufacturing powered by pipelines of talent out of the University of Wisconsin (and the symbiotic, sustainable relationship between academic infrastructure and economic performance it creates) will resume its ascent. Indeed, Madison has always boasted among the most educated citizens in the country. This year, the city ranks #7 nationally for Educational Attainment. With a typical Millennial population approaching 30% (according to a recent Brookings study), Madison is poised to welcome even more with its affordable housing and employers eager to hire.



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41. ORLANDO, FL

Orlando tries reopening by focusing on being a better hometown.

POPULATION
METRO: 2,508,970

HIGHLIGHTED RANKINGS

-  PRODUCT
-  PROMOTION
- 

[See Methodology](#) ▶

Being the largest city in a region that generates more than \$60 billion in tourism-related revenue every year (2020 and '21 being the notable exceptions) 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 Top 10 ranking in our Promotion category drove its overall ranking, including collecting the third-most TripAdvisor reviews of any American city. Orlando plans buzzy product releases with military precision—and suffered deeply when confronted with an invisible enemy it couldn't defeat quickly, its many high-budget, tourism-reliant initiatives cut short, from SeaWorld's new Sesame Street, rolled out for the show's

50th anniversary, to LEGOLAND Resort's debuted Lego Movie World. The city has also expanded its attention beyond family fun. The new Exploria Stadium houses the local MLS men's and women's teams, with seats for 25,500 fans, with plenty of placemaking rising around the emerging neighborhood. The road back to its visitor economy glory will be a long one for Orlando, as the one-year change in the city's housing prices (#101) and unemployment rate (#85) are both open wounds from the city's pandemic battle.

Download Full Report 

42. SAN ANTONIO, TX

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

POPULATION
METRO: 2,468,193

HIGHLIGHTED RANKINGS



PROGRAMMING



PROMOTION



[See Methodology](#) ▶

The genius of San Antonio is that, ever since 1941, it has sagely leveraged, grown and enhanced its greatest asset and attraction: the River Walk. The idyllic pedestrian promenade along the San Antonio River, extended from three to 15 miles in 2013, is a scenic urban lifeline that connects visitors to everywhere they want to be and anchors the city's #6 ranking for Attractions among American cities. On one end of the River Walk, there's the five colonial missions, a UNESCO heritage site and key players in a #17 finish in our Sights & Landmarks subcategory. 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 curiosities, eclectic stops and riverside cafés. Increasingly, Pearl is a destination within the destination: a mixed-use space in a former brewery, it's a beguiling blend of retail, dining, offices, a riverside amphitheater, events and a campus of the Culinary Institute of America. Around the esteemed school, a host of grads and chefs have clustered, creating a smorgasbord of choices from Italian to 'cue to bakery to vegetarian cuisine. It may surprise you that San Antonio ranks #8 nationally for its restaurants, an important subcategory that will improve with a dozen high-profile openings this year alone.


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43. MILWAUKEE, WI


A sudden destination city pre-pandemic, Milwaukee rebuilds with everything at stake.


POPULATION
METRO: 1,575,223

HIGHLIGHTED RANKINGS

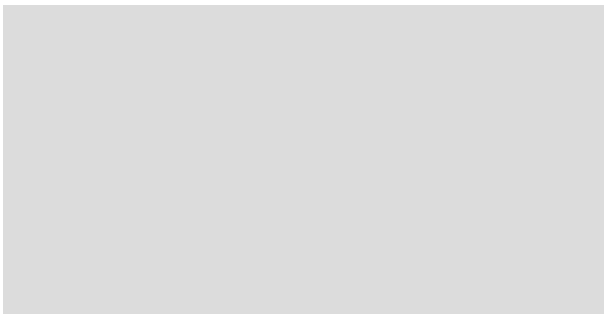
 PROGRAMMING

 PEOPLE





[See Methodology](#) ▶



According to the Wisconsin Department of Tourism, some 23 million tourists visited the Milwaukee area in 2016—and it's been climbing ever since (pandemic excepted), which resulted in an economic impact of more than \$3.7 billion for the city in 2018 alone. So what's been luring these millions to this urban center in the American Heartland? Sited on America's third coast, Wisconsin's largest city combines cherished traditions and modern attitude. It celebrates its beer brewing heritage and offers a vibrant farm-to-table culinary scene—an obvious asset to a city with a century of feeding and brewing for a continent. A jack of all trades but master of none in our categories, the city will fight hard to return to its ascent as a cruise

ship destination. In 2019, 10 passenger ships docked here, more than double from 2018. Plans to expand the downtown Milwaukee convention center (the Wisconsin Center) are also moving forward, with construction expected to begin in 2022. The project hopes to accelerate a downtown renewal kickstarted by the Northwestern Mutual Tower & Commons in 2017, Fiserv Forum (the home of the NBA Bucks) in 2018 and, most recently, the BMO Tower, which will house the city's #21-ranked Fortune 500 companies.


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44. ST. LOUIS, MO

One of the world’s top music cities is an energetic crossroads of the American dream.


POPULATION
METRO: 2,805,190

HIGHLIGHTED RANKINGS

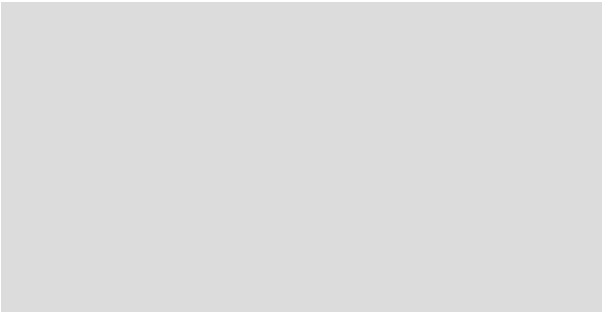
 PRODUCT

 PROMOTION





[See Methodology](#) ▶



America’s gateway to the West has always been an understated city of neighborhoods (ranking #19 in our Sights & Landmarks subcategory) and cultural elegance. It performs well (#18) for nightlife action in bars and clubs (not surprisingly, Miles Davis is a native son), and ranks #23 for Programming, led also by a #21 finish for Restaurants. There’s often a correlation in the rankings between good nightlife and prosperity, and St. Louis is no exception—it ranks #16 for Fortune 500 companies that call the Gateway to the West home. The city’s strategic plans to bolster its ability to attract meetings and events—devastated by the past 18 months—received good news recently when the AC Next Gen Project that will update and expand the America’s Center Convention Complex downtown received approval last summer for \$105 million in bond funding from the city. But humankind can’t live by nightlife alone, especially if children are involved, so there’s always the zoo, and there must be a visit to the mind-blowing (for any age) City Museum. Not surprisingly, St. Louis ranks #16 in our Museums subcategory.


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45. INDIANAPOLIS, IN


Indy is rich in experiences, events and eye-popping housing affordability for a big city.


POPULATION
METRO: 2,029,472

HIGHLIGHTED RANKINGS

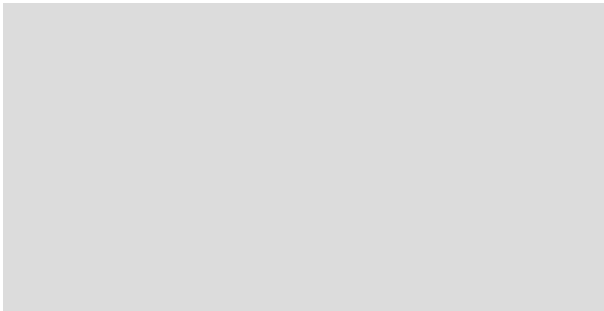
 PRODUCT

 PEOPLE





[See Methodology](#) ▶



It’s difficult to overestimate the powerful influence a strong sports brand can have on the perception and profile of a city. Indianapolis might owe its fame to the century-old auto race known as the Indianapolis 500, but this Midwest metropolis has plenty to offer, even if you don’t have a need for speed. Come for the sparkling airport, world class cultural institutions and bustling nightlife, stay for affordable neighborhoods and family-friendly entertainment. True to its reputation as the capital of speed, Indianapolis is home to workers who fuel a diverse economy anchored by three Fortune 500s—ranking it at a tie for #31 nationally—and some of the shortest commutes of any metro area. Indy has plenty of attractions to call its own. Destinations like the picturesque Canal Walk promenade, the Indianapolis Museum of Art and the Children’s Museum of Indianapolis (the largest institution of its kind in

the world) helped earn Indy an impressive #13 rank in the Attractions subcategory. Urban vibrancy gets a boost with the \$300-million transformation of what was once the largest Coca-Cola bottling facility in the world into the Bottleworks District, featuring the new Bottleworks Hotel and a new home to Indy's best coffee roasters, florists, brewers, food purveyors and artisans.

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46. EL PASO, TX

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

POPULATION
METRO: 840,477

HIGHLIGHTED RANKINGS



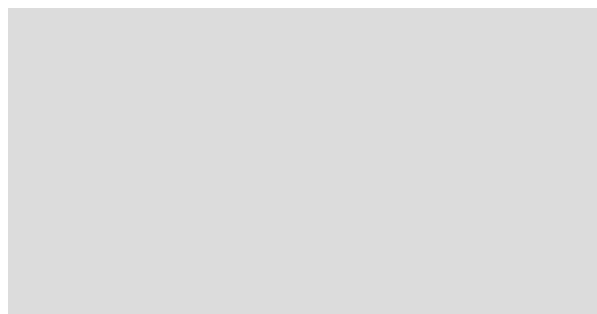
PLACE



PROGRAMMING



[See Methodology](#) ▶



Safe (the “Safest City in America!” if you listen to loud and proud former mayor Dee Margo, even though we have it at #5 in our subcategory), progressive and increasingly basking in the fruits of its 2012 \$500-million bond initiative that funded a children’s museum, new arena, cultural center and more—all downtown—the city is also cooking in the literal sense, ranking #39 for its culinary scene. But the boom is tapping El Paso’s history, too. “The city mothballed its streetcar system in the 1970s,” said Destination El Paso CEO Bryan Crowe. “We brought back the perfectly preserved streetcars to service our newly expanded medical schools.” Today the streetcar travels a 4.8-mile route in two loops through El Paso’s uptown and downtown areas. Fortified by its roots as a cowboy town, El Paso is leveraging its regional pride by enticing scattered locals back home, while embracing its border-city advantage. A #18 ranking in our Change in Civilian Labor Force subcategory points to a growing population. The city also benefits from its direct ties to Mexico and Latin America, with its population mostly of Hispanic origin (80%). It doesn’t get more Tex-Mex than here, where many residents speak a foreign language—in this case, overwhelmingly Spanish—at home.

Download Full Report 

47. BALTIMORE, MD

Baltimore is far more than what you know about it from television. And that’s a very good thing.

POPULATION
METRO: 2,796,733

HIGHLIGHTED RANKINGS

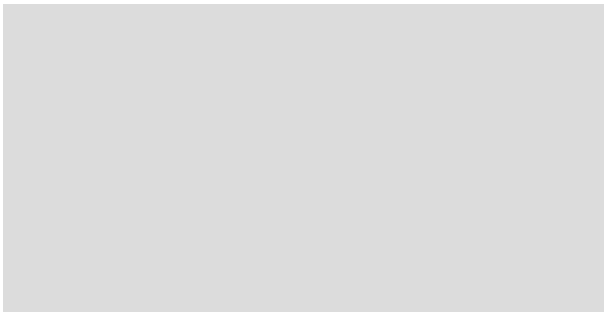
 PRODUCT

 PROGRAMMING





[See Methodology](#) ▶



Less than an hour’s commute from Washington, D.C., Baltimore offers a slower pace of life and significantly cheaper housing than its hyper-charged neighbor to the south. But the time to buy into one of Baltimore’s diverse, historic communities may just be right now—home prices in the city reached a 10-year record in July 2020. Baltimore is also home to world-class institutions like Johns Hopkins University (ranked #6 nationally) and the National Aquarium, as well as a quirky culture that makes Charm City a place like no other. Johns Hopkins is Baltimore’s largest employer, and while it may be lacking Fortune 500 company (ranking #70 in our subcategory), Maryland boasts a \$35-billion aerospace industry, and the defense contractor Northrop Grumman is a Top 5 employer of Baltimore residents. The city ranks an impressive #15 for Educational Attainment. It also earns a #12 ranking for Museums, and many—from historic ships to the highly acclaimed Port Discovery

Children's Museum—are clustered around the Inner Harbor, which for 50 years has served as a nationwide model for the reuse of post-industrial waterfront. With impressive airport connectivity (#21) and established urban infrastructure, Baltimore is #19 in our vital Product category.

