

BEST PLACES

TO LIVE
2010



Live Green Without Living in the Sticks

MINNEAPOLIS, MN

Boasting one of the highest concentrations of organic farms in America, Minneapolis is big-city green living at its best, proving eco can be urban. The city doles out millions of dollars in stimulus cash for innovative eco-projects, such as the new 5.5-mile Midtown Greenway, a former rail line that has been transformed into a carbon-free route for bike and foot commuters to help eliminate traffic.



Keep a Boat

RED BANK, NJ

Ninety minutes from New York's Penn Station, Red Bank's Victorian streets and cool vibe and the wide, brackish Navesink make it ideal for power professionals who like spending their weekends on the water.



One of Fairfax's main draws, Bolinas Road

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: SARAH RUBENSTEIN, JENNY ELIA PERRELLI, TONY CZECH, ERIC AEDER, MICHAEL BRADDOCK, GETTY IMAGES, ISTOCKPHOTO.COM



Live Like a Cowboy

CASPER, WY

Casper ain't prettified or gussied up. It's a working stiff's town — cowboys and oil workers, beer and guns — but it's also a tolerant place that welcomes anyone who shares an affinity for open land and a "do as you please" way of life. There isn't much industry outside oil and coal, but taxes are low and it's perfect for portable businesses. Eight miles south, Casper Mountain is everything to most people: great nordic-ski center with some downhill, plus miles of hiking and mountain biking.

Where you choose to settle down should be a true reflection of who you are. Although there are dozens of great cities and towns in America, there's only one that's just right for you. To help you find exactly what you're looking for, we've scoured the land to find the best places to...

by ROBERT EARLE HOWELLS and DOUG SCHNITZSPAHN



Surf Every Day

PAIA, MAUI, HI

Mellow Paia is a semi-nontouristy North Shore town of 2,500, where walkable downtown streets are lined with surf shops, galleries, and cafes. Rasta- and trustafarians queue for vegan breakfasts at Mana Foods, and Laird Hamilton look-alikes do coffee at Anthony's.

KEY

MEDIAN HOME PRICE

COST OF LIVING COMPARED TO REST OF U.S.

SUNNY DAYS PER YEAR

All stats according to Bestplaces.net

Go Suburban Without Settling Down

FAIRFAX, CA

\$688,420

107% HIGHER

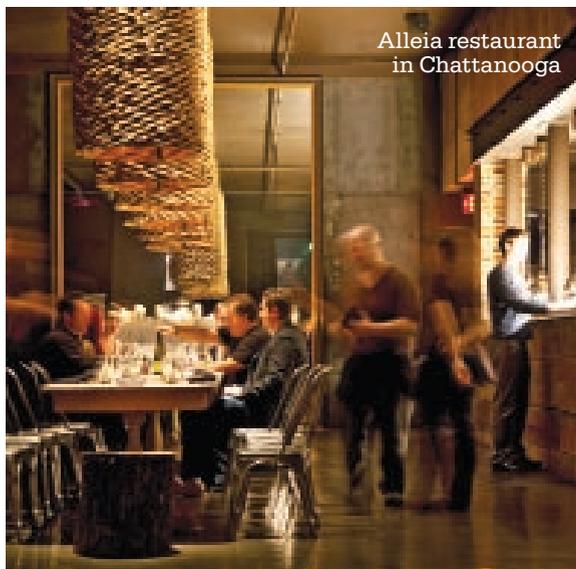
257 DAYS

FAIRFAX QUASHES every notion of what a suburb looks and feels like. The woody town of 8,000 is just a 30-minute drive to

San Francisco but exists in a redwood-and-oak-shaded universe that seems to have been deep-frozen in an epoch when the Grateful Dead would jam on the softball field and Van Morrison and Neil Young would play local bars; when Gary Fisher and Joe Breeze would jockey modified clunkers down Mount Tam trails en route to birthing the mountain bike; when farmers would trundle their goods to the Good Earth — not just a health-food store, but a cynosure of consciousness.

