

America's

BEST CITIES

A RANKING OF U.S. PLACE EQUITY

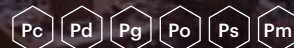
2021

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

The Performance of America's Best Cities: The Methodology — 06

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THESE ARE AMERICA'S BEST CITIES NOW

Resonance is building the most comprehensive city rankings on the planet. Here's why the performance and competitive identity of our cities matters now more than ever.



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

The COVID-19 pandemic has, of course, changed everything about our business and our cities. It's caused us to reexamine and rethink the way we'll want to live, work and play in the future. If there's one thing that social distancing and working from home has taught us, it's that the shared spaces we were asked to close and avoid—from restaurants to sporting venues, museums and galleries—are what we cherish most about the cities we live in or love to visit.

American cities—defined in our 2021 ranking as the principal urban centers in an MSA area with a population of more than 500,000 people—face imminent and myriad challenges that will define their next decade and beyond. To say a reinvention is upon us is an understatement.

To capture this reality in our rankings—now in their seventh year—we have also expanded and evolved. We have added several new subcategories to our six performance pillars to capture the economic performance of cities amidst this crisis, because it will be economic resiliency that will grease the gears of recovery.

For our Prosperity category, we have added “One-year % change in unemployment rate” between Feb. 2020 and Feb. 2021 to measure the impact of the pandemic on employment in each city. The related “One-year % change in median family income” category measures a family's earning power before and during the pandemic. Relatedly, our “One-year % change in median home prices” subcategory explores the cities that have held (or in some cases increased) their perceived value in the eyes of citizens and newcomers.

Our vital People category was also refined, and we added the “One-year % change in civilian labor force (Feb. 2020 – Feb. 2021) subcategory to track the unprecedented migration—to the detriment of some cities and the benefit of others—during the past 18 months.

This last data set is crucial. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, domestic migration hit a new all-time low in 2019 of 9.8 percent of the population. This follows decades of steady declines. During the 1960s, 20 percent of Americans moved to a new residence each year. In 2019, less than 10 percent of Americans did. As a result, wealthy, vibrant U.S. cities had institutionalized their future access to talent and economic domination. But the pandemic has kick-started mobility not seen in decades, contradicting all previous behavior during a recession in which people stayed put.

The legacy leading cities are forecasting billions of dollars of annual property tax revenue losses, at least temporarily, while renters celebrate the first rent decreases they've ever seen. Of course cities like New York, L.A. and Chicago will always be magnets for those seeking big deals and economic opportunity, but even a drip of talent and capital in their economic firehose can irrigate dozens of smaller urban centers in the country. Places like Ogden, Utah, and Boise, Idaho are blooming. So are dozens of other mid-size cities that have risen in our rankings this year.

While it remains to be seen what the long-term effects of the pandemic will be on our cities both large and small, they will recover. In fact, many will thrive. And our team at Resonance will be following them closely, identifying the Best Cities to live, work and visit now, and in the years to come.

A stylized, handwritten signature of Chris Fair in black ink.

Chris Fair, President & CEO
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IT TOOK A WHILE, BUT AMERICAN CITIES ARE BACK

American urban centers of all sizes are forever changed by the past 18 months. Accessibility has opened up in some places, while others are coveted like never before. Regardless, there's never been a more important time for our cities—one that will define them for a generation.



How many of you know someone who left a major city for a suburb, a mountain town, a seaside retreat in the past year? It's understandable—outdoor space was at a premium, hospitals were strained, and big-city throngs felt threatening in a new and unfamiliar way. Those who remain wonder: Will those residents ever come back? And, if not, who will arrive in their stead?

There's talk of a new era of bohemian creativity and bonhomie in New York City, where talent across creative industries—who might have previously been priced out—can now afford those studios and one-bedrooms in Manhattan. You can feel the energy, the unbridled joy, week to week as more people get vaccinated against COVID-19. As restaurateur Danny Meyer said in an April press conference hosted by NYC and Company, the city is “in a crouched position,” waiting for things to feel safe, and “being in a crouched position for too long, you're bound to leap forward.”

A staggering 80% of travel to New York City comes from domestic visitors, according to Mayor Bill de Blasio, and the recently completed overhaul of LaGuardia Airport and newly revealed Moynihan Train Hall (updating Penn Station) are ready to welcome those travelers right now.

Pre-pandemic, Washington, D.C., had 10 million domestic visitors annually, which helped to support more than 80,000 jobs. Now, as long-shuttered Smithsonian museums have begun a staggered reopening in May, the nation's capital looks to court the 50 million people living within a four-hour drive of D.C. until international borders truly reopen.

In New Orleans, new hotels are popping up at a furious clip, from the French Quarter to the Lower Garden District; in Texas, the massive three-day Austin City Limits music festival announced it would return in October. Full-show passes sold out almost immediately. These cities are making up for lost time, and travelers are eager to make up for lost trips.

According to Destination Analysts' American Traveler Sentiment Study, about 87% of American travelers expect to take a trip this summer, be it a vacation, a trip to see friends or relatives, or even business travel and conferences. Social distancing may be a way of life for years to come, but cities have responded by enhancing their green spaces, developing creative year-round outdoor dining and promoting lesser-known experiences, events and cultures. The effects of the pandemic will linger long after the world has received a shot against the coronavirus, but that shot brings hope and promise. With the right frame of mind, it will bring a reinvention of cities and an opportunity to be a better host—and guest.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Laura Redman'.

Laura Dannen Redman
Digital Content Director, AFAR Media

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THE PERFORMANCE OF AMERICA'S BEST CITIES: THE METHODOLOGY

Resonance Consultancy ranks America's cities (principal cities of metropolitan areas with populations of more than 500,000) by using a combination of statistical performance and qualitative evaluations by locals and visitors in 24 areas grouped into six core categories. Principal cities are defined as the largest city in each metropolitan statistical area.

THE SIX CORE CATEGORIES



Pc PLACE

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

Weather Average number of sunny days (WeatherBase.com)

Safety Homicide rate (Federal Bureau of Investigation national data sources)

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

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



Pd PRODUCT

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

Airport Connectivity Number of direct destinations served by the city's airports (FlightConnections.com and FlightsFrom.com)

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

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

University Ranking Score of the top local university (U.S. News Best National University Rankings)

Professional Sports Teams Number of professional-league sports teams in a city (multiple sources)



Pg PROGRAMMING

This category measures the experiential pillars of a great visit: food, shopping and nightlife. If our Product category is the “hardware” of cities and destinations, the mosaic of cultural programming and lifestyle experiences they offer is the “software” that makes them run. While such programming initiatives are individually insignificant, their sum fosters a community’s connection to place.