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48. PITTSBURGH, PA

America's city of industry is gearing up to supply the global economy all over again.

POPULATION
METRO: 2,331,447

HIGHLIGHTED RANKINGS



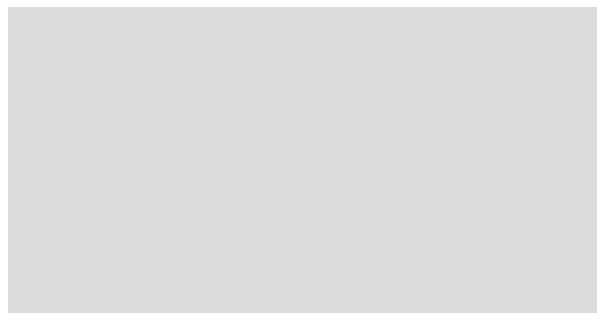
PRODUCT



PROMOTION



[See Methodology](#) ►



It's Steel City, City of (440!) Bridges, Andy Warhol's hometown and birthplace of the NFL's "Stillers." In fact, sports tourism is huge in Pittsburgh, home also to the Penguins and Pirates. According to a study done by the three sports franchises, over the last five years sports tourism led to numerous jobs, \$6 billion in direct or indirect spending and \$73 million in state and local tax revenue. The city knows how to kick back, too: it ranks #29 for great nightlife and #31 for its culinary scene, making it a place of work and play. The city is also home to Carnegie Mellon and the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center, which helps explain its #16 University ranking and an overall sense of practicality and stewardship (and why urbanist and author Richard Florida launched his career here). Case in point: the city held severe COVID-19 outbreaks at bay and quietly was among the best-performing large U.S. cities from a public health perspective. Economically, the city was middle-of-the-pack during the devastation of the past 18 months, from its one-year change in unemployment rate (#47) to its change in median family income (#59).

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49. CAPE CORAL, FL

America’s safest city is no longer overlooked in favor of glowing neighbors Sanibel Island and Fort Myers.

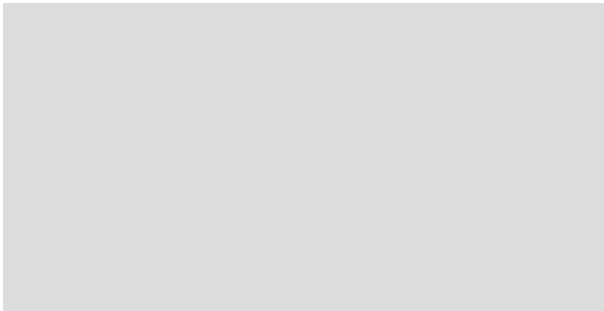
POPULATION
METRO: 737,468

HIGHLIGHTED RANKINGS

 PLACE

 PRODUCT

[See Methodology](#) ►



Sure, there’s Southwest Florida’s first Westin property—coming off a \$15-million remodel later this summer. As well as another big reno just completed at Boca Grande’s historic Old Florida Gasparilla Inn. But people are coming here to live. It’s not only the safest city in the nation, it’s also one of the most beautiful, ranked #3 in our Parks & Outdoors subcategory. What Cape Coral lacks in the soft, sandy beaches of its neighboring islands it more than makes up for in riverfront vistas and outdoor pursuits galore. It’s also one of the most accessible, with Southwest Florida International Airport (RSW)—ranked #35 nationally for Connectivity—a mere 30-minute drive after baggage claim. The city is attractive to students, too, who are drawn to the easy lifestyle and a dozen colleges and community colleges within 50 miles of the city center. Increasingly, graduates are putting down roots. According to Yahoo Finance, more than 50% of Millennials in the region own homes—the third highest rate in the nation. A post-pandemic wave of next-level dining and drinking options—ranging from elevated cuisine at the Bohemian to Ceremony Brewing—is sure to improve the area’s #70 Restaurants ranking in the future.

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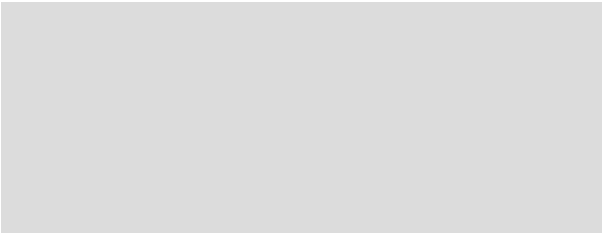
50. RIVERSIDE, CA

Prosperity, great weather and multiculturalism make Riverside a city of opportunity like few others.

POPULATION
METRO: 4,560,470

HIGHLIGHTED RANKINGS

 PLACE  PROSPERITY





They call it the City of Arts and Innovation, but Riverside, on the outskirts of Los Angeles, 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 name, Riverside is also home to the Riverside Metropolitan Museum and Fox Performing Arts Center, a 1929 theater built in Spanish Colonial Revival style in the heart of downtown. The city boasts one of the nation’s most ethnically diverse populations, with citizens of Hispanic descent making up 53% of the local population, while nearly 44% of citizens speak a non-English language. 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. Riverside also performs well in our Place category (#17), which includes Safety (#34) and the third-best weather in the country—that is, only if you enjoy 277 days of sunshine annually. The city has also fared very well during the pandemic, attracting residents in the work-from-home new normal and raking Top 10 nationally in both our Change in Civilian Labor Force and Change in Family Income subcategories.



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51. OGDEN, UT

A city that prospers off the outdoors.

POPULATION
METRO: 662,875

HIGHLIGHTED RANKINGS

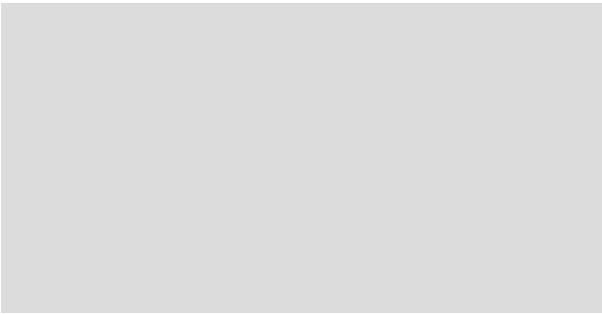
 PEOPLE

 PROSPERITY





[See Methodology](#) ▶



Sitting nearly 4,300 feet above sea level along the northern end of the Wasatch Mountain range just 35 miles from Salt Lake City, Ogden appeals mightily to the avid outdoor set. But it has an urban wild side, too, with events like the annual Witchstock fest (complete with a Zombie Crawl) and the family-friendly Harvest Moon Celebration. 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, the city being situated in the heart of the sector's cluster two miles from Hill Air Force Base. Combine these powerful industries and you get one of the most well-off—and, at #104 in our Promotion category, overlooked—cities in the nation. But the secret is out. Between February 2020 and 2021, the city earned a #5 ranking for Change in Civilian Labor Force. Few smaller cities are feeling the impact of the big-city urban outflow as much as Ogden. Not surprisingly, the city's housing is booming, and it ranks #4 nationally in our Change in Home Prices subcategory. City building is also ongoing, including a new, 5.3-mile rapid bus transit line from downtown to Weber State University and McKay-Dee Hospital.

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52. NEW ORLEANS, LA

Few cities of this size radiate the lore that New Orleans does.

POPULATION
METRO: 1,267,777

HIGHLIGHTED RANKINGS



PROGRAMMING



PROMOTION



[See Methodology](#) ▶

In the face of poverty and injustice—and environmental catastrophes compounded by both—NoLa has created a culture of presence, music and festivals that may pale in size to others in the world, but never in intensity. It's why the city ranks #7 nationally for Programming, our category spanning shopping, dining, and after-hours vibrancy. Given the need to celebrate, to seize the day, to revel in all that fusion of humanity and culture and sweaty new people and ideas, the city ranks #5 in our Nightlife category. After all, the party only begins in the French Quarter. It grows more refined and local as it weaves into Marigny, Bywater or the timeless jazz seduction of Frenchmen Street. NoLa also shines in our Shopping category, trailing only New York City nationally, helped by the intoxicating treasures of Magazine Street convincing visitors that their finds are only available here and now. And they often are. In the last few years, the city has been renovating and expediting projects languishing since the Hurricane Katrina rebuild. Having been gutted by one of the highest COVID-19 infection rates among American cities, New Orleans is once again getting up off the mat.

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53. KNOXVILLE, TN

Knoxville’s tradition of collaboration is now creating a food and drink scene to watch.

POPULATION
METRO: 853,337

HIGHLIGHTED RANKINGS

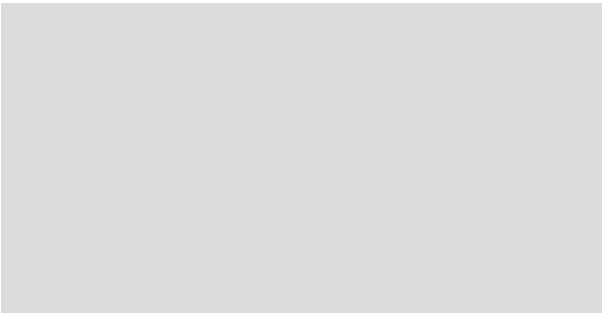
 PEOPLE

 PROSPERITY





[See Methodology](#) ▶



An urban walker’s paradise, downtown Knoxville’s features vibrant murals, local music venues, historic sites and museums. Instead of playing second fiddle to nearby Asheville and Chattanooga, Knoxville is finding its own groove and becoming an increasingly prominent destination for food lovers of all tastes—the state’s first James Beard Award–winning chef, Joseph Lenn, operates J.C. Holdway right downtown. What makes the food scene so spectacular is the collaboration of local chefs with other chefs, brewers, distillers and wine makers. Group efforts, like a long-table dinner along the middle of a downtown street in 2017, have resulted in a

number of unique culinary experiences for which demand has been spring-loaded post-pandemic. Knoxville's superpower isn't just pocket urbanism: the city features more than 150 miles of trails and greenways, paddle-friendly rivers, and forest hiking, all within a quick bike ride or drive. No wonder it ranks #21 in America in our Parks & Outdoors subcategory. Like other ascendant small cities in our ranking, Knoxville may live middle-of-the-pack in our Promotion category (#57) but the secret is out among Americans seeking a new hometown with plenty of opportunity, especially one with the #11-best Change in Unemployment Rate in 2020 and early 2021.

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54. JACKSONVILLE, FL

Florida’s fastest growing city is the next destination for talent and tourists.

POPULATION
METRO: 1,503,574

HIGHLIGHTED RANKINGS

 PROGRAMMING

 PROMOTION





See Methodology ►

Young professionals are lured to Jax for jobs as well as for its low cost of living. The city boasted Top 10 unemployment rates last year, even with a raging pandemic. With just a short drive to beaches and the country’s largest urban parks system (giving it a #25 ranking on our Parks & Outdoors subcategory), Jacksonville isn’t a bad place to hang your beach hat. Boosting the city’s outdoor chops is the newly consolidated and easier-to-access 7 Creeks Recreation Area, with longer trails, more recreational opportunities and a total of 5,600 uninterrupted acres of preserved wildlife that represents one of the most expansive new networks of parks in the U.S. With top jobs in aerospace, financial services and IT, Jacksonville is home to companies like Bank of America Merrill Lynch, Mayo Clinic, JP Morgan Chase, Citi, Johnson & Johnson and Aetna, giving the city high marks in our Fortune 500 Companies subcategory (tied for #38). Jax also has bragging rights to a diverse workforce, making it more inclusive and welcoming for all types of workers. With 22 miles of beaches and access to the winding St. Johns River, Jacksonville is filled with natural amenities to enjoy nearly all year round in the Florida sunshine.