Yoga teachers and moneyed city folk have always mingled peacefully here, and nothing's changed but the real estate prices. "It's unfathomable," says realtor Ryan Murphy, a Fairfaxian since 1974. "A house that's \$700,000 here could be \$2 million 10 minutes away in Ross." These prices might still arch an eyebrow outside of tony Marin County, but it's a bad news-good news symbiosis — homes are costly because the un-suburban suburb can't grow. Virtually every contiguous acre of Fairfax is public land of some sort, hence the rural vibe.

Ultramarathoner Dean Karnazes honed his thighs on Mount Tam. "I've run on all seven continents," says Karnazes. "But everything I love to do is right here: surf, kite, mountain bike, run." Said surf is a 30-minute winding drive west at Bolinas Beach, a sheltered spot with a mellow break. Stop by Fat Cat Surf Shop for wax on the way and Good Earth for a cuppa fair-trade joe. (No chain anything's here. No parking meters, either.) Then grab a beer at the Sleeping Lady. Maybe Neil will stop by and sing "Comes a Time."



Alleia restaurant in Chattanooga

Ride a Resurgence

CHATTANOOGA, TN

\$112,480

18% LOWER

207 DAYS

GEOGRAPHICALLY BLESSED CHATTANOOGA — flanking the Tennessee River beneath Lookout Mountain, humanely scaled with a population of 170,000 — has risen from decrepitude and thwarted the recession with moxie and

family-friendly flair. Basically, it's a city of good ideas: A river flows through it, so why not line that river with 10 miles of parks and rec trails? Downtown's Warehouse Row? Reinvent it as a hub of boutiques and artisanal goods. Knock down the old Terminal Hotel? Nah, let's turn it into a micro-brewery. "It's the one city in the South we used to make fun of," says Ed McMahon, senior resident fellow at the Urban Land Institute in Washington, DC. "Boarded-up buildings, polluted — but its visionary, 25-year turnaround is one I cite as an international model of development." Chattanooga also awaits the 2011 arrival of Volkswagen's \$1 billion plant and, with it, 2,000 new jobs; meanwhile, the local Business Development Center energizes small businesses and entrepreneurs. All this prosperity has bred a new trend — inspired eateries. James Beard semi-finalist chef Daniel Lindley just opened his third, Alleia, in the Main Street arts district.

What hasn't changed is Chattanooga's zeal for the outdoors: rowing on the Tennessee, climbing and hang gliding on Lookout Mountain, riding bike trails and country roads, paddling the frothy Ocoee 45 minutes away.

Get In On the Ground Floor

HOUSTON, TX

How a recession changes things. Houston used to top the list of worst places to live, but the city is now one of the few places in the U.S. where new-housing stats are on the rise. And with a stable economy based on energy, healthcare, and NASA, the city forecasts a marked uptick in new jobs for 2010. Houston also has one of the best art scenes in the country, a fervent sports base, and one of the most diverse ethnic populations in America, with the museum district being among the city's best for cool Texas culture.



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Live the Southern Good Life

OXFORD, MS

Renowned as an oasis of Ivy-League intellectualism and stunningly beautiful women, Oxford used to draw attention from food snobs because it was one of the few spots in the South where you could find fresh sushi. Now, spurred on by the Southern Foodways Alliance — which perpetuates the cuisines of the South — and chefs like '09 James Beard winner John Currence, it has a food scene to rival any big city's.



Take Your Northwest Dry

YAKIMA, WA

Mount Rainier's mighty rain shadow renders dry Yakima a nexus of apples, hops (read: microbreweries), and grapes (60-plus wineries) at the hinge of the eastern Cascades and the Great Basin desert. Less than an hour west is Tieton River Canyon for rafting, hiking, and climbing; just beyond is skiing at White Pass. Floating and fly-fishing on the Yakima River are next door. Housing is affordable, and an old-fashioned downtown is savoring a newly fashioned renaissance.