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

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

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



Po PEOPLE

Human capital is often a city’s most valuable resource. To evaluate the relative strength of human capital from one city to the next, we consider the education of the city’s population, as well as the one-year change in the civilian labor force. After all, a city’s ability to attract—and keep—their workforce even during the most difficult situations is something of proven importance when it comes to attracting future talent.

Educational Attainment Percentage of the population with higher education (U.S. Census, American Community Survey)

Change in Civilian Labor Force One year % change in civilian labor force (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Feb. 2020–Feb. 2021)



Ps PROSPERITY

In general, beliefs about the wealth and prosperity of a city are shaped by statistics such as employment, average household incomes and the presence of large, recognizable corporations—despite the fact that start-ups and innovation increasingly drive a city’s development and economic growth. This year, our prosperity ranking also tracks changes in home prices to reflect the effect the pandemic has had on the desirability of a city as a place to work and live.

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

Change in Unemployment Rate One year % change in unemployment rate (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Feb. 2020–Feb. 2021)

Change in Home Prices One year % change in median home prices (Zillow.com, Feb. 2020–Feb. 2021)

Change in Family Income One year % change in median family income (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2019–2020)



Pm PROMOTION

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

Facebook Check-ins Number of Facebook check-ins in each city (Facebook.com)

Google Search Number of Google search results per city name (Google.com)

TripAdvisor Reviews Number of TripAdvisor reviews (TripAdvisor.com)

Instagram Hashtags Number of Instagram city name hashtags used (Instagram.com)

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

America's

TOP 100 CITIES PROFILES

American cities are the engines of the nation and the badges of human ingenuity. Yes, they've been hobbled over the past 18 months, exposing the long-ignored foundational and institutional problems that manifested on their streets and in their hospitals and seniors homes. But they're also leading—like they always have—the recovery and future-defining next stage of human innovation. The 100 cities that we profile over the next 50 pages will likely be at the heart of that renewal.



THE STREETS ARE ALIVE AGAIN

POPULATION

METRO 19,294,236

HIGHLIGHTS

1 PLACE

1 PROGRAMMING

1 NEW YORK_{NY}

If New York City forgot about how bad life can get for its citizenry, the past 18 months were a hellish reminder.

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. Statewide, more than 18,000 COVID-19 patients were in hospitals at one point. Daily deaths peaked at 799 in April 2020, totaling more than 53,000 by mid-May 2021. There have been more than 2 million infections in this city alone.

The gruesome pandemic events in America's city of superlatives was, like everything in this global microcosmopolis, a proxy for our collective headspace. It was where so many of the common threads of the crisis were weaved together and worn wearily by those who, unlike hundreds of thousands with the means to head upstate, or to Connecticut, had nowhere to hide. By the unprotected essential workers trying to keep the world together, like a shredded Peter Parker with the subway in Spider-Man 2, sacrificing himself for the good of his fellow New Yorkers.

It was this city-scale tragedy that first landed in the crosshairs of the sniping haters declaring that the big, vibrant, cheek-by-jowl city experiment was finally over. But for resilient New Yorkers, those attacks of course merely rallied the city's citizens amidst the death, the protest and malaise.



LITTLE ISLAND PARK ON THE HUDSON



Jerry Seinfeld penned the now famous Times opus “So You Think New York is ‘Dead,’” in which he channeled all of us in declaring, “The last thing we need in the thick of so many challenges is some putz on LinkedIn wailing and whimpering, ‘Everyone’s gone!’” In what would be a prescient middle finger to the oncoming onslaught of Dear John letters from those who decided it was over, Seinfeld continued: “He says ‘Everyone’s gone for good.’ How the hell do you know that? You moved to Miami. Yes, I also have a place out on Long Island. But I will never abandon New York City. Ever.”

While the vast majority of New Yorkers never abandoned their fortress, most of the 66.6 million people who visited in 2019 (a numerical omen, perhaps, but also a visitor record) had no choice but to shun it, obliterating the hospitality industry and the \$46 billion in annual spending that it generated before the pandemic. More acutely, the evaporation of the visitor economy also obliterated hundreds of thousands of jobs in a matter of weeks. If previous pandemics are any indication, these vital jobs will be the last to return.

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.

According to NYPD data, murders in the city rose to 462 last year, up nearly 45% from 319 in 2019. The city recorded 1,531 shootings in 2020—almost double from 2019.

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. He was two weeks removed from a late-April press conference—almost a year to the day when the city touched 800 deaths in 24 hours—where he and Mayor de Blasio announced the largest-ever marketing campaign for New York City tourism recovery, at \$30 million. The leaders spoke excitedly about the forecasted 36.4 million visitors expected in 2021, more than half of the 2019 record; they spoke about how 110,000 hotel rooms are expected to be available for booking by the end of the year, and how the city will start setting records again soon, with almost 70 million annual visitors expected by 2024.

But, for now, there’s a sea of pent-up demand to catalogue and prime, beginning with NYC Summer Restaurant Week, starting July 19 and running until mid-August.

Even the gateways into town have been renovated: LaGuardia’s redesigned Terminal B features 35 new gates, along with retail, restaurants and amenities that more than double the previous offerings. Newark Liberty International Airport’s Terminal A opens in 2022 with 33 gates.

No fewer than a dozen high-profile hotels have opened or are opening in the next 18 months—from the Ace in Boerum Hill to the Pendry near Hudson Yards.

And it looks like Deno’s Wonder Wheel Amusement Park in Coney Island will be able to celebrate its centennial this summer with proper crowds, along with the new Phoenix Family Thrill roller coaster to mark the occasion.

Even Broadway is projected to return this fall, with brand-new shows debuting, including *Thoughts of a Colored Man*, *Diana* and *Mrs. Doubtfire*.

When it’s your turn to return to America’s best city, do yourself a favor and dedicate two hours to view the recovery from Summit NYC’s newest observation deck and the highest vantage point in Midtown. Stare eye level with the Chrysler Building, the Empire State Building and north to Central Park. Then walk the glass floor ledges that overhang Madison Avenue. Then feel a deep gratitude for this place and its people.