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55. OMAHA, NE



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

POPULATION
METRO: 931,779

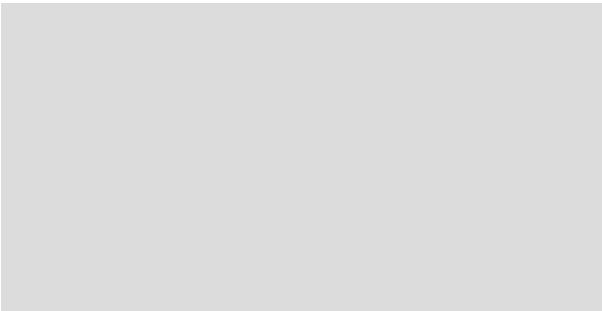
HIGHLIGHTED RANKINGS

 PLACE

 PROGRAMMING

[See Methodology](#) ▶



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’s decision to stay in Omaha—where he lives in a modest home he bought for \$31,500 more than 60 years ago—has always been a source of curiosity. But the Berkshire Hathaway CEO’s hometown 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 ties at a #24 ranking for Fortune 500 firms in town, boasting the most (eight) of any city with less than a million people. The city has also been notably economically resilient in the face of the pandemic, ranking #13

nationally in Change in Unemployment Rate. But it's not just stalwarts like Mutual of Omaha that keep this city bustling: a growing tech sector has earned Omaha the nickname "Silicon Prairie." It's important to note that Omahans work to live, too, as evidenced by its #31 ranking for Nightlife and #39 for Shopping in the country (pre-COVID-19, anyway).

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56. FAYETTEVILLE, AR

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

POPULATION
METRO: 514,259

HIGHLIGHTED RANKINGS



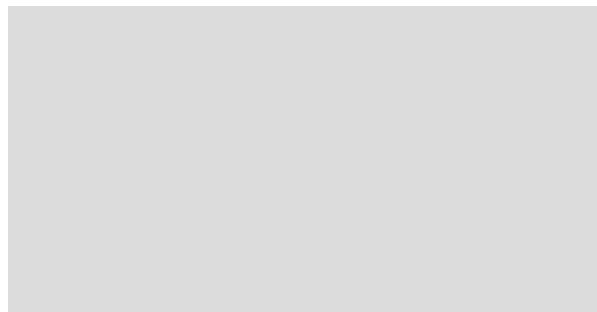
PEOPLE



PROSPERITY



[See Methodology](#) ►



Situated in the Ozark Mountains with more than 200 days of sunshine a year, Fayetteville has plenty of outdoor play to offer. Home to the University of Arkansas and its nearly 28,000 students, the Natural State municipality is also considered the entertainment capital of northwest Arkansas, with everything from live music to street performances. The city is financially solid, with a Top 25 overall ranking for Prosperity in America, including a tie at #31 for Fortune 500 Companies, and seemingly pandemic- proof employment numbers. The city ranked #12 in the country in our Change in Unemployment Rate subcategory. Its performance in our Prosperity category 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 new \$13.8-million, 37,4000-square-foot Civil Engineering Research and Education Center at the Arkansas Research and Technology Park, due for completion soon, will enable testing of large-scale structural systems and will be a hub for research, academic, government and industrial partners throughout the state.

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57. HONOLULU, HI

There's the unparalleled natural beauty, of course, but there's innovative shopping and dining, too.

POPULATION
METRO: 984,821

HIGHLIGHTED RANKINGS



PLACE



PROGRAMMING



[See Methodology](#) ►

As a global vacation destination, visited by more than six million tourists last year—up 16.2% in five years, according to local numbers, Honolulu is trying to heal an economy devastated by the pandemic. It has among the highest rates of unemployment in the country (ranking #109 in Change in Unemployment Rate), and a long struggle back to rebuilding its visitor-focused workforce. Things were going in the right direction for the state at the beginning of 2020, with visitation and spending up 5% year-over-year as late as February. But with the pall of COVID-19 falling swiftly and mercilessly, month-over-month visitor spending dropped as much as 80% in 2020 and 2021, with almost 10,000 jobs lost in the city as a result. But Honolulu will be back—it's getting increasingly difficult to find a place to lay your towel in Waikiki again, and rehiring has commenced. It's also simply too coveted as both a destination and a hometown to be down for long. The city ranks #6 in the nation in our layered Place category, including #1 for Parks & Outdoors, with its verdant, knife-edge topography exploding into the blue sky from rolling hills every few miles.



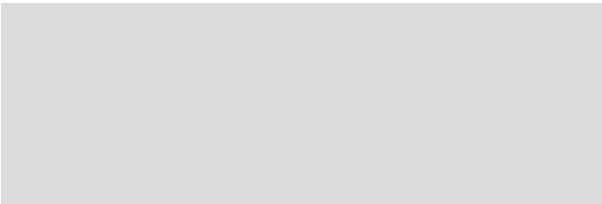
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58. PALM BAY, FL

Open natural spaces inspire entrepreneurs ready for take-off on Florida’s Space Coast.

POPULATION
METRO: 585,507

HIGHLIGHTED RANKINGS





PLACE



PEOPLE

[See Methodology](#) ▶

From the fishing pier and sandy beach at Castaways Point Park to the fully handicapped and special needs accessible playground at Inspiration Park, Palm Bay values its 29 green spaces. Combine those with the 200-acre Fred Poppe Regional Park, golf courses, Turkey Creek Sanctuary and beaches, and there was a lot of park space to make riding out the pandemic a little easier here. Combine that natural endowment with one of the country’s lowest crime rates (#10) and the result is a #35 ranking overall for Place, a category that also includes Sights & Landmarks and Weather. Manufacturing thrives here, led by defense and semiconductor firms. Being four miles to the Florida Institute of Technology and 48 miles to the John F. Kennedy Space Center, the Space Coast city also has a growing technology industry. The economic firepower means the city ranks #22 nationally in our Change in Unemployment Rate subcategory. Looking ahead to the area’s recovery, Palm Bay is planning to revitalize its Bayfront district adjacent to Indian River Lagoon, a plan that would include an accessible public waterfront, with a recommended budget of \$29 million, by 2024.


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59. MEMPHIS, TN


Two centuries of creativity and civil rights poise Memphis for a bright future.


POPULATION
METRO: 1,339,623

HIGHLIGHTED RANKINGS

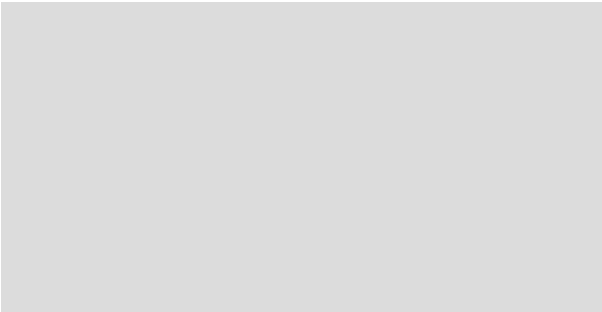
 PRODUCT

 PROMOTION





[See Methodology](#) ▶



Tennessee’s second-largest city is an American icon that’s 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 can’t hold a guitar to Memphis’ contributions to the Civil Rights Movement. Or its barbecue. With so many stories to tell, the city ranks #27 nationally in our Museums subcategory—home to the aforementioned Graceland and the National Civil Rights Museum, and #37 for Sights & Landmarks. 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. But the city is also an ascendant business center, with legacies like the country’s first Black millionaire, J.E. Walker, and ties at #31 for Fortune 500 Companies, with corporate titans including FedEx and AutoZone headquartered here. Affordable housing—and new downtown investment—make Memphis a city to watch, especially given its #20 ranking for Change in Civilian Labor Force, indicating that the city is drawing new, post-pandemic residents able to work from anywhere.




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60. FRESNO, CA

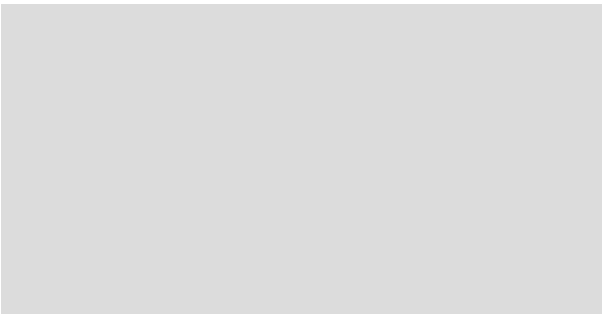
The urban heart of central California is also the state’s breadbasket.

POPULATION
METRO: 984,521

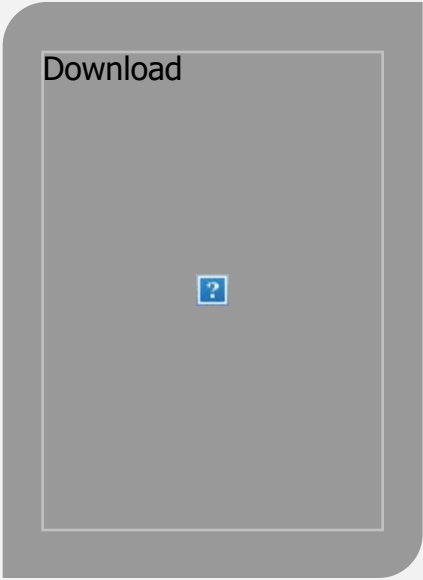
HIGHLIGHTED RANKINGS

 PLACE  PROSPERITY


[See Methodology](#) ►



While often overshadowed by its coastal peers, Fresno, the largest inland city in California at almost one million people, is much more than a farming town. The city is also a hub for manufacturing, education and healthcare. Its central location, about halfway between Los Angeles and Silicon Valley, has long drawn entrepreneurs seeking connection to California’s power centers. It’s perhaps why the city has one of the best unemployment numbers in the country (#9) and, even during the pandemic, the ranking for Change in Family Income between 2019 and 2020 is Top 15 nationally. Of course, farming has contributed to the economic resiliency. Fresno County’s economic output from agriculture adds up to \$8.3 billion annually, providing ample opportunity for its large foreign-born population. The city’s revitalizing 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. For now, it’s the center of a vibrant farm-to-table restaurant scene (#43), with a slate of restaurants, breweries and even a long-anticipated downtown wine bar sure to improve the city’s culinary scene. Near-perfect weather (#8) and easy access to Yosemite and Sequoia National Parks mean plenty of day trips.



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61. LEXINGTON, KY

The energetic metro races to expand.

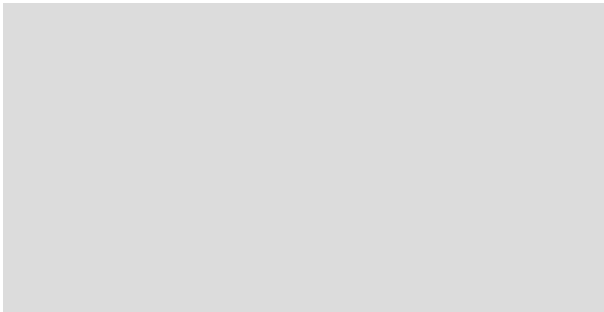
POPULATION
METRO: 510,647

HIGHLIGHTED RANKINGS

 PROGRAMMING

 PROSPERITY

 [See Methodology](#) ▶



There’s more to the Horse Capital of the World and the Bluegrass Region metro than thoroughbreds. The birthplace of bourbon made our Top 50 for Nightlife, at #48, with everything from party-bike bar hopping to the Bluegrass Trail for craft beer lovers. With Kentucky’s largest mall, the city ranked #60 for Shopping. Those two subcategories contributed to Lexington’s overall #58 spot for Programming. “Lex” is also relatively big on TripAdvisor, ranking #54 for total reviews, which helped its #67 Promotion ranking. Lex can toot its own horn for the \$220-million, 800,000-square-

foot mixed-use City Center downtown, in the final stages of opening with two hotels and luxury condos. Then there's the \$275-million expansion to Lexington Convention Center's Rupp Arena at Central Bank Center, slated to be fully open by next year. The economic pipeline has resulted in this small but mighty city being incredibly resilient, even during the pandemic, ranking #20 in Change in Unemployment Rate between 2020 and 2021, as well as #26 for Change in Family Income. Lex already ranks #26 in the nation for most educated residents. It's likely going to attract many more.