The Naked Lounge coffee shop in Chico

Get Your Degree, Then Settle Down

CHICO, CA

🏠 \$271,930

💰 14% HIGHER

☀️ 249 DAYS

COLLEGE AND COMMUNITY MESH so neatly in Chico that the would-be Sacramento Valley farm town has more than a little in common with eastern brick-and-ivy burbs, with its leafy streets, coffeehouses, and arched brick campus

buildings in the middle of town. The city gets a cultural contact high as acts such as Suzanne Vega, Wynton Marsalis, and B.B. King roll through to play the school's Laxson Auditorium, and Chico Staters get to intermingle with a grounded community. It's college-town living with a California spin, as the Sierra Nevadas, Mount Shasta, and Mount Lassen are all easy day trips. Locals are crazy for skiing and fishing — and for Bidwell Park, which is four times the size of New York City's Central Park.

"The university brings a good balance," says Christian Burke, creative services manager at Chico-based Tri Counties Bank. "Dreadlocked folks mix with conservative farmers." Burke is typical of a Chico breed — a Chico State grad who bailed town for a job but returned with family in tow. "Maybe it's not a place to make your fortune, but neighbors wave to each other." And the fortune part could change. An influx of tech, healthcare, and green businesses has recently joined Chico's most famous employer: Sierra Nevada Brewing Co.

Get the Flavor of Portland (Before It Was Overrun)

VANCOUVER, BC

🏠 \$539,150

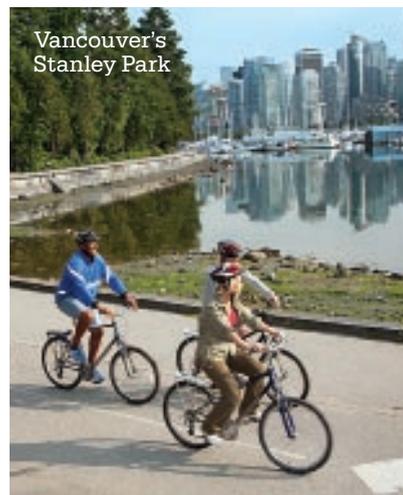
💰 31% HIGHER

☀️ 144 DAYS

WHILE PORTLAND, Oregon, may still be the hub of eco-urban savoir faire, Vancouver is on the rise as the most forward-

thinking, cosmopolitan city in North America. The Olympics have certainly sparked the city's good-life upsurge, but, as in Portland, bike culture has been at the forefront of reimagining life here: New mayor Gregor Robertson is a strong proponent of going car-free, closing off an entire lane of Vancouver's busy Burrard Bridge for bike traffic last summer.

But Vancouver is far more than a gentrified eco-haven. The city works and plays hard. On weekends office drones head to the surrounding hills to risk broken collarbones on technical North Shore mountain-bike problems, set new climbing routes at Squamish, or ski couloirs at Whistler-Blackcomb.



Vancouver's Stanley Park



Live in the 1890s

EAST AURORA, NY

The main street is called Main Street, and it has red-brick pavement, a five-and-dime (Vidler's), a diner (Charlie's) that serves homemade cinnamon bread, and a single-screen movie house. The village of East Aurora — home of Millard Fillmore, center of last century's Arts and Crafts movement, and a place that said no way to Wal-Mart — is just 25 minutes from Buffalo but relishes a nostalgic feel. Kids still ride bikes to school and grab a free T-bar to ski or board in Emery Park.

CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT: DOORUNG KINDERSLEY/GETTY IMAGES; EARL HARPER/ARORA; MATT THELEN; COURTESY TOURISM VANCOUVER/COAST MOUNTAIN PHOTOGRAPHY; TERRY TOMAZIK



Go Car-Free

COLLINGSWOOD, NJ

With 11-minutes-by-train proximity to Philly and a condensed, walkable/bikeable downtown, Collingswood is green by nature and intent. A bike-share program gets you a spiffed-up clunker (painted green) and free upkeep for \$25 a year. Composting bins are subsidized. Even oddball plastics get recycled, and a community garden sprouts this summer. Victorian homes near the huge Knight Park run in the low \$300,000s.