WONDER WHEEL, LUNA PARK IN CONEY ISLAND



THE CITY SPRINGS BACK TO LIFE IN SANTA MONICA

POPULATION

METRO 13,249,614

HIGHLIGHTS

2 PRODUCT

2 PROMOTION

2 LOS ANGELES CA

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

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 numbers are grim, of course, with the city's 11,633 cases and 233 deaths per 100,000 people triple the COVID-19 toll of San Francisco, and terms like "infection epicenter" on the lips of global media for the better part of the year. But as the COVID-19 crisis launched L.A.—and Mayor Eric Garcetti—into the spotlight, the city avoided the unthinkable by taking swift action and biting the economic bullet early. L.A. was the first metropolis in the U.S. to demand almost full closure, "and the biggest city to go to full closure of

all nonessential businesses," the mayor pointed out back when people were still calling this the flu. Combine that foresight with California's fast action on lockdowns, and the result is a state that boasts the lowest infection rate in the country as of mid-May 2021. By that month, Los Angeles County had consecutive days in which it didn't record a single COVID-19 death.

Spring and early summer arrived with the anticipated news that the city had met infection and vaccine thresholds to allow indoor bars to welcome people again, crowds to cheer on the Dodgers and expanded capacity at restaurants, theaters, amusement parks and, to the delight of many in this town, gyms.

But the city has a long, long way back. As of February 2021, the unemployment rate was almost 10%, which is up 5.6 points since the same time last year and is significantly higher than the national



THE BROAD CONTEMPORARY ART MUSEUM

average of just 6.2%. This is 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 past this nightmare and 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.

Let's start with the business of getting the city back to its culinary ascent.

Los Angeles has always had star power, of course, but when Michelin announced in June 2019 that 24 Greater Los Angeles area restaurants had been awarded with its most prestigious accolade in its inaugural Michelin Guide California selection, it suddenly meant more than just A-listers and cinema cachet.

Indeed, of the seven new two-star distinctions in the Guide, six were in L.A., further cementing its standing as "the most exciting food city in America," according to the guide.

"Los Angeles is a literal melting pot of talent with chefs hailing from a mosaic of cultures who are open to experimentation and innovation. Mix in access to the country's best

produce and an audience of Angelenos who celebrate creativity and you've got L.A.'s formula for being the most exciting food city," said Stacey Sun, executive director of the city's dineL.A. program. Unsurprisingly, the city trails only NYC nationally in our Restaurants subcategory.

Speaking of locally grown, when it opens on Olvera Street at LA Plaza Village, LA Plaza Cocina will be the first museum and teaching kitchen dedicated to Mexican food in the U.S. Through an array of exhibitions, cooking classes, lectures, workshops and culinary festivals, the multidisciplinary venue aims to educate visitors and celebrate Mexico's culinary heritage. The city's Mexican heritage is also leading the bounty of new restaurants opening their doors. Cha Cha Chá is Chef Alejandro Guzman's new outdoor rooftop hotspot, featuring tacos, tostadas and more, all inspired by his Terraza Cha Cha Chá in Mexico City. Alma at the Grove is Grupo Hunan's first U.S. restaurant, with a menu filled with fresh and local ingredients, highlighting a rich culinary history in a traditional hacienda space.

The city is also tightening its grip on 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 temporary exhibit of acclaimed artist Hayao Miyazaki.

Amazingly, all nine of LAX's terminals are in the midst of a \$14.3-billion modernization that includes the automated people mover (APM) train, scheduled to open in 2023. Mobility also makes it into the city with the new, \$1.7-billion Regional Connector Transit Project, featuring a 1.9-mile underground light-rail system that will provide a one-seat ride across Los Angeles County. Imagine traveling from the Metro Gold Line to Long Beach and from East Los Angeles to Santa Monica without transferring lines. It's forecasted to open in 2022.

Given everything to experience in the City of Angels, it's a good thing that there are more than two dozen hotels in the pipeline, with many recently opened, ranging from Venice Beach's V Hotel, converted from a 1915 beachfront landmark, to the Minoru Yamasaki-designed luxury Fairmont Century Plaza.

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 destination marketer and an initiative that will further secure the city's #2 ranking in our vital Promotions category.



NEW SOFI STADIUM IN INGLEWOOD



THE CHICAGO RIVERWALK

POPULATION

METRO 9,508,605

HIGHLIGHTS

2

AIRPORT
CONNECTIVITY

2

NIGHTLIFE

3 CHICAGO IL

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

In the last few years, the Windy City pursued and acquired some big-ticket draws, including the NFL Draft, the James Beard Foundation Awards and the Laver Cup. It also bolstered tourist-friendly attractions like the Riverwalk, along with events that showcase Chicago's craft beer scene.

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,

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.

Indeed, when Rahm Emanuel won the mayorship in 2011, an estimated 39 million people a year were visiting Chicago. By the time he wrapped up his final term in 2019, that number had ballooned to nearly 58 million annual visitors—an impressive tourism feat and perhaps the biggest success story of Emanuel's mayoral tenure.



THE NEW PENDRY CHICAGO HOTEL



Phoenix and San Jose, 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—and even stronger than ever, with the second-most Fortune 500 headquarters in the country, only behind New York.

Even amidst the pandemic, Chicago was named the top metro area for corporate investment for the seventh consecutive year in 2020 by Site Selection magazine, a business publication that tracks real estate and corporate development.

The city's strong performance in our important Programming category, which measures a city's shopping, culinary and nightlife chops, will only improve in future years with all the investment back on the table as Chicago comes back from the pandemic.

And that #3 ranking for Restaurants in the country will give it a head start. At the heart of that food culture? Chicago's Greektown cuisine, honed over a century by the best sampling of Greek heritage outside of Athens.

Decorated local chef Doug Psaltis opened Andros Taverna earlier this year, a new contemporary Greek restaurant in Chicago's vibrant Logan Square neighborhood, adjacent to the city's forthcoming public park and

green space expansion. Another Greek addition is Papagus Taverna, serving classic Greek dishes available for carryout and delivery downtown.

Also leading Chicago's culinary rebirth is the city's youngest Michelin-starred chef, Donald Young, who has debuted Venteux, a French brasserie located in the new Pendry Chicago hotel. The Pendry, located in the landmarked Carbide & Carbon Building, is just one of a dozen bold hotel openings, joining anticipated projects like the Sable Hotel (a Hilton Curio Collection Property) at Navy Pier, and the debut of the St. Regis Chicago in Jeanne Gang's highly anticipated Vista Tower, projected to be the third tallest skyscraper in the city.