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62. OKLAHOMA CITY, OK

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

POPULATION
METRO: 1,382,841

HIGHLIGHTED RANKINGS

 PEOPLE

 PROMOTION





[See Methodology](#) ▶

As a long-time business center for the energy, biosciences and aerospace sectors, this is a city where linear thinking just doesn’t cut it. Yes, a new \$288-million convention center opened downtown recently, boasting 200,000 square feet of exhibition space and a 35,000-square-foot ballroom. But there’s also the only urban whitewater rafting facility in the world. Already designated as an official Olympic and Paralympic training site, Oklahoma City is creating the finest rowing racecourse in the world 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. OKC was also one of four communities to receive a multi-year grant from the Outdoor Foundation, which aims to make getting outside part of the fabric of peoples’ lives by facilitating outdoors access for kids and families of all backgrounds. This openness to take care of business and livability is getting noticed by the rest of the country—the city is increasingly a new hometown for thousands of families, indicated by its #17 ranking in our Change in Civilian Labor Force subcategory, tracked between February 2020 and February 2021.


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63. SANTA ROSA, CA


Prosperous, safe and well-educated, Santa Rosa is as resilient as it is beautiful.


POPULATION
METRO: 499,772

HIGHLIGHTED RANKINGS

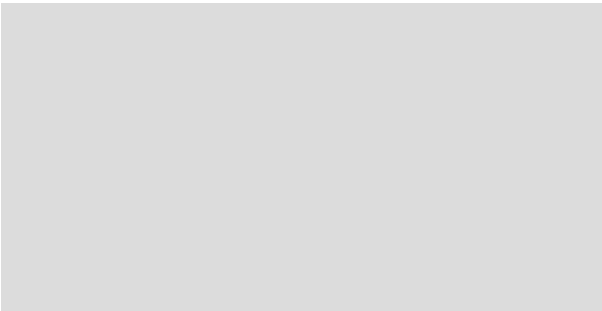
 PLACE

 PROSPERITY





[See Methodology](#) ▶



After suffering untold tragedy during the Tubbs wildfire in 2017 and, you know, the pandemic, Santa Rosa—“the urban heart of Sonoma County,” located 55 miles north of San Francisco—is poised to face the future more resilient than ever. Just consider that the city is the smallest—by population—in our Top 100 ranking to better appreciate its middle-of-the-pack finish. As the largest city in Northern California’s Wine Country, Santa Rosa enjoys amenities both human and natural. The city ranks #11 for Safety and #18 for Weather. Its wealth means that even throughout the pandemic, the city ranked #3 in the nation in our Change in Family Income. America’s 34th-most educated citizenry knows how to preserve wealth. They also know how to enjoy the fragile majesty around them. As the New York Times wrote

about Santa Rosa in its annual 52 Places to Love in 2021: “Everything is within reach, including the rough, beautiful Sonoma County coastline. The region brings together so many different experiences: manicured vineyards, a wonderful downtown with breweries and coffee shops, dark-green forests and snaking rivers, mountains and big agricultural valleys.” Also within reach: a SMART train station that will connect the city to Marin County and ferries to San Francisco.

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64. SPOKANE, WA


Spokane is drawing priced-out West Coasters and growing

prosperous as a result.

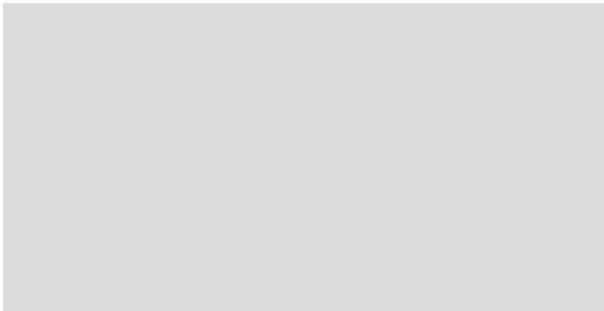
POPULATION
METRO: 550,160

HIGHLIGHTED RANKINGS

 PLACE

 PROSPERITY

[See Methodology](#) ▶



Seattle’s real estate gold rush has as many losers as winners, and those who missed out are headed to the 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. It ranks Top 3 for Change in Unemployment Rate (more people are working, even during the pandemic), as well as in our Change in Home Prices subcategory (prices are rising and fast—20% over the past year with a still-affordable average of \$330,000). It’s also #11 for Change in Family Income (2020 vs. 2019). All this good news means the city ranks #1 in the nation in our coveted Prosperity category. Spokane. In the middle of Eastern Washington state. Believe it. The nightlife (#50 in the country) matches a feisty and growing culinary scene. Spokane is the urban heart of Washington’s Walla Walla, Yakima and Columbia wine regions. The bounty of the land can be tasted not only in restaurant wine lists but also at tasting rooms throughout the city. Speaking of Yakima, it produces 75% of the country’s hops—more than enough to justify Spokane’s craft beer boom that today includes 31 breweries.

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65. OXNARD, CA

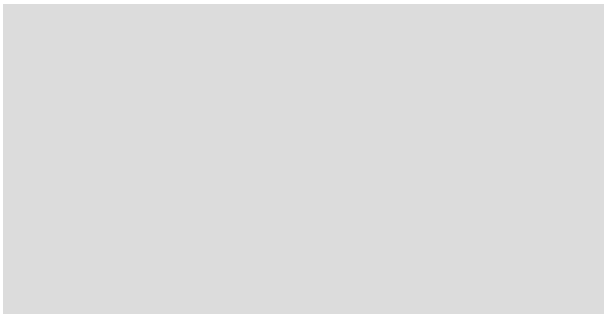
Rich, rugged and sunny, Oxnard’s future as a coveted hometown is looking bright.

POPULATION
METRO: 847,263

HIGHLIGHTED RANKINGS

 PLACE  PEOPLE

[See Methodology](#) ►



Oxnard, sandwiched between more famous Malibu and Santa Barbara, is an increasingly poorly kept secret. This California city has too much going for it to stay under the radar. It’s gorgeous weather ranks #3 in the country, and its direct access to beaches and the coastal mountains means a Top 10 finish in our deep Place category. The city’s diversified economy, including agriculture, oil, shipping, and business and financial services, makes Oxnard a magnet for both high-income and educated households and foreign-born residents, giving the city a #65 rank overall in our vital People category. But the pandemic did hit this California dream town hard. The city ranked in the bottom 20 percent nationally in Change in Family Income (#99) between 2019 and 2020, and for Change in House Prices (#80). Still, proximity to L.A. and Port Hueneme, right next door—the only major navigable port in

California between Los Angeles and the San Francisco Bay—means the city's economic fortunes will turn sooner than later. The California coast's allure, after all, has always bounced back. Especially in places as safe (#14) and idyllic as Oxnard.

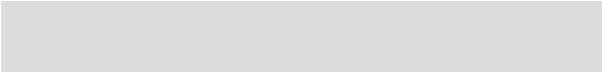


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66. AUGUSTA, GA


There's more to life than golf in this poised hometown of the future.



POPULATION
METRO: 599,616



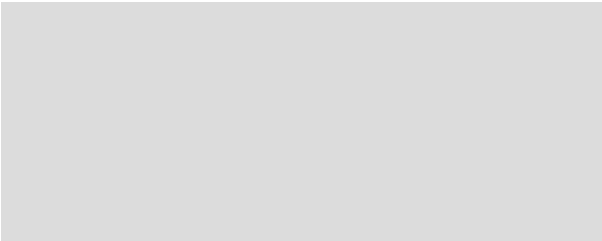
HIGHLIGHTED RANKINGS

 PLACE

 PROSPERITY

[See Methodology ▶](#)



Internationally famous for hosting the Masters golf tournament each spring, Augusta was rocked last year when the city’s largest event was cancelled for only the second time ever due to the COVID-19 outbreak. (The first time was World War II.) Still, this layered and beautiful city of stately avenues that share the urban grid with the Savannah River and the Augusta Canal (and the iconic train tracks) seemed to be holding up well, ranking #19 in our Change in Unemployment Rate subcategory (and #37 in the nation for our main Prosperity ranking). Once the pandemic passes, the city can continue its economic ascent—and not just from the return of the 200,000 golf fans, pros and media annually. Augusta is a military center and already houses Fort Gordon and its 20,000 employees. Things will really take off in the next few years with the announcement of a U.S. Army Cyber Command facility. Combine the expected job growth with median housing prices around \$100,000 and a #21 ranking in our Safety subcategory (and #40 for Weather) and you have one compelling home town. Small wonder, then, that the city is Top 25 in the nation in our Change in Civilian Labor Force subcategory.

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67. MCALLEN, TX

An economic dynamo, fueled by Mexican-American talent and culture.

POPULATION
METRO: 855,176

HIGHLIGHTED RANKINGS



PLACE



PROSPERITY



[See Methodology](#) ▶

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 hosts 42 automotive suppliers employing 40,000 people, mostly high-skill workers. McAllen has recently focused on attracting companies from across the border, and saw a major success with the opening of a new facility for the Mexican manufacturing company Tetakawi. This diverse city welcomes its foreign-born population, attracting residents from near and far due to its strong manufacturing economy. And it's reaping what it sows: McAllen ranks a remarkable #7 in the nation in our Change in Civilian Labor Force subcategory. Even during the pandemic, the city's citizens held fast, finishing #16 in Change in Family Income (2019 vs. 2020). New residents are coming for the quality of life that locals love. McAllen ranks #21 in our deep and vital Place category, with its excellent weather and low crime rate (both ranking #16 nationally). The city has a vibrant theater scene, including local troupes and touring Broadway productions, which are sure to thrive again once social distancing is lifted.



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68. GREENSBORO, NC

History and the land’s bounty run deep in this North Carolina gem.


POPULATION
METRO: 762,063

HIGHLIGHTED RANKINGS

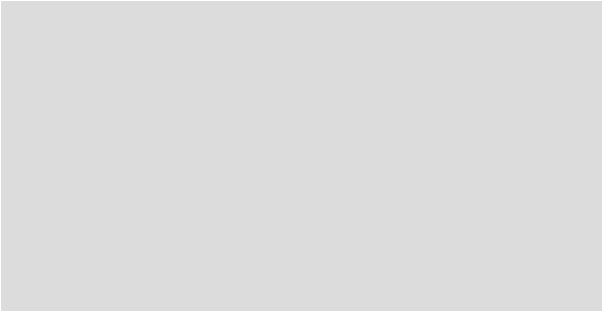
 PROGRAMMING

 PROSPERITY





[See Methodology](#) ▶



A quest for diversity is part of Greensboro's past, and events that transpired in the city helped shape African American legacy. Today, Greensboro is a city that draws history buffs, antique furniture shoppers and foodies. In North Carolina, fertile farmland is a great source of pride, and Greensboro residents have a strong connection to the land and the food they put on the table. Locals and visitors come together around food—at markets 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 #62) offers a special kind of American sensibility and 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 ranks #5 in the country in our Change in Family Income (comparing 2019 and 2020), as well as #29 for Change in Home Prices (comparing median prices between February 2020 and February 2021). Overall, the city finished an impressive #14 in our main Prosperity category.

69. PROVIDENCE, RI

Fresh air and fresh faces rule in America's smallest state.

POPULATION
METRO: 1,618,268

HIGHLIGHTED RANKINGS



PRODUCT



PROSPERITY



[See Methodology](#) ►

The smallest state in America has a capital city with plenty of big ideas, a lot of very smart and creative people and a happening nightlife. Home to an Ivy League college, 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 #8 nationally in the University subcategory. It also boasts plenty of fresh air to go along with the fresh perspectives of academia. Start your ramble at the Rhode Island School of Design Museum of Art, which offers a collection featuring some 84,000 artifacts from ancient Rome, Egypt and Greece, as well as modern Eames furniture and Frank Lloyd Wright stained-glass windows. Brown University's historic campus on 18th-century College Hill is not far, and you can wander the tree-lined streets, where an impressive collection of beautiful Georgian-style homes sit side by side. No wonder the city ranks #41 in the country for Sights & Landmarks. And with a #35 ranking for Safety, exploring this endlessly walkable city is the best way to discover its low-key appeal.


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70. ROCHESTER, NY


The faded industrial Great Lakes titan still has a lot working for it.