Build Your Dream House

BLACK HILLS, SD

If you wanted to buy a few acres and build the house of your dreams in a rugged setting like Carbondale, Colorado, or Bozeman, Montana, you're too late. But South Dakota's Black Hills ranks right up there with those better-known adrenaline centers — minus the prices and the crowds. Indeed, 80 acres are going for less than \$300K, and 10-acre lots in the woods outside of Spearfish are listed at \$100K. Compare that with more than \$600K for 10 acres in Bozeman.



Climbing in north Reno

Ski and Climb Without the Crowds

RENO, NV

🏠 \$274,670

💰 \$ 13% HIGHER

☀️ 252 DAYS

LOCALS AND THE RECENTLY relocated are content to let you think that old downtown Reno — casinos, all-night buffets, transient hordes — is Reno. In reality, it has sprouted some hipper draws of late:

A right-field blast out of the AAA Reno Aces' ballpark lands in the Truckee River; the new Riverwalk District is home to galleries, artists lofts, coffeehouses, and non-blue hair nightlife; and the July Artown festival drew 300,000 art lovers last year.

But Reno is really all about location and its extraordinary proximity to four seasons of outdoor adventure. The Sierra Nevada range, just to the west, harbors the world's greatest concentration of ski areas, not to mention cobalt-clear Lake Tahoe and millions of acres of public-land playground. That quick mountain commute invites

Reno-Boulder comparisons, but if you're a skier, Reno is king. A South Reno-dwelling downhiller is 15 minutes away from the 45-degree chutes of Mount Rose, and more fabled resorts like Squaw Valley and South Lake Tahoe's Heavenly are within an hour of town. Snow gets measured in feet up in the mountains, but only in occasional inches where Reno lies, at 4,500 feet.

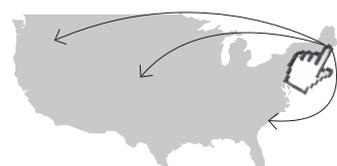
Accountant Derek Thomas opted out of other A-list outdoor meccas like Ventura and Laramie and started a family and business in Reno: "I ski Rose all winter and I can be on the lake in my kayak in 25 minutes." Whitewater paddlers have it even better. The Truckee bisects the city, and the new downtown whitewater park teems with lunch-hour play boaters. The park signals the toehold that younger, fitter Renoites are gaining on the city's traditional core, and an emerging non-casino Reno aligned with clean air, culture, and those soaring mountains.



Buy Someone Else's Dream House

LAS VEGAS, NV

Few places burst harder in the mortgage crisis than Las Vegas — 70 percent of homeowners owe more on their mortgage than their home is worth, and housing prices have plummeted 50 percent. The good news? You can get a recently built house in a great area with mountain biking, climbing, and a bit of nightlife nearby, for \$100 per square foot.



Telecommute with Ease

BETHEL, ME

Most quaint New England villages are like movie sets — attractive fronts and some tourist appeal, but their bucolic ways would wear thin quickly on transplanted city folk. Bethel is a metro area in white-steeped microcosm. It has a historic downtown and a cool old hardware store, but also a fourplex, a full slate of medicos, a ski resort, and a supermarket with a foodie-pleasing deli. Pretty good for a town of 2,500, and you don't even have to give up your lattes.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: COURTESY KONA; ISTOCKPHOTO.COM; JEFF GREEN; ISTOCKPHOTO.COM; MATT THELLEN

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Inhabit an Unlikely Art Mecca

MARFA, TX

When minimalist New York artist Donald Judd opted for the sage-flat serenity of Marfa in the '70s, he touched off the transformation of a literal West Texas cow town. Previously famous only for its "mystery lights" (and more recently as the location for *No Country for Old Men*) this town of 1,900 now has serious galleries, nonprofit arts foundations, coffee-cum-bookshops, and independent grocers.