The flurry of openings follows a pre-pandemic boom in which seven hotels debuted in the city's central business district alone. Among them was the 21c Museum Hotel Chicago, which combines a restaurant with a 297-room boutique hotel and multi-venue contemporary art museum. The much-anticipated Japanese-inspired Nobu Hotel Chicago is finally online, with its rooftop lounge perch and front-row view of America's most spectacular architectural bounty.

Chicago also ranks #3 in our vital Product category, comprising the subcategories of Airport Connectivity (#2), University (#4), Museums (#4) and Attractions (#5).

Both museums and attractions figure heavily into the Windy City's return.

Art on theMART, which bills itself as the largest permanent digital art projection in the world and features contemporary artwork across the 2.5-acre river-facing facade of theMART, is one pre-pandemic cultural home run eager to reclaim its momentum. Some 32,000 people attended the launch event in September 2018. "We are already becoming an integral part of the cultural fabric of the city and an iconic public art platform that amplifies what is important to Chicagoans and the world," noted Cynthia Noble, executive director of Art on theMART.

Museums are also reopening, with ambitious exhibitions such as Immersive Van Gogh at Lighthouse ArtSpace Chicago, Frida Kahlo: Timeless at the Cleve Carney Museum of Art and Mandela: Struggle for Freedom at the Illinois Holocaust Museum and Education Center.

Of course the biggest news is the legacy of one family of proud Chicagoans: the Obamas. The Obama Portraits is on display at the Art Institute of Chicago on the first stop of its U.S. tour. The First Lady recalls visiting the Art Institute frequently with her family when she was growing up on the South Side, and the museum was also the site of the couple's first date. The portraits are on display until August 15 and are an opening act to this year's groundbreaking of the Obama Presidential Center in Jackson Park, a marquee attraction on Chicago's South Side. "I think President Obama's library can do for tourism what McCormick Place has done for business travel in the city," Emanuel noted during his time as mayor. The city's future rankings for Museums nationally will surely improve as a result.



ART ON THEMART

POPULATION

METRO 4,701,332

HIGHLIGHTS

2 SIGHTS & LANDMARKS

3 EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

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

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. The result is a place that doesn't just welcome differences, but actually encourages and celebrates them. 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, with Stanford University and the University of California, Berkeley, 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 has been deeply wounded by the pandemic. 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 61%, from 26.2 million visitors in 2019 to just over 10 million in 2020, according to the San Francisco Travel

4 SAN FRANCISCO CA

VIEW OF SALESFORCE TOWER AND THE TRANSBAY TRANSIT CENTER ROOFTOP PARK



Association. Total spending by visitors was down 77.7% from a record high of \$10.3 billion in 2019. The pandemic shredded massive plans for 2020, including monumental anniversaries like Golden Gate Park's 150th and San Francisco Pride's 50th. The Asian Art Museum's impressive expansion, in which 13,000 square feet of additional exhibition space and a 7,500-square-foot rooftop art terrace were added, shut as quickly as it reopened.

But all of these delays have only filled a pipeline that will bring a flood of openings and opportunities this summer. Total visitation is anticipated to return to pre-pandemic levels by 2023.

San Francisco's quick action and methodical inclusivity during the pandemic ensured the city took care of its own over the past 18 months—from COVID-19 patients to the swelling homeless population—stemming any of the significant, long-term outbreaks that overwhelmed so many other urban hospitals in the country. But the problems of homelessness and poverty have only grown. City leaders appear ready. "We're the city of St. Francis, and if we don't lead on this, then shame on us," said Joe D'Alessandro, CEO of San Francisco Travel. "As a DMO we're taking a leading role on this... looking for small fixes until we can figure it out federally."

POPULATION

METRO 4,832,346

5 BOSTON MA

HIGHLIGHTS

1 UNIVERSITY RANKING

2 PEOPLE

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

A hub of higher education and home to the fourth-best-educated workforce in the nation, Beantown produces a steady stream of new talent to help attract start-ups and established companies alike. Future talent gravitates to Harvard,

of course—the country's top school (and a big reason why the city is #1 in our University subcategory and scored #4 in our overall Product category, which measures hard-to-build infrastructure in subcategories like Airport Connectivity)—as well as to Boston's density of other world-class universities and colleges. The city is bursting with lecture halls, labs and classrooms for the more than 75 institutions of higher learning, and is energized by the estimated 200,000 post-secondary students creating stories, ideas, solutions and technologies that will help drive the economy and incubate innovation districts nationally and globally in the coming decades. New students flock here, to arguably the

continent's largest university town, by the tens of thousands every year and become smitten with the crooked narrow streets and storied pubs, blended with American optimism and East Coast connections. The city's ranking in our Museums subcategory is also more than respectable, at #13. In addition to the bounty of museums you'd expect to see in one of the nation's oldest cities (from the grandeur of the Museum of Fine Arts to one of the nation's first museums dedicated to African American history), Boston just keeps opening temples of creativity, history and reflection. The city's newest, free contemporary art museum, the MassArt Art Museum, opened in early 2020, just before lockdown. MAAM, as it has become known, is distinct, even among the city's cultural density, with imaginatively curated exhibitions featuring influential, emerging and well-known artists from around the world.

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, which measures a city's percentage of the population with postsecondary education. 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.

With the pandemic (relatively) in the rearview, the city can get back to its ambitious buildout as America's newest (oldest) urban destination. In early 2020, hotel inventory in Boston was projected to grow by almost 5,000 new rooms in the next five years alone, a 20% increase in supply. More than half of those rooms are 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. Boston strong, indeed.



VIEW OF PARK STREET CHURCH FROM BOSTON COMMON

POPULATION

METRO 3,316,073

HIGHLIGHTS

3 PLACE

7 ATTRACTIONS

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

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—252 years ago, on a hillside overlooking what is now known as Old Town San Diego.

Two and a half centuries later, this city of 1.4 million (with an MSA population approaching 3.5 million) is one of the fastest-growing in the U.S. It ranks #3

6 SAN DIEGO CA

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. After a festive 2019 celebrating its 250th, the city is now pausing somewhat to reap the fruits of an intense few years of development. Of course, with the COVID-19 outbreak and California's stringent shelter-in-place orders, San Diegans don't really have a choice. But given that San Diego fared better than L.A. through much of the pandemic, the sacrifices worked for the most part.