POPULATION
METRO: 1,072,877

HIGHLIGHTED RANKINGS

 PROGRAMMING

 PEOPLE

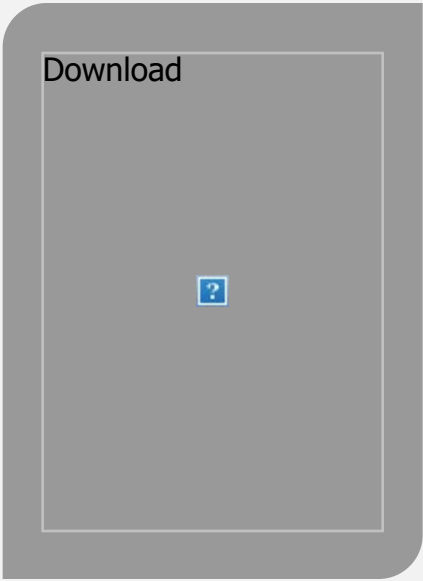




[See Methodology](#) ▶

Look back through its history far enough and you’ll discover that Rochester was one of the country’s first boom towns. The fertile Genesee River Valley fueled torrid entrepreneurship and massive wealth in flour mills, then manufacturing, then again with 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, at an average price of \$180,000 but up

12.5% as of April year-over-year, according to Zillow—remain. And so does the city’s legacy of research and development. Several of the region’s universities (including the University of Rochester and Rochester Institute of Technology, ranked #18 nationally in our University subcategory) 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 a highly educated, skilled workforce intensifies post-pandemic. The city already has an enviable foundation of industries ranging from Kodak legacies like optics, photonics and imaging, to biotech, energy innovation and IT services. The city’s ranking of #36 in Educational Attainment by its citizens speaks volumes about the good hands that steer this former industrial titan.



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71. COLUMBIA, SC

Economic stewardship and urban investment power South Carolina’s stealthy state capital.

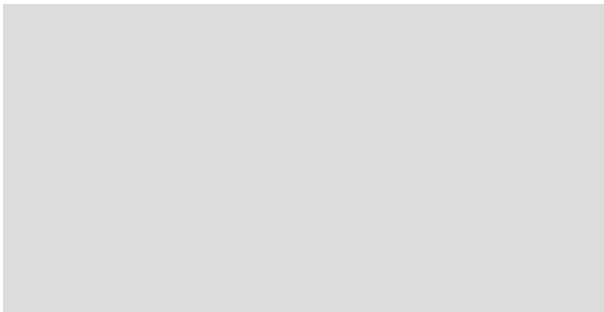
POPULATION
METRO: 824,278

HIGHLIGHTED RANKINGS

 PEOPLE

 PROSPERITY

[See Methodology](#) ▶



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 #61 ranking in our Promotion category isn’t exactly making the city blow up online, its #57 in TripAdvisor Reviews means that people who know are regularly talking about this city. So what’s the (nascent) buzz? Well, 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. Four-year-old Segra Park (formerly Spirit Communications Park)—shut down just a few years after opening due to the pandemic—is set to host both minor league Fireflies games and get locals out to shows and public events once more. Speaking of residents, they’ve held fast through a challenging year and a half, ranking #16 nationally in our Change in Unemployment Rate and #35 for Change in Family Income. The University of

South Carolina, ranked #47 in the country, adds a youthful dynamism to the historic urban stock here—the Vista warehouse district being just the latest example.



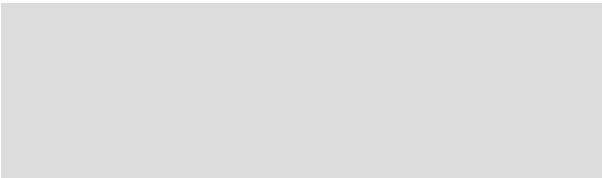
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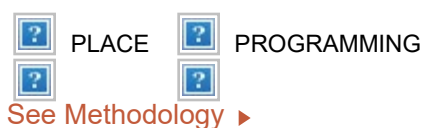
72. VIRGINIA BEACH, VA

Big-city amenities lap the golden sand in Virginia’s largest city.

POPULATION
METRO: 1,761,729

HIGHLIGHTED RANKINGS





Few East Coast American cities blend the urban with the natural as beautifully as Virginia Beach. With 38 miles of coastline at the mouth of the Chesapeake Bay, Virginia Beach has long been a vacation destination for folks looking to escape the sweltering summers of Washington, D.C. But Virginia's largest city is coming into its own, with a growing Millennial population drawn by a strong economy, affordable housing and thriving local food scene. Recapturing hundreds of millions from domestic and international tourists, plus the tens of thousands of hospitality-related jobs that evaporated with the lockdown, will be key to the city's rebound. Fortunately, new investment is afoot, with everything from 1865 Brewing Co., the first Black-owned brewery in Hampton Roads, to the recently unveiled Apex Entertainment, an 85,000-square-foot amusement center. Expect VB's #24 ranking for Attractions nationally to improve shortly. The pristine, endless sandy beach, charmingly framed by a three-mile, 140-year-old boardwalk, is the city's top draw, earning Virginia Beach a Top 25 ranking in our Place category, powered by its sixth-lowest crime rate in the country.

[Download Full Report](#)

73. GREENVILLE, SC

With a location as beautiful as it is central, Greenville is open for business.

POPULATION
METRO: 895,942

HIGHLIGHTED RANKINGS



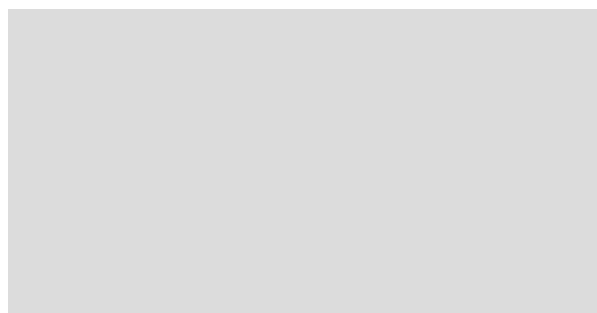
PRODUCT



PEOPLE



[See Methodology](#) ►



This compact city nestled up against the Blue Ridge Mountains is doing a lot of things right, and its #58 ranking in our Product category proves it has invested well in its institutions and attractions. From the Museum and Gallery at Bob Jones University, one of America's finest collections of paintings from Italian masters like Giotto di Bondone, to the Shoeless Joe Jackson Museum and Baseball Library that invites visitors into the home where the baseball legend lived and died, Greenville's cultural credentials earn it a #45 ranking in our Museums subcategory. While Falls Park on the Reedy is a lovely natural oasis in the center of the city (resulting in a #48 ranking in our Parks & Outdoors subcategory), the artfully cantilevered Liberty Bridge next door is an equally impressive destination—a pedestrian walkway above the falls. The city is peppered with such gems, ranking an impressive #47 in our Attractions subcategory. Locals know they have a good thing going, which is why most stayed put during the past year and a half, resulting in the Greenville's #9 ranking in our Change in Civilian Labor Force subcategory (measured between February 2020 and February 2021).

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74. STOCKTON, CA

From agricultural center to bedroom community to downtown hot spot.

POPULATION
METRO: 742,603

HIGHLIGHTED RANKINGS

 PLACE

 PROSPERITY

[See Methodology](#) ▶

A once-sleepy agricultural town, Stockton has recently gained kudos as a more affordable bedroom community for Silicon Valley. But there's plenty going on within its city limits. Healthcare and education are the city's largest sectors, thanks in large part to the University of the Pacific, which helps support a #49 ranking in University. Manufacturing and logistics are also major parts of the economy, providing opportunity for Stockton's diverse population. Despite being an inland city in California's Central Valley, Stockton has the unique advantage of being home to a deep-water port connected to the San Francisco Bay. Its revitalizing downtown just welcomed its tallest building, a California Superior Courthouse, and, until social distancing went into effect, played host to numerous outdoor festivals and concerts that take advantage of the excellent weather (#12). Residents rode out the pandemic by staying put, indicative of Stockton's #6 ranking in our Change in Civilian Labor Force subcategory. Given the city's Top 10 ranking in our Change in Home Prices subcategory (tracked between February 2020 and February 2021), it seems a lot more people are arriving post-pandemic.

75. WINSTON-SALEM, NC

Few small cities in America punch above their economic and creative weight as much as Winston-Salem.

POPULATION
METRO: 666,216

HIGHLIGHTED RANKINGS



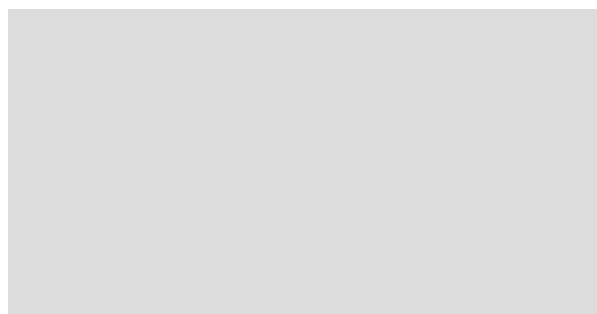
PRODUCT



PROSPERITY



[See Methodology](#) ▶



To localize what's happening in the heart of North Carolina, just look at the city's Wake Forest Innovation Quarter—or, as of last year, just "Innovation Quarter." Or use IQ. The downtown-based research park encompasses 90 companies, more than 1,000 residences, five academic institutions, and 20 miles of connected greenways and parks. With the last of the historic buildings renovated in the area, the next phase is to build new to capture the sudden interest in the city's relentless pursuit of innovation and making—continuing on its 300-year history of textiles, manufacturing and, of course, tobacco. The city's current triangulation of both declining and emerging industries and the investment that comes with being home to Wake Forest University (#17 in the nation in our rankings) has catapulted Winston-Salem to #6 in America for Prosperity, led by its #1 ranking for Change in Family Income during the pandemic. That kind of performance gets noticed quickly, and the city's #40 ranking in our Change in Home Prices subcategory will likely climb given the wealth of beautiful, historic single-family homes priced well under \$200,000. That they may be haunted only adds to the intrigue (and social media cred) for out-of-town buyers.

[Download Full Report](#)

76. DAYTON, OH

The arts fly high in this aerospace hub.

POPULATION
METRO: 803,543

HIGHLIGHTED RANKINGS

?

PEOPLE

?

PROSPERITY

[See Methodology](#) ▶

Dayton is known for airplanes—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 Museums subcategory, at #62. Along with a #68 ranking for Nightlife, the city hit #80 in the nation for Programming, a category that also includes Restaurants and Shopping. With strong manufacturing, healthcare and IT sectors, Dayton is the state's aerospace hub today and in the future, with investments like the Air Force Life Cycle Management System's recently awarding the University of Dayton Research Institute a 10-year contract worth \$28.5 million to provide F-15 sustainment engineering studies. The city stayed on course during the past hellish year and a bit, ranking #21 in the nation for Change in Unemployment Rate and #22 for a Change in Home Prices.

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77. AKRON, OH

Water and wealth distinguish the Ohio metropolis.

POPULATION
METRO: 703,845

HIGHLIGHTED RANKINGS

PEOPLE

PROSPERITY

See Methodology ▶

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, including the Tudor Revival Manor House, 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 is symbolic of the wealth that still persists in Akron today. One of the world’s leading polymer centers, the city is home to eight Fortune 500 companies, tying for #38 in that subcategory nationally. Not surprisingly, Akron’s strongest category performance is in Prosperity, at #29. The city is making the single largest infrastructure investment in its 189-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.

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78. DETROIT, MI

The world is rooting for Comeback City. It’s got a new arena, streetcar and unshakeable local pride.

POPULATION
METRO: 4,317,848

HIGHLIGHTED RANKINGS

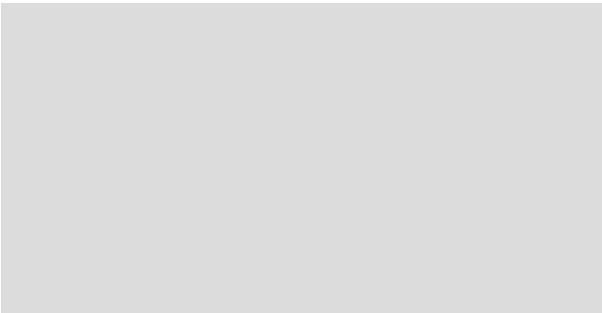
 PRODUCT

 PROSPERITY





[See Methodology](#) ▶



Detroit has been on top of the world, it’s been as low as you can go. Call it Motor City, the D, Comeback City... they all apply and more. Certainly, the latter was appropriate in spring 2018, when Detroit emerged from the bankruptcy it had been struggling through since 2013. And there were encouraging words for the tourism industry—which, before the pandemic, welcomed 19 million visitors annually who spent more than \$6 billion. The city even ranks #15 for Instagram Hashtags—pandemic year and all. The 6.6-mile QLine streetcar—named after Quicken Loans, which bought naming rights—has been operational on the Woodward Corridor for a few years. Yet more than \$7 billion in investment has poured into the corridor route

since 2013. More than 200 development projects are under construction, planned or completed throughout Downtown, Midtown, New Center and the North End. The city's #14 ranking for Fortune 500 Companies should improve with all the new infrastructure. Already improving in an almost unthinkable ascendancy for a city written off by everyone but the true believers? The city's #26 Prosperity ranking in the nation, including #2 in Change in Unemployment Rate. Comeback, indeed.