Sip Whiskey and Watch the World Go By

LOUISVILLE, KY

To some, Louisville is just bourbon, baseball bats, and a famous horse race; to those who know better, it's artistic funk and gentlemanly class. Packed with eclectic coffee shops, thrift stores, skate punks, and bluegrass street musicians, Bardstown Road is a slice of weirdness in the midst of an upscale neighborhood. Bourbon's reemergence as a sophisticated beverage rather than redneck swill parallels the city's cultural renaissance.

Get Adventure 24/7/365

OGDEN, UT

- 🏠 \$124,720
- 💰 13% LOWER
- ☀️ 223 DAYS

OGDEN ISN'T JUST ANOTHER town blessed with world-class adventure on its doorstep: This once run-down railroad town has a government-sponsored mandate to grow around adrenaline sports.

"The goal of Ogden is to become the capital of high-adventure recreation," says mayor Matthew Godfrey.

During the decade he has been in office, Godfrey has implemented sweetheart business incentives for outdoor companies willing to move to Ogden; he scored his biggest catch when Salomon moved its offices here in 2007. But Ogden's list of adventure amenities is even more impressive. Within five minutes of downtown is rock climbing, access to more than a hundred miles of trails, plus

two whitewater kayak parks. Just a 20-minute drive up canyon, Snowbasin offers all the famed powder of Utah's Wasatch resorts without Colorado's famed lift lines.

When orthopedic surgeon and mountain-bike fanatic Dann Byck was weighing the options on where to move his practice from Washington State, Ogden topped the list. "Most desirable places have too many doctors who do what I do, but there was still a chance to get in early here," he says. Byck admits the cultural scene is still developing, but there's everything from the Utah Jazz to opera 30 minutes down the interstate in Salt Lake City.

Because of Godfrey's push for Ogden to join the A-list of supercharged mountain towns, it's no longer a secret. But unlike those others, it's still within reach: The median home price here is less than half of Boulder's.

Wolf Creek Utah Ski Resort, 25 minutes from Ogden



More Best Places to... Stay Active in the SW: Bisbee, AZ Annual 1,000 Great Stair Climb will kick your butt. **Be Poor: Bend, OR** "Poverty with a view" is the saying. **Live in a Mountain Town in the Northeast: Ellicottville, NY** Just outside-of-Buffalo ski town is home to IMBA mountain-bike trails. **Raise Kids: Idaho Falls, ID** Mountains make the best playgrounds.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: JONATHAN PALMER, ALEXA MILLER, TODD JOHNSON

Own a Real Ranch

PRESCOTT, AZ

A mile high is the sweet spot in Arizona, where you avoid low-lying Phoenix's summer heat and Flagstaff's winter cold. In Prescott (5,347 feet) you get the mild climate, a historical Old West downtown (Whiskey Row), and pine-scented open space with red-rock accents. Plentiful so-called horse properties get you a house, corral, and a couple of acres of boonies starting at \$250,000.



Live in the (Very) Old South

ST. AUGUSTINE, FL

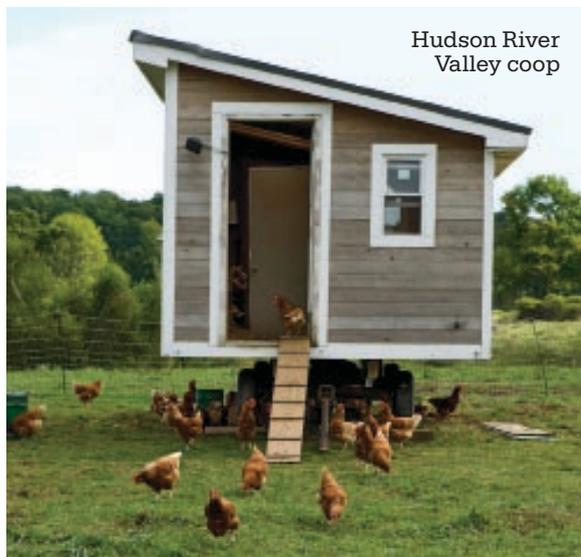
Small, flat, walkable, bikeable, and laced with waterways, the city fronts great winter surf and preserves a graceful Old Florida feel befitting America's oldest city. The Spanish Colonial downtown core has red-brick streets and a shady central plaza for summertime concerts. Ocean-front condos and golf-course homes start at \$300,000, and Jacksonville's airport and Jaguars are just an hour north.