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.

SeaWorld, which reopened in the spring, will unveil a new 17-acre Sesame Place-themed park this year on the site of the current Aquatica San Diego, SeaWorld's waterpark. Sesame Place San Diego will open as a Certified Autism Center (CAC), mirroring its Philadelphia sister park, which was the first theme park in the world to achieve this designation.

LEGOLAND California Resort, reopened in May, had announced the largest addition in the park's history right before the pandemic hit in early 2020.

The San Diego Symphony's permanent bayside concert venue, The Shell—with its architecturally striking and acoustically optimized stage—also opens this year within Embarcadero Marina Park South.

The Mingei International Museum in Balboa Park is reopening, too, along with a \$52-million project that transformed the museum along Plaza de Panama and created a newly designed community gathering space, education center and quiet, spacious upper level galleries devoted to exhibitions (complete with a library open to visitors). Restored historic spaces include the museum's upper terraces, which will be opened to the public for the first time in decades, offering views of the Plaza de Panama, El Prado and California Tower. The museum's historic Bell Tower will also be opened and accessed by a new grand staircase.

And 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.



LA JOLLA COVE

POPULATION

METRO 6,196,585

HIGHLIGHTS

2 EDUCATIONAL
ATTAINMENT

5 MUSEUMS

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

The ubiquity of D.C. in dramas on screens small and large, combined with the shocking events of 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.

The winning of Amazon's coveted HQ2 in nearby Arlington, Virginia, dominated local chatter over the past three years—the 25,000 jobs created will be located in what Amazon calls National Landing, a newly minted place brand for the neighborhood near Reagan National Airport known as Crystal City. The jobs will improve D.C.'s already impressive economic footing, powered by its #7 national spot for Fortune 500 companies located here.

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.

First to open is Capitol Hill's The Roost, a 12,500-square-foot community-based food hall, with a diverse collection of food, beer, wine and spirits purveyors.

7 WASHINGTON DC

DC WHARF DISTRICT



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 about to 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.

As for D.C.'s much-promoted Wharf, the Southwest Waterfront development is on to Phase 2, which will add a Pendry

Hotel with 131 rooms, a 1.5-acre park, 95,000 square feet of retail space and 547,000 square feet of office space.

Visitors will also benefit from all this investment, and the city's #5 ranking in our Sights & Landmarks category will only improve in the coming years, as will its current #5 Museums ranking. The Lincoln Memorial Rehabilitation adds new services and design to enhance the visitor experience, including activating the space below the monument, and construction continues on a dedicated U.S. WWI memorial to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the war's end. The memorial's 58.5-foot bronze sculpture will be the highest free-standing bronze artwork in the Western hemisphere and is expected to be completed in 2023.

POPULATION

METRO 2,892,066

HIGHLIGHTS

1 PEOPLE

4 AIRPORT
CONNECTIVITY

Light rail, legal pot and buzzing 'hoods put Denver on the fast track—and on the radar of urban wanderers looking for a new post-pandemic home.

Since its Wild West early days, Denver has attracted people from a variety of cultures who've created a rich tapestry and a diverse cultural heritage. Today, 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.

But it's not just an abundance of jobs and a lower cost of living that's attracting a highly educated and in-demand workforce. Blessed with

8 DENVER CO

UNION STATION AND TRANSIT CENTER



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. Lest we 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.

Plans are afoot for an arts explosion over the next year. Meow Wolf, the artist collective responsible for Santa Fe's immersive art exhibit the House of Eternal Return, opens

its second permanent installation here this year, and the Denver Art Museum's Martin Building (formerly North Building) is undergoing an extensive, multi-year renovation.

Of course the street-level creativity flows out from the River North Art District, known locally as "RiNo" and the neighborhood "where art is made." Its blend of urban charm and unique industrial revival housing jazz bars, restaurants, brewpubs, art galleries and working studios attracted significant investment in 2019 with the North Wynkoop development, a 14-acre mixed-use project, and the opening of the Mission Ballroom, a 4,000-person venue that will only add to Denver's reputation as a fast-rising creative hub and top destination for live music.

POPULATION

METRO 4,761,603

HIGHLIGHTS

6 WEATHER

11 CHANGE IN CIVILIAN
LABOR FORCE

Latin soul, daring architecture and a reverence for the outdoors blends a heady mix in the heart of the American Southwest.

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

9 PHOENIX AZ

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.

The city certainly wasn't idle during the lockdown, as places like the Pemberton PHX, a historic downtown home made over as a design-focused community hub that opened earlier this year, are powering Phoenix's urban renaissance, further bolstering its already impressive #12 national ranking in our Shopping category.

No fewer than 10 hotels have opened or will be opening in town this year, with downtown leading the way. The 13-story urban-inspired boutique AC Hotel Downtown is the post-pandemic destination the city needs, pouring craft cocktails, and featuring an outdoor patio with fireplaces and city panoramas.

The city is also embracing its understated culinary tradition and Latin roots with places like BarCoa, a spot that elevates the tasting and discovery of tequilas and smoky mezcals. A street-level cantina and locally owned taco trucks round out the authenticity.

The soon-to-be-opened Epicenter at Agritopia, southeast of the city, is going all-in on local restaurants like Matt's Big Breakfast and enchilada favorite Gadzooks, in addition to many other opportunities to try the locally brewed, distilled and grown. Retail and residential add to all the new development that's shining a light on the Gilbert suburb.

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.



VIEW OF PHOENIX SKYLINE

POPULATION

METRO 1,987,846

HIGHLIGHTS

1 EDUCATIONAL
ATTAINMENT

3 PROSPERITY

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

It's fascinating what a well-educated, well-paid and diverse population can do for a city's 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.

10 SAN JOSE CA

The bounty of universities is a performance driver all its own, creating symbiotic integrations with local tech companies and offering access to funding and innovation like few others. Given the optimal conditions of a lauded, coveted school and the on-ramp it provides to jobs in the city, San José will continue to stock its talent pipeline. The region, home to Google, Facebook, Cisco Systems, eBay and PayPal, is #3 for Fortune 500 companies, trailing only New York and Chicago, and each is already ravenous for graduates as recovery plans hit full speed.

But the massive number of corporate offices in San José doesn't just provide jobs: it's reshaping the very city—and region—where those offices are based.