[Download Full Report](#)

79. MODESTO, CA

Already sunny and diverse, Modesto's strategic location near

Silicon Valley has the city ready for take off.

POPULATION
METRO: 543,194

HIGHLIGHTED RANKINGS



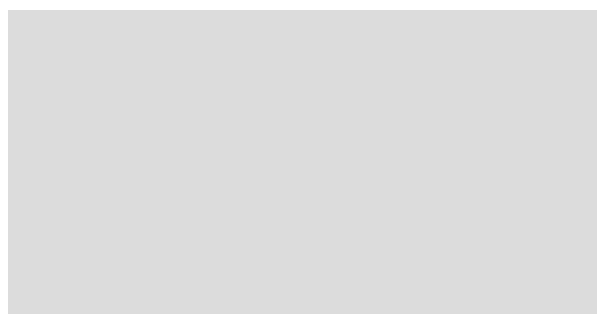
PLACE



PROSPERITY



[See Methodology](#) ►



The Central Valley city has plenty of sun (with a #11 ranking nationally) making it a unique hub for warm-weather agricultural products, including almonds, tomatoes and grapes. All that agricultural labor has attracted a large foreign-born population, while the city's close proximity to Silicon Valley gives it a relatively high household income, with a #18 ranking in the nation for Prosperity. Modesto performed well, economically speaking, during the pandemic, ranking #18 nationally in our Change in Family Income subcategory, which was related to the city's relatively stellar performance in keeping unemployment low. In the coming years, the commute from Modesto to the world's largest tech companies will get a lot easier with a new rail service that takes advantage of the city's historic train station and will serve as a catalyst for downtown development. Modesto's already high Place ranking (#33) 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 (#106 nationally) will improve as well.


[Download Full Report](#)


80. CHATTANOOGA, TN


Affordable living amidst an outdoor bounty.


POPULATION
METRO: 556,209

HIGHLIGHTED RANKINGS

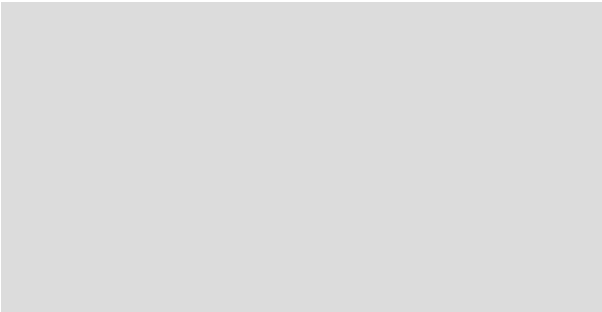
 PRODUCT

 PROSPERITY



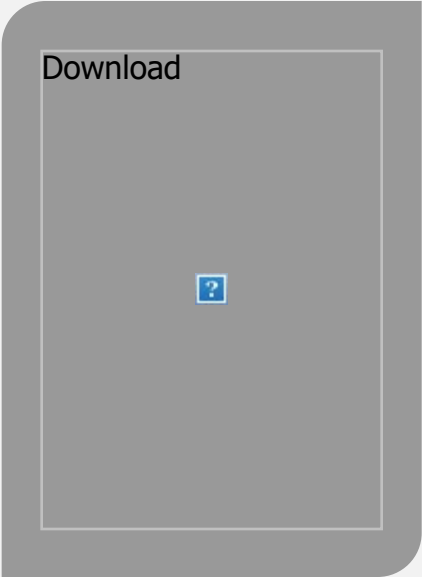


[See Methodology](#) ▶



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 in 2015. The town certainly boasts the adrenal bonafides: from climbing the Tennessee Wall to all manner of self-propulsion just outside of city limits. To say nothing of craft breweries like Heaven & Ale to speed recovery time. No wonder it ranks at #18 in our Parks & Outdoors subcategory. Despite the natural bounty and serenity, Gig City boasts internet velocity supplied by the publicly owned Electric Power Board (EPB). It’s also possible to drive to Nashville and Atlanta in under two hours. Companies with deep talent needs in town include Volkswagen and Blue Shield of Tennessee. The city is also nurturing business start-ups with the biggest business incubator in Tennessee, as well as the biggest downtown innovation district of any U.S. city its size. Oh, and the median price for a single-family home is \$249,000, according to Redfin, up 17% year over year. The city ranks Top 20 in the country for Change in Home Prices, tracked

between February 2020 and February 2021, and an incredible #4 for Change in Unemployment Rate over that same time.



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81. BUFFALO, NY

Understated urban revival amidst one of America's architectural bounties.

POPULATION
METRO: 1,130,175

HIGHLIGHTED RANKINGS



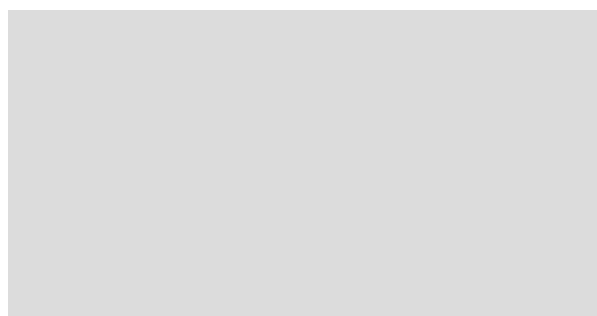
PEOPLE



PROMOTION



[See Methodology](#) ▶



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 had 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 still the only city in America where the country's three most iconic architects still have buildings standing: Frank Lloyd Wright's Martin House, plus the recently restored Frank Lloyd Wright houses of Graycliff; Louis Sullivan's Guaranty Building (today an office building and bank); 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. Buffalo already ranks Top 25 (#24) in our Sights & Landmarks subcategory and will only improve.

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82. HARRISBURG, PA

This small Pennsylvania dynamo has economic horsepower to spare.

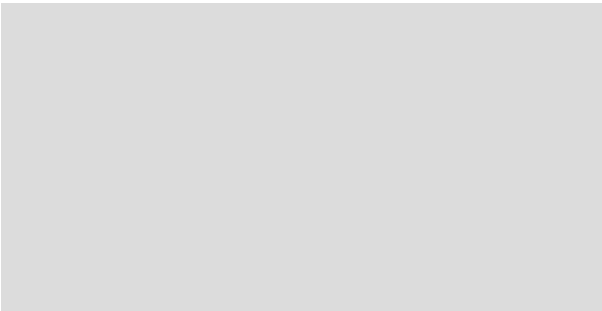
POPULATION
METRO: 571,013

HIGHLIGHTED RANKINGS

 PEOPLE

 PROSPERITY

 [See Methodology](#) ▶



The state capital on the banks of Susquehanna River with views of the Appalachians' Blue Ridge is the economic heart of about 400 surrounding

communities, including Hershey. With the government as the main employer, other key sectors include health services and technology. 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 is also home to an impressive group of Fortune 500 companies (tied at #38). The city also landed at #52 for People, a category that includes Educational Attainment (#60) and Change in Civilian Labor Force (#45). Harrisburg's safety (#37) and Convention Center size—the Pennsylvania Farm Show Complex and Expo Center boasts more than a million square feet of exhibition, meeting and banquet space—make it poised to capture the regional tourism, meetings and conventions rebound to further bolster its economy at a pivotal time. Harrisburg University is getting a major lift, too: a new \$130-million, 386,208-square-foot building set to open this fall and will house its Health and Science Education Center, as well as a hotel and restaurant.

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83. RICHMOND, VA

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

POPULATION
METRO: 1,269,530

HIGHLIGHTED RANKINGS

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PLACE

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PROMOTION

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See Methodology ▶

Richmond may radiate a “genteel and understated nature” as the New York Times observed, but things happen here. It’s a wealthy city, ranking #18 for the presence of Fortune 500 companies in town. But the pandemic has wreaked havoc on the city’s otherwise enviable prosperity, even though it started the crisis strong in mitigating job loss initially. Richmond ranks among the bottom 20% in the nation in our Change in Unemployment Rate (#94), tracked between February 2020 and February 2021. As such, the city ranks toward the bottom of our index for Prosperity, at #85. The economic situation means the Top 25 most-educated citizenry in America is leaving the local workforce—and even the city. The city ranked out of the Top 100, at 101, in our Change in Civilian Labor Force subcategory. Still, a city this established, central and storied will not be down for long. It still weights Top 50 in our deep Place category—with a #27 ranking for its Sights & Landmarks, a subcategory that tracks neighborhoods. And the neighborhood of Jackson Ward, once the epicenter of the city’s Black culture, will thrive again, and the nearby restaurants (ranking #41 in the nation) and the galleries of Broad Street still reward exploration on foot or bike.

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84. WICHITA, KS

Development takes off in the cultural hub of Kansas.

POPULATION
METRO: 637,690

HIGHLIGHTED RANKINGS

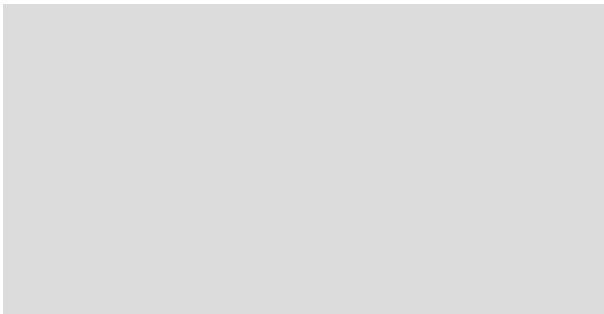
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PLACE

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PEOPLE

[See Methodology](#) ▶



The Air Capital of the World (named because of the manufacturing of aircraft, its pro-aviation business environment and the largest concentration of aerospace manufacturing employees in the nation) performs consistently across all our categories, with Product (#66) and Programming (#67) being notable. The former includes Attractions (#56) and Museums (#53), and Wichita has draws such as Sedgwick County Zoo, the Mid-America All-Indian Center, Ulrich Museum of Art and the Kansas Aviation Museum. The city scores well for Programming, too, with its

1,200 restaurants and 30 food trucks together ranking #56 in the country. Rounding out this small cultural powerhouse are big-city cultural icons like the Wichita Grand Opera and Ballet Wichita. Development is occurring all over: in the Historic Delano District (where cowboys caroused in the 1870s and '80s) with a new extended-stay hotel; and downtown, where the new \$75-million Riverfront Stadium for Minor League Baseball opened in April 2021 and where developers are turning four vacant buildings into a hotel, health school, culinary college and student housing. Wichita performed well in our Change in Civilian Labor Force, ranking #29, with sweet isolation, urban amenities and America's 28th-best weather has people considering the middle of America like never before.

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85. WORCESTER, MA

A city characterized by deep thinkers and bold designers.

POPULATION
METRO: 923,672

HIGHLIGHTED RANKINGS

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PLACE

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PEOPLE

[See Methodology](#) ▶

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 #31 for Clark University, with Worcester Polytechnic Institute also drawing students from all over the country. Given the academic chops, it’s not surprising the city ranks #41 for Educational Attainment among its citizenry (more than 30% of residents hold a bachelor’s degree or higher). With manufacturing, education and healthcare 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 more affordability, room and safety (for which Worcester ranks Top 20 in the country) away from urban centers. The city’s #16 ranking for Change in Home Prices in 2020 certainly indicates a town getting noticed.