Live Like a Rock Star

NASHVILLE, TN

When Jack White decided to open his record label and production studio, Third Man Records, in Nashville last March instead of in New York or L.A., it cemented the city's emergence as the South's most cosmopolitan hub, outpacing Memphis in culture, Atlanta in coziness, and New Orleans in economic opportunity.



Hudson River Valley coop

Start an Organic Farm

RED HOOK, NY

\$244,090

\$ 25% HIGHER

167 DAYS

RED HOOK AND THE SURROUNDING hills of the mid-Hudson River Valley are locavore hotbeds, and the natural vibe is so stunning it inspired the sublime canvases of the 19th-century Hudson River School artists. The town of

1,800 toes the line between precious tourist attraction and idealistic agrarian community.

Rich soil and a climate that's slightly more temperate than that of surrounding spots are big factors in the success of the farms here, but the most important reason is the megalopolis two hours to the south. "The market access is hard to beat," says Severine von Tschamer Fleming of Smithereen Farm. "Chefs and shoppers in the city are excited to buy our produce and meats. It's such an obvious foodshed to New York City." Leading the charge are local organic farms like Hearty Roots and Awesome, both run by farmers in their late 20s and early 30s.

Many of the best plots are taken, but lots of underutilized land, abandoned barns, and old dairies still beckon. And you don't have to go whole hog and buy a fully functioning farm. The organic ethos is ingrained deep enough that Red Hook is also a great place just to tinker with a garden in the backyard or join a CSA. Plus, this isn't the sticks: The Poughkeepsie Metro-North Railroad gets transplants back into the city in under two hours, and just across the Hudson, New Paltz offers some of the state's best climbing, hiking, and cross-country skiing.

Live Downtown

DENVER, CO

\$218,780

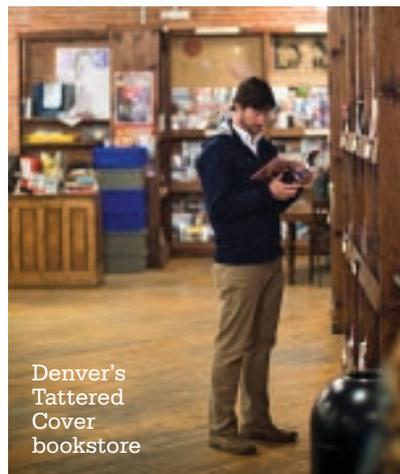
\$ 5% HIGHER

245 DAYS

DENVER'S BIGGEST selling point has always been what's outside of town — blue-sky powder days and the largest concentration of peaks higher than 10,000 feet in the country. But over the past decade, the once dormant downtown of the Queen City of the Plains has been transformed into one of the best in the country for work, owning a condo, and walking to everything from an NBA game to deliberately divey bars.

The reclamation of LoDo began way back in the '80s, but it was Barack Obama's acceptance speech at the 2008 Democratic National Convention, which drew creative chefs and telecommuting urbanites looking to escape bigger cities, that galvanized its reputation as the most sophisticated city in the square states. Hangouts run the gamut from Sinatra-style cocktails at the Oxford Hotel's Cruise Room to burritos and breakfast beers at kitschy-cool El Chapultepec to winemaking in a Quonset hut at Infinite Monkey Theorem. "I work down here and don't have to get in a car until I go skiing," says Chuck Sullivan, co-founder of a local consulting business.

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Denver's Tattered Cover bookstore

Be an Urban Paddler: Washington, DC To live in DC and not paddle is like living in Vail and not skiing. **Preserve the Past:** Middleburg, VA Lots of stone and timber houses plus tax credits for historical renovations. **Be Young and Thirsty:** Hoboken, NJ A bar on every corner and one in the middle of every block. **Live in a Foreign Country:** Hermann, MO Germany of the Midwest.