The city's 2014 adoption of the Diridon Station Area Plan to create a mixed-use urban destination near public transit was predicated on Google bankrolling things to bring the vision to life. The project, being built out over the next few years, promises hundreds of thousands of square feet of office space next to an intermodal transit station that, if transit and rail funding stars align, will be a transportation hub for the state.

In addition to the tantalizing prospect of high-speed rail links to San Francisco and the Central Valley, Diridon Station is also planned to be the hub for San Francisco's Bay Area Rapid Transit when the connection is finished at the end of this decade.



SHOPPING ON SANTANA ROW



11 PHILADELPHIA

PENNSYLVANIA

POPULATION METRO 6,079,130

HIGHLIGHTS

- 10 PRODUCT
- 11 PROGRAMMING

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

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.



12 DALLAS

TEXAS

POPULATION METRO 7,320,663

HIGHLIGHTS

- 7 PRODUCT
- 12 PROMOTION

Dallas-boosters like to say that “Big Things Happen Here,” and as the city climbs up our rankings year after year, we’d have to agree.

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 Jose 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. 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, with bars and restaurants concentrated in Oak Lawn, and to the Dallas Arts District, the largest contiguous urban arts district in the nation. 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 for Programming.



13 ATLANTA

GEORGIA

POPULATION METRO 5,862,424

HIGHLIGHTS

- 5 AIRPORT CONNECTIVITY
- 7 FORTUNE 500 COMPANIES (TIE)

Affluent, charming and dripping with history, this giant of the American South is creating the future on its own terms.

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 the 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.



14 SEATTLE

WASHINGTON

POPULATION METRO 3,871,323

HIGHLIGHTS

- 8 PROGRAMMING
- 9 PEOPLE

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

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, 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."

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.



15 AUSTIN

TEXAS

POPULATION METRO 2,114,441

HIGHLIGHTS

- 7 PEOPLE
- 13 PROGRAMMING

The home of SXSW and the purported best live music scene on the planet is quickly becoming America's new hometown.

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.



16 LAS VEGAS

NEVADA

POPULATION METRO 2,182,004

HIGHLIGHTS

- 1 WEATHER
- 2 ATTRACTIONS

This pulsing destination has never been quieter than in the COVID-19 reality. Its resilience and response will define it for decades.

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 in the 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, signaling deep intent. The city is ready, with dozens of massive new openings that will entice visitors back for the next decade.



17 HOUSTON

TEXAS

POPULATION METRO 6,884,138

HIGHLIGHTS

- 4 DINING
- 4 GOOGLE TRENDS

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

International immigration 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 its 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 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.



18 COLUMBUS

OHIO

POPULATION METRO 2,077,761

HIGHLIGHTS

- 8 PROSPERITY
- 16 PEOPLE

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

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



19 BOISE

IDAHO

POPULATION METRO 710,743

HIGHLIGHTS

- 4 PROSPERITY
- 4 SAFETY

One of the fastest-growing cities in the country entices with the promise of plentiful jobs and after-work outdoor adventure.

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.



20 TUCSON

ARIZONA

POPULATION METRO 1,027,207

HIGHLIGHTS

- 10 PROSPERITY
- 16 WEATHER

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

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 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 swagger.

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.



21 PROVO

UTAH

POPULATION METRO 616,791

HIGHLIGHTS

- 3 PEOPLE
- 3 SAFETY

An outdoor paradise prepares for take-off.

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. Its 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 is the city's talent and economic performance. Technology, healthcare, and education are among the city's major industries, with an economy propelled by a highly educated population: Provo ranked #15 for Educational Attainment (with nearly 43% having earned a bachelor's degree or higher). Supported 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. Good thing the city has invested in Google Fiber and a recent \$40-million airport terminal expansion.



22 TAMPA

FLORIDA

POPULATION METRO 3,097,859

HIGHLIGHTS

- 8 SAFETY
- 10 ATTRACTIONS

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

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

OREGON

POPULATION METRO 2,445,761

HIGHLIGHTS

- 8 PARKS & OUTDOORS
- 10 PROGRAMMING

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

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.

The city's people have always set Portland—and its livability and performance—apart: 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 Portland's 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 protest, Portlanders once again forged their reputation as an uncompromising citizenry.



24 RALEIGH

NORTH CAROLINA

POPULATION METRO 1,332,311

HIGHLIGHTS

- 6 EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT
- 9 SAFETY

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

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 like in 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.



25 MIAMI

FLORIDA

POPULATION METRO 6,090,660

HIGHLIGHTS

- 2 INSTAGRAM HASHTAGS
- 5 DINING

Miami's creativity is fueled by its arms-wide-open acceptance of new immigrants—both international and domestic.

Miami's natural attributes have always captured the world's imagination and crystalized 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-lusting 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.



26 CHARLESTON

SOUTH CAROLINA

POPULATION METRO 774,508

HIGHLIGHTS

2 PARKS & OUTDOORS

9 MUSEUMS

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

A beguiling fusion of built environment and coastal transition landscapes—golden islands, channels and marshes—Charleston is one of North America's most architecturally significant destinations.

This easy yet kinetic seaside American treasure draws pilgrims from all over the world, propelled by the promise of legendary Southern hospitality from another time. 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 at 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.



27 CHARLOTTE

NORTH CAROLINA

POPULATION METRO 2,545,560

HIGHLIGHTS

7 AIRPORT CONNECTIVITY

18 FORTUNE 500 COMPANIES (TIE)

Affluent and easy to love for its southern charm, North Carolina's biggest city is open for business and pleasure.

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.



28 SALT LAKE CITY

UTAH

POPULATION METRO 1,201,043

HIGHLIGHTS

8 CHANGE IN HOME PRICES

20 AIRPORT CONNECTIVITY

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

Combining spectacular natural and built environments, Salt Lake City is no longer just a gateway to the great outdoors 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 for über-conservative Mormonism and 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 University ranking.



29 NASHVILLE

TENNESSEE

POPULATION METRO 1,871,903

HIGHLIGHTS

- 8 UNIVERSITY RANKING
- 12 NIGHTLIFE

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

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.



30 MINNEAPOLIS

MINNESOTA

POPULATION METRO 3,573,609

HIGHLIGHTS

- 9 FORTUNE 500 COMPANIES
- 12 EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

Culture, affordability and a low pre-pandemic unemployment rate make Minneapolis a talent magnet.