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86. GRAND RAPIDS, MI

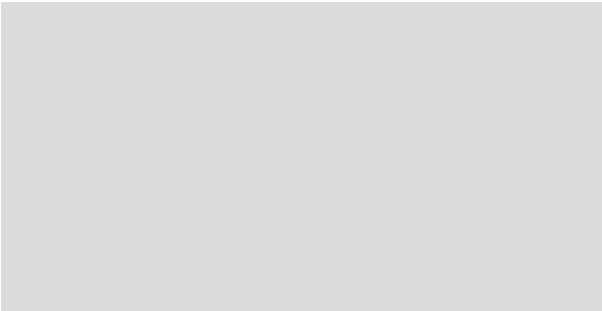
A cool urbanism runs through this Michigan city’s deep sense of place.

POPULATION
METRO: 1,062,392

HIGHLIGHTED RANKINGS

 PRODUCT  PROSPERITY
 

[See Methodology](#) ▶



Sure, it gets cold in Grand Rapids, which ranks dead last, at #100, for Weather in this year’s index, but that doesn’t keep residents of Michigan’s laid-back second city from living all four seasons outdoors. That might mean paddling along the state’s longest river, taking in ArtPrize (the annual international art competition), sampling brews at the Michigan Brewers Guild Winter Beer Festival—or simply enjoying life in a growing city that retains its small-town feel. Locals insist you can’t miss the

stunning Frederik Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park, a sprawling complex of botanical treasures accented by the work of international artists. Architecture buffs will want to schedule a tour of the Frank Lloyd Wright Meyer May House, and the enormous Alexander Calder statue outside City Hall can also be found on the city's official logo. Grand Rapids is clean, friendly and safe (with a stellar #15 ranking in Safety), making it a prime spot to raise a family. Kids can romp through some 1,200 acres of parks as their parents enjoy the option of cycling to work along one of the city's many trails. Getting in and out is easy, with the city enjoying the #46-most connected airport in the country.

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87. TULSA, OK

The industrious company town doubles down on livability with a public space for the ages.

POPULATION
METRO: 990,544

HIGHLIGHTED RANKINGS

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PLACE

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PROMOTION

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[See Methodology ▶](#)

Can a park bring a city into the 21st century? When Tulsa philanthropist George Kaiser decided to create the Gathering Place, he made no small plan, aiming for a space that would “bring together people throughout the Tulsa area to rediscover that we are all bound together by commonalities.” Kaiser, one of the 100 wealthiest people in the world, wanted a park to break down inequalities and increase livability. So he invested \$465 million into 66.5 acres. It quickly made it on Time magazine’s World’s Greatest Places list. Kaiser takes the long view: “A single new community commons cannot dramatically change the trajectory of a city by itself, of course. But so much else is also happening in Tulsa at the same time that we feel the Gathering Place can help serve as the catalyst for a more vibrant and dynamic city.” This is a pivotal year for Tulsa, 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 Greenwood, at the time the wealthiest Black community in the country and known as Black Wall Street. Greenwood Rising, the city’s new history museum and memorial, is vital to confronting a tragedy that was kept quiet for decades.


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88. BIRMINGHAM, AL


Magic City has many new tricks.


POPULATION
METRO: 1,085,330

HIGHLIGHTED RANKINGS

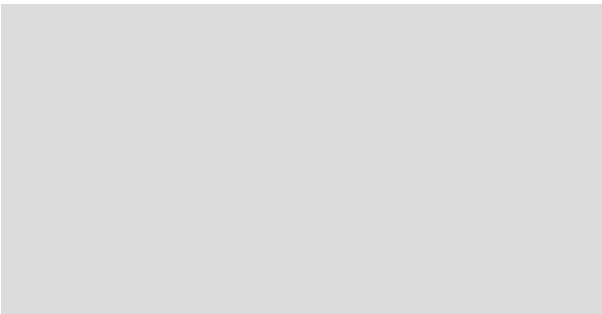
 PROGRAMMING

 PEOPLE





[See Methodology](#) ▶



Before the COVID-19 pandemic, few American cities were as ascendant as Alabama’s largest. With a confluence of culinary talent (and awards), downtown revitalization and impressive economic projections, Magic City was on its way. But despite the crisis, the city’s economy—the one Forbes predicted as a Top 10 most promising job market based on net employment outlook for the first quarter of 2020—is holding resilient. The one year change in unemployment rates between February 2020 and February 2021 ranked #32 nationally. The pandemic also seemed to make Birmingham even more magnetic: the city ranks #15 in our Change in Civilian Labor Force subcategory, indicating a net growth of new talent. Post-pandemic, the city will work hard to resume its culinary trajectory, with long-time

favorites like Niki's West and John's Diner hopefully open again, along with Frank Stitt's trio of award-winning restaurants: Highlands Bar & Grill (winner of the James Beard Foundation's Outstanding Restaurant), Bottega and Chez Fonfon, the city's #64 Restaurant ranking is only temporary. Also poised to welcome back eager residents and in-the-know tourists are the handful of restored historic theaters—from the Lyric, which reopened in 2016, to the Alabama Theatre.


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89. LANCASTER, PA



From the Amish to protons, a borough diversifies.

POPULATION
METRO: 540,999

HIGHLIGHTED RANKINGS

 PLACE

 PROSPERITY



[See Methodology](#) ▶

The country’s oldest Amish settlement is here, its members getting around by horse and buggy and living without electricity. 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 the country’s oldest continually running theater (the circa-1852 Fulton Opera House), and its central location along the New York–Washington distribution corridor. From architectural styles dating back to the 1700s to modern art galleries, Lancaster’s distinction is evident as you walk its historic streets. With a #32 ranking for Shopping (vintage clothes, country quilts, antiques, contemporary jewelry and more), it landed at #72 overall in our Programming category. It’s also safe, ranking #32 in the country in that subcategory. Manufacturing, food processing (Kellogg Company operates here), finance and insurance are major employers. So is healthcare, a sector that’s growing: the Penn Medicine Lancaster General Health Ann B. Barshinger Cancer Institute is building a new \$48-million Proton Center, scheduled to open later this year. The economic activity has propelled Lancaster into the Top 50 among America’s most prosperous cities (#44).


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90. LOUISVILLE, KY


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

POPULATION
METRO: 1,257,088

HIGHLIGHTED RANKINGS

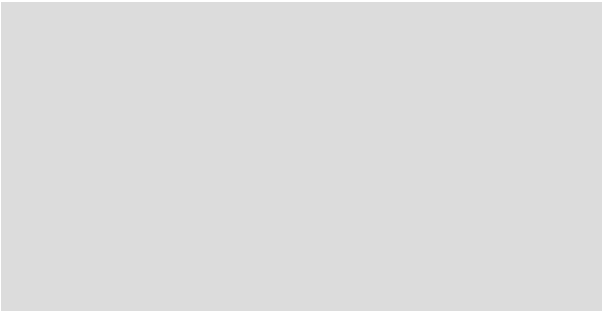
 PROGRAMMING

 PROMOTION

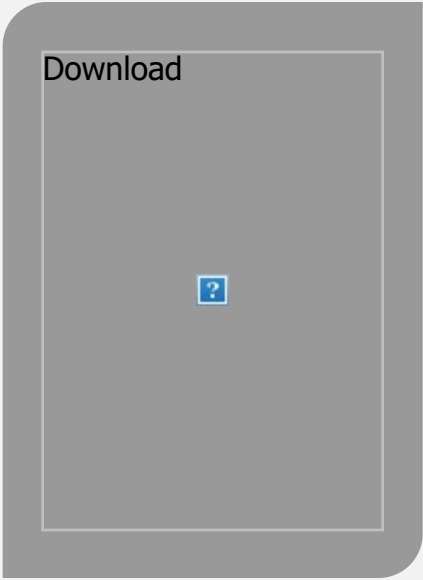




[See Methodology ▶](#)



It’s easy to love Louisville; the city checks lots of boxes as a tourism destination to visit and as a place to live. First, it’s prosperous (tied at #49 for Fortune 500 companies located here). Then there’s its uncountable varieties of craft bourbon and some 2,500 restaurants, several manned by James Beard honorees—giving Louisville a #37 ranking for Restaurants. The city is also the birthplace of the Louisville Slugger, baseball bat of legend Babe Ruth—you can visit the factory and museum, and watch the manufacture of one of the 1.8 million bats that are made every year. If your idea of a home run is The Greatest, there’s the three-level Muhammad Ali Center. And, of course, the most famous horse race in the world. If you miss Derby Day, you can bet on Churchill Downs’ on-site museum to deliver the flavor. No surprise that Louisville is #30 in our ranking for Attractions; these are only a few of myriad offerings that run the gamut. This is a city with a Museum Row—and a #36 ranking in our Museums category.



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91. ALLENTOWN, PA

Good fortune (and balance) fuels the city's growth.

POPULATION
METRO: 837,610

HIGHLIGHTED RANKINGS



PLACE



PEOPLE



[See Methodology](#) ▶

With storied Dutch roots, Pennsylvania's third-largest city boasts four major hospitals, 12 post-secondary institutions, and (of course) the Lehigh Valley IronPigs Minor League Baseball team. Healthcare, technology, energy, manufacturing, professional services and transportation dominate the city's robust economic scene. With major employers such as Fortune 500 companies Air Products & Chemicals (an international industrial gases company with \$8.9 billion in sales in 2019 alone) and PPL Corporation (one of the largest regulated utility companies in the country), Allentown ties at #38 nationally for Fortune 500 head offices in town. Despite its incumbent prosperity, the city's terrible year saw it finish dead last for its one-year change in median family income between 2019 and 2020. On the bright side, demand for housing—#19 in our Change in Home Prices subcategory—indicates prosperous times are around the corner. Allentown is also safe, ranking #19 in our Safety subcategory. The sense of place will only increase with the local Neighborhood Improvement Zone's recent approval of \$21 million in financing for New York developers to upgrade downtown's outdoor Grand Plaza (formerly PPL Plaza) with a food hall, outdoor area and new retail and office space—much needed public gathering spaces after a difficult time for the city.

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92. LAKELAND, FL

This hidden gem in Central Florida’s easy living is catching the attention of the WFH crowd.

POPULATION
METRO: 686,218

HIGHLIGHTED RANKINGS

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 PLACE

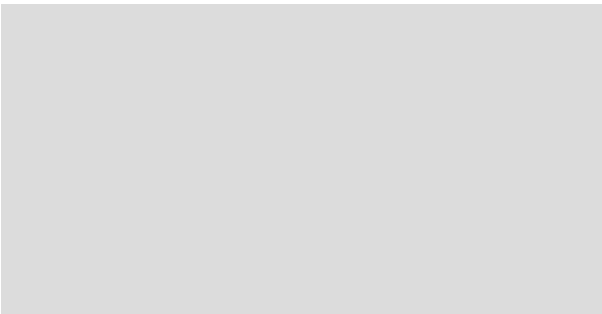
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 PEOPLE

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[See Methodology](#) ▶



Located 25 miles inland from the Tampa Bay area, Lakeland has its own coastline—mainly in the form of its many lakes that have, for time immemorial, provided sustenance and a home to dozens of Native American tribes. Today, the same lakes and surrounding trails and parkland help the city’s #42 ranking in our Parks &

Outdoors subcategory. Their pedestrian access from the city's downtown, as well as the ability to fish, boat, and bird watch within minutes of leaving the house all contribute to the city's ascendant livability in recent years (this is Lakeland's first appearance on our America's Best Cities ranking). Also notable is the city's #28 ranking for Safety, contributing to its #51 overall ranking nationally in our deep Place category. But it's not all leisure and outdoors in Lakeland and the city prides itself on economic resiliency. Case in point: its #1 ranking in our Change in Civilian Labor Force subcategory. In a pandemic and at a time when talent is leaving cities of all sizes, this is a significant shift that will help the city's development for decades as it navigates triangulating its agricultural past and its tourism and hospitality present.

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93. LITTLE ROCK, AR

Big ambition and political capital are taking Little Rock to new heights.

POPULATION
METRO: 737,015

HIGHLIGHTED RANKINGS

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PRODUCT

?

PEOPLE

[See Methodology](#) ▶

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 is Top 50 nationally when it comes to attracting and retaining Fortune 500 companies. A powerful and diverse corporate presence distinguishes Arkansas' capital city, situated on the banks of the state's namesake river, that will likely surprise many people unfamiliar with this southern city—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 national and multinational corporations headquartered 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 other wilderness, and also as the place where former president Bill Clinton cut his political teeth. But the city is also an increasingly coveted hometown, with great weather and a Top 50 ranking nationally for its Sights & Landmarks. Surprises like the ESSE Purse Museum, focusing on "the evolution of 20th-century American woman through the bags she carried and their contents," showcase the city's subdued irreverence.