As the site of the George Floyd murder at the hands of local police 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 Mississippi.

With 18 Fortune 500 companies, Minneapolis scores an impressive #9 in our Fortune 500 subcategory. The highly educated workforce (ranked #12 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 to recovery, with its ranking in our Change in Civilian Labor Force subcategory sitting in the bottom 10% nationally, and the subsequent sag in housing demand pushing real estate prices lower.



31 KANSAS CITY

MISSOURI

POPULATION METRO 2,124,518

HIGHLIGHTS

- 12 PEOPLE
- 24 GOOGLE TRENDS

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

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.

Economic resilience helped avoid 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 opportunities to visit the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art or the American Jazz Museum. Besides the good weather (#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.



32 SACRAMENTO

CALIFORNIA

POPULATION METRO 2,315,980

HIGHLIGHTS

- 13 WEATHER
- 25 PEOPLE

Green, bountiful and affluent, California's capital is big on local stewardship and valuing what it already has.

California's state capital is peaceful and beautiful, ranking well for its natural attributes, including epic weather (#13). 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.

Some help from Mother Nature—and tourism—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.



33 COLORADO SPRINGS

COLORADO

POPULATION METRO 723,498

HIGHLIGHTS

- 8 PEOPLE
- 12 PARKS & OUTDOORS

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

Situated at the base of Pikes Peak, Colorado Springs is a wonderland for those who love adventure, unsurprisingly ranking #12 for Parks & Outdoors. After hiking the Garden of the Gods or biking Cheyenne Mountain State Park, 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 once social distancing is relaxed—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.



34 ALBUQUERQUE

NEW MEXICO

POPULATION METRO 912,108

HIGHLIGHTS

- 10 PARKS & OUTDOORS
- 16 SHOPPING

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

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, 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. Its 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.



35 DURHAM NORTH CAROLINA

POPULATION METRO 626,695

HIGHLIGHTS

- 7 UNIVERSITY RANKING
- 8 EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

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

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 it 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).



36 NORTH PORT FLORIDA

POPULATION METRO 803,709

HIGHLIGHTS

- 2 SAFETY
- 5 CHANGE IN UNEMPLOYMENT RATE

New homes and opportunities are springing up in abundance in this naturally stunning Florida city.

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, 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 for Change in Family Income).



37 CINCINNATI OHIO

POPULATION METRO 2,201,741

HIGHLIGHTS

- 7 PROSPERITY
- 27 DINING

From "Banks of the Ohio" to Over the Rhine, from baseball to music to beer, Cincinnati is most entertaining.

Cincinnati has been simmering just under the surface of mainstream urban vibrancy for a few years now, but in 2018 it leapt into the coveted New York Times 52 Places to Visit list. 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.



38 ALBANY NEW YORK

POPULATION METRO 880,736

HIGHLIGHTS

2 CHANGE IN FAMILY INCOME

11 PEOPLE

Central, prosperous and sophisticated, New York State's capital knows its worth.

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 mean big things post-pandemic.



39 PORTLAND MAINE

POPULATION METRO 532,075

HIGHLIGHTS

9 PARKS & OUTDOORS

13 EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

Enviably streetscapes and plentiful arts and culture help this Maine gem punch above its weight for talent attraction.

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 Parks & Outdoors, as part of its #42 ranking for Place, a measure of the natural and built environment. There are six unfairly picturesque local lighthouses, 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 ranks #22 for Safety) 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).



40 MADISON WISCONSIN

POPULATION METRO 653,725

HIGHLIGHTS

4 PEOPLE

22 UNIVERSITY RANKING

Some cities win the lottery, and this oft-cited example of livability, job creation and Millennial magnetism is no exception.

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.



41 ORLANDO

FLORIDA

POPULATION METRO 2,508,970

HIGHLIGHTS

- 1 ATTRACTIONS
- 3 TRIPADVISOR REVIEWS

With its tourism superpower depleted by the pandemic, Orlando tries reopening by focusing on being a better hometown.

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. 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.



42 SAN ANTONIO

TEXAS

POPULATION METRO 2,468,193

HIGHLIGHTS

- 6 ATTRACTIONS
- 8 DINING

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

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. San Antonio ranks a stealthy #8 nationally for its restaurants.



43 MILWAUKEE

WISCONSIN

POPULATION METRO 1,575,223

HIGHLIGHTS

- 21 FORTUNE 500 COMPANIES
- 25 NIGHTLIFE

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

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? 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. 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 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.



44 ST. LOUIS

MISSOURI

POPULATION METRO 2,805,190

HIGHLIGHTS

- 10 UNIVERSITY RANKING
- 16 MUSEUMS

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

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.



45 INDIANAPOLIS

INDIANA

POPULATION METRO 2,029,472

HIGHLIGHTS

- 13 ATTRACTIONS
- 26 PEOPLE

Indy is rich in experiences and events, but its housing affordability is the real reason to fall for this Midwest gem.

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 Bottleworks District, featuring the new Bottleworks Hotel and a new home to Indy's best coffee roasters, florists, brewers, food purveyors and artisans.



46 EL PASO

TEXAS

POPULATION METRO 840,477

HIGHLIGHTS

- 7 PLACE
- 18 CHANGE IN CIVILIAN LABOR FORCE

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

Safe (the "Safest City in America!" if you listen to former mayor Dee Margo, even though we have it at #5), 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.



47 BALTIMORE

MARYLAND

POPULATION METRO 2,796,733

HIGHLIGHTS

- 6 UNIVERSITY RANKING
- 12 MUSEUMS

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

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. Its world-class institutions like Johns Hopkins University (ranked #6) and the National Aquarium, as well as a quirky culture makes Charm City distinct. Johns Hopkins is Baltimore's largest employer, and while it may be lacking Fortune 500 company (ranking #70 nationally), 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.



48 PITTSBURGH

PENNSYLVANIA

POPULATION METRO 2,331,447

HIGHLIGHTS

- 16 UNIVERSITY RANKING
- 18 FORTUNE 500 COMPANIES (TIE)

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

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).