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94. SCRANTON, PA

Joe Biden’s—and Michael Scott’s—hometown is having a moment.

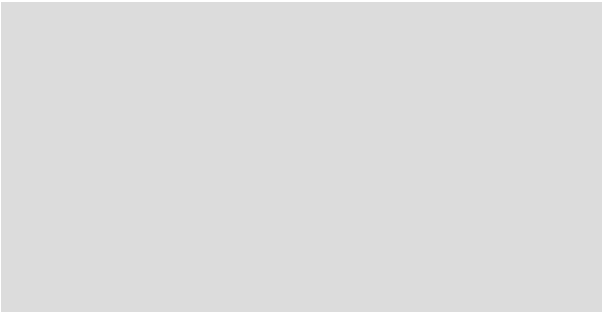
POPULATION
METRO: 555,642

HIGHLIGHTED RANKINGS

 PEOPLE

 PROSPERITY

[See Methodology](#) ▶



Scranton’s scrap is in its name, all the way back to the mid-1800s when the fearless Scranton brothers amalgamated smaller railroad lines to create an eponymous transportation hub for their steam engine empire. A couple of decades after the town’s founding, electric lights illuminated Scranton and electric streetcars ran shortly after. You can still see the bright Electric City neon sign downtown and the Steamtown National Historic Site occupies a 40-acre yard of this important railroad

and preserves the history of early railway expansion. Given the little-known history of this largely overlooked city, the local pride you hear from U.S. President Joe Biden, then, isn't just populist malarkey. And its focus on taking care of its own is manifesting into a modern-day renaissance. Ranked #29 in our Safety subcategory, Scranton's years of focusing on safer streets and placemaking are paying off in significant ways. The city's #23 ranking in our Change in Home Prices subcategory indicates an inflow of new residents into the city. Its #22 ranking for Change in Family Income, tracked between 2019 and 2020, is testament to its economic resilience, one writing an unlikely story in which a Rust Belt city can claim a Top 20 ranking for Prosperity in a national index.


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95. FAYETTEVILLE, NC


Americana and Southern hospitality blend in Fayetteville’s historic embrace.

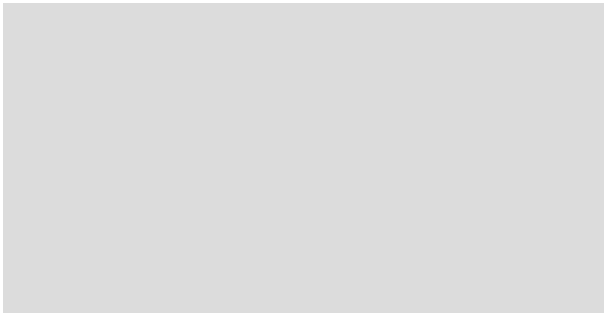
POPULATION
METRO: 519,101

HIGHLIGHTED RANKINGS

 PLACE

 PROSPERITY

 [See Methodology](#) ▶



Despite its location just an hour from Raleigh, the city stands on its own merits as an increasingly coveted home town—central, fun and affordable. Home to Fort Bragg, one the most active military installations in the country, Fayetteville goes all in on its affiliation, with a shocking share of its 500-plus restaurants, breweries and bars inspired by the military and ballistics. Is it any wonder, then, that the city ranks #35 in the nation in our Safety subcategory? The reverence for U.S. Forces is weaved into the tapestry here, from the impressive Airborne & Special Operations Museum to statues and monuments all over the urban grid honoring the decorated and the fallen. But the city’s urban stock is historic and the architectural patina makes for a beautiful downtown that, up until the pandemic, was in a flurry of renovation and publicly funded placemaking. In fact, Fayetteville today ranks #68 in our Shopping subcategory in the nation. Post-pandemic, expect the renovations of older buildings into epic lofts and coveted townhomes to continue, made possible by a place where the one-year change in median family income stayed relatively protected at #32 nationally, despite the economic devastation felt in other cities of its size.

[Download Full Report](#)

96. DELTONA, FL

Old Florida looks to the future with economic resiliency and a commitment to livability.

POPULATION
METRO: 646,288

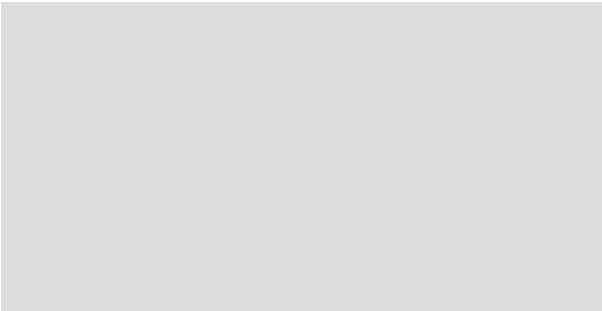
HIGHLIGHTED RANKINGS

 PEOPLE

 PROSPERITY

[See Methodology](#) ▶



With its roots as a retirement village with a few thousand residents a few decades back, Deltona has grown quickly and strategically, powered by its enviable location—30 miles from both Daytona Beach and Orlando—and all the big-city amenities that come with the proximity. The appeal is easy to see. Despite its central location, the city and nearby districts like historic DeLand are a trip back in time, with natural, sometimes primordial beauty and main streets that have been stewarded for years, most recently by a new wave of citizens interested in creating hometown amenities.

Spots like Persimmon Hollow Brewing Company try to build a sense of place and transcend the bedroom community trap of so many similarly positioned cities. And places like the Deltona Club—created by a famous golf course designer and repeatedly voted in the top 25 public courses in the state—keeps resident dollars in the community in a region with hundreds of nearby tee-off options. But the lifestyle is only facilitated by the economic resilience of the area, led by the tireless Volusia County Division of Economic Development, which has been recruiting investment in an area that ranked #4 in Change in Family Income in the entire country.

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97. CLEVELAND, OH

Cleveland's ascent is powered by its embrace of second-tier city cool and affordability.

POPULATION
METRO: 2,056,898

HIGHLIGHTED RANKINGS



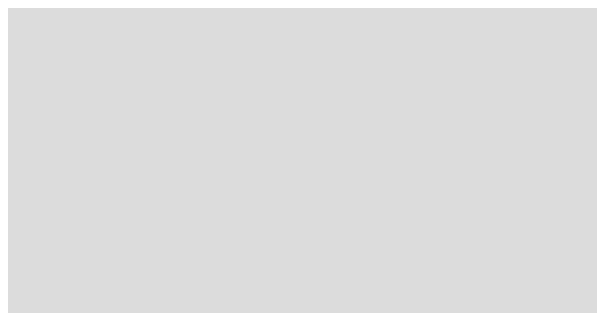
PRODUCT



PROSPERITY



[See Methodology](#) ▶



There are few American cities with a rebirth story like Cleveland's. More than 50 years after the Cuyahoga River (in)famously caught fire in 1969, Cleveland today is poised like it hasn't been since the town was known as "The City of Champions" for its sports domination. Consider that, since 2000, the city has been the recipient of an 80% increase in reported Millennial residents. A huge attribute of this rise is the increasingly diversified university and college landscape and the welcoming environment catering to student life. So is a still-healthy number of Fortune 500 companies in town (#24 in the nation) and relatively affordable, plentiful housing stock. Tourists, too, continue to flood in, with 19.2 million—a new record—arriving in 2018, although obviously considerably lower over the past 18 months. They're drawn by Cleveland's compact and revitalized downtown—with its impressive cache of underrated 19th-century architecture and stately industrial streetscapes—all walkable and dotted with daring restaurants tucked next to old favorites. No wonder the city is Top 30 in our Sights & Landmarks category. Keen to keep its ascent going, Cleveland is already positioning for a new COVID-19 reality, lauding access by car and less-crowded streets.

[Download Full Report](#)

98. DES MOINES, IA

The affordability brings the soul while entrepreneurs and head offices serve up plenty of jobs.

POPULATION
METRO: 680,439

HIGHLIGHTED RANKINGS

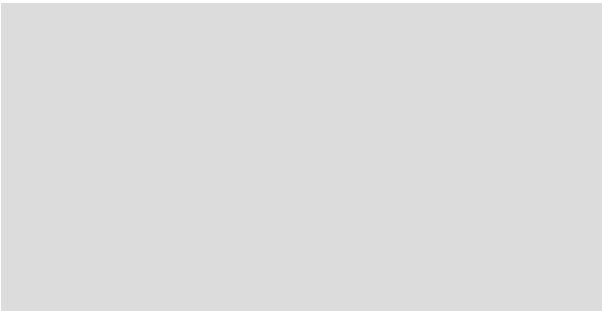
 PRODUCT

 PEOPLE





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As young talent reconsiders big cities, Des Moines checks a lot of boxes. Iowa’s state capital is a business mecca with an artsy side, bustling late into the evening with a blend of daring culture and heartland hospitality. Add in the low, low cost of living, and is it any wonder that prairie-cool Des Moines, which earns our #37 ranking in our Change in Unemployment Rate subcategory, is one of the fastest-growing cities in the Midwest? Des Moines ranks #29 for Educational Attainment among its citizenry—always a good sign for paving the way for future talent. Also impressive are the city’s major corporate outposts of Nationwide and Wells Fargo that round out the thriving finance and insurance sector, which boasts a \$3-billion annual payroll—at least before the pandemic. And in the golden-domed State

Capitol, lawmakers are working to ensure a friendly business climate with temptingly low corporate taxes. Business might be booming, but that doesn't mean cost of living is: Des Moines remains affordable, with housing costs at about two-thirds the national average. With that, the burgeoning cultural scene and friendly Midwest attitude—and some under-the-radar natural areas and parks (ranked #39 in the nation), Des Moines is a city to watch.

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99. SPRINGFIELD, MA

A history of basketball, a future in biotech.

POPULATION
METRO: 699,480

HIGHLIGHTED RANKINGS

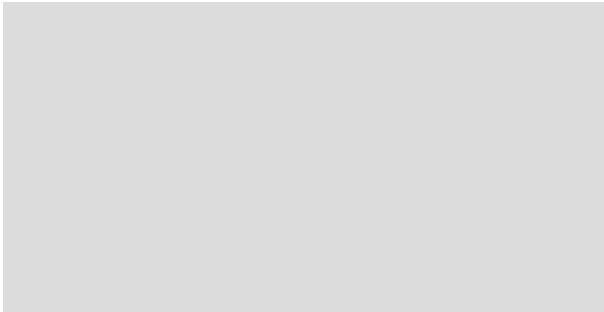
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PLACE

?

PRODUCT

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If the fact that Theodor Geisel, aka Dr. Seuss, hailed from here doesn't grab your attention (and you're not intrigued by 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) will. The economic engine of Western Massachusetts, which forms part of the biotech industry's Super Cluster, is tied at #38 for Fortune 500 companies. The birthplace of basketball—don't let Canadians tell you otherwise—also ranked well for its size for the education of its citizens, with a #49 ranking for Educational Attainment (with nearly 19% of the population having a bachelor's degree or higher). Manufacturing, healthcare, education and life sciences keep the economy robust. Since 2018, more than \$400 million in new projects have been announced, including the forthcoming \$37-million hotel complex at the old York Street Jail site, a \$14-million Educare school and an orthopedic surgery center at Baystate Health.

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100. LANSING, MI

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

POPULATION
METRO: 546,772

HIGHLIGHTED RANKINGS



PROSPERITY



PROMOTION



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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 due to a surge in insurance, insurtech, medtech and IT businesses. Little wonder it ranked #28 overall in our Prosperity category, including #6 for its one-year change in median family income, tracked between 2019 and 2020. Hundreds of new jobs are on the horizon, with 15 projects worth \$311 million in private investment approved pre-pandemic alone. With downtown's revitalization in the works, the city in the center of the Great Lakes State is growing up. Yet it retains its small-town appeal, ranking #53 for Sights & Landmarks. Charming character homes surround the Capitol Building, and trails line the banks of the Red Cedar and Grand rivers. Leafy East Lansing is home to Michigan State University, which bolstered the city's Product profile and tied it for #34 in our University ranking. 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.

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