49 CAPE CORAL

FLORIDA

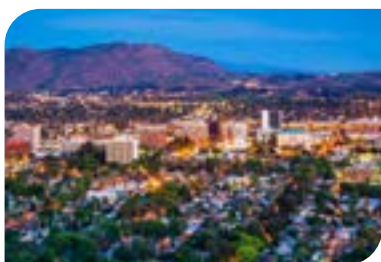
POPULATION METRO 737,468

HIGHLIGHTS

- 1 SAFETY
- 3 PARKS & OUTDOORS

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

Sure, there's Southwest Florida's first Westin property—coming off a \$15-million remodel—and a 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 sandy beaches of its neighboring islands it more than makes up for in riverfront vistas and outdoor pursuits. 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 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.



50 RIVERSIDE

CALIFORNIA

POPULATION METRO 4,560,470

HIGHLIGHTS

- 3 WEATHER
- 10 CHANGE IN CIVILIAN LABOR FORCE

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

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. 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.



51 OGDEN

UTAH

POPULATION METRO 662,875

HIGHLIGHTS

- 4 CHANGE IN HOME PRICE
- 5 CHANGE IN CIVILIAN LABOR FORCE

A city prospers off the outdoors.

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, \$91.9-million, 5.3-mile rapid bus transit line from downtown to Weber State University and McKay-Dee Hospital.



52 NEW ORLEANS

LOUISIANA

POPULATION METRO 1,267,777

HIGHLIGHTS

- 2 SHOPPING
- 5 TRIPADVISOR REVIEWS

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

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.



53 KNOXVILLE

TENNESSEE

POPULATION METRO 853,337

HIGHLIGHTS

11 CHANGE IN UNEMPLOYMENT RATE

21 PARKS & OUTDOORS

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

An urban walker's paradise, downtown Knoxville is a treasure trove to explore and discover, from vibrant murals to local music venues, historic sites and museums. Instead of playing second fiddle to nearby Asheville and Chattanooga, Knoxville is finding its own groove as 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. 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.



54 JACKSONVILLE

FLORIDA

POPULATION METRO 1,503,574

HIGHLIGHTS

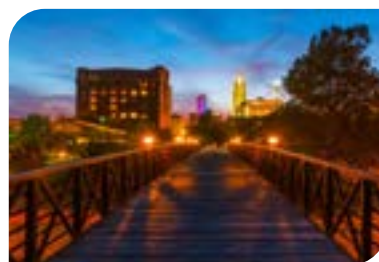
10 CHANGE IN UNEMPLOYMENT RATE

25 PARKS & OUTDOORS

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

Young professionals love 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 (it ranks #25 for Parks & Outdoors), 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.



55 OMAHA

NEBRASKA

POPULATION METRO 931,779

HIGHLIGHTS

13 CHANGE IN UNEMPLOYMENT RATE

22 PARKS & OUTDOORS

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

Nebraska's largest city has always worked overtime to carve out its place on the banks of the Missouri River in pretty much the middle of the (contiguous) country. Billionaire Warren Buffett'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).



56 FAYETTEVILLE

ARKANSAS

POPULATION METRO 514,259

HIGHLIGHTS

- 12 CHANGE IN UNEMPLOYMENT RATE
- 31 FORTUNE 500 COMPANIES (TIE)

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

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.



57 HONOLULU

HAWAII

POPULATION METRO 984,821

HIGHLIGHTS

- 1 PARKS & OUTDOORS
- 8 SHOPPING

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

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.



58 PALM BAY

FLORIDA

POPULATION METRO 585,507

HIGHLIGHTS

- 10 SAFETY
- 22 CHANGE IN UNEMPLOYMENT RATE

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

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.



59 MEMPHIS TENNESSEE

POPULATION METRO 1,339,623

HIGHLIGHTS

- 20 CHANGE IN CIVILIAN LABOR FORCE
- 27 MUSEUMS

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

Tennessee's second-largest city is an American icon that's been quietly adding to the national lore from the bank of the Mississippi River for more than 200 years. The heart of the Delta Blues and famously home to Graceland, it is the lesser-known Music City, USA, when compared to Austin and Nashville. But those two can't hold a guitar to Memphis' contributions to the Civil Rights Movement. Or its barbecue. With so many stories, the city ranks an impressive #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 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 the city is drawing post-pandemic residents able to work from anywhere.



60 FRESNO CALIFORNIA

POPULATION METRO 984,521

HIGHLIGHTS

- 8 WEATHER
- 9 CHANGE IN UNEMPLOYMENT RATE

The urban heart of central California is also the state's breadbasket—with an impressive restaurant scene big on local bounty.

Fresno, the largest inland city in California, 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.



61 LEXINGTON KENTUCKY

POPULATION METRO 510,647

HIGHLIGHTS

- 26 EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT
- 31 PROSPERITY

The energetic metro races to expand.

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.



62 OKLAHOMA CITY OKLAHOMA

POPULATION METRO 1,382,841

HIGHLIGHTS

- 17 CHANGE IN CIVILIAN LABOR FORCE
- 20 WEATHER

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

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 (between February 2020 and February 2021).



63 SANTA ROSA CALIFORNIA

POPULATION METRO 499,772

HIGHLIGHTS

- 11 SAFETY
- 18 WEATHER

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

After suffering untold tragedy during the Tubbs wildfire in 2017 and, you know, the pandemic, Santa Rosa—"the urban heart of Sonoma County," 55 miles north of San Francisco—is poised to face the future more resilient. 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.



64 SPOKANE WASHINGTON

POPULATION METRO 550,160

HIGHLIGHTS

- 1 PROSPERITY
- 26 PARKS & OUTDOORS

Impressive in nightlife, culture and shopping, Spokane is drawing priced-out West Coasters and growing prosperous as a result.

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, sparking 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. Nearby Yakima produces 75% of the country's hops—more than enough to justify Spokane's craft beer boom that today includes 31 breweries.



65 OXNARD

CALIFORNIA

POPULATION METRO 847,263

HIGHLIGHTS

3 WEATHER

14 SAFETY

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

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. Its 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.



66 AUGUSTA

GEORGIA

POPULATION METRO 599,616

HIGHLIGHTS

19 CHANGE IN UNEMPLOYMENT RATE

21 SAFETY

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

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.



67 MCALLEN

TEXAS

POPULATION METRO 855,176

HIGHLIGHTS

7 CHANGE IN CIVILIAN LABOR FORCE

21 PLACE

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

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.



68 GREENSBORO

NORTH CAROLINA

POPULATION METRO 762,063

HIGHLIGHTS

- 14 PROSPERITY
- 48 WEATHER

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

A quest for diversity is part of Greensboro's past, and events that transpired in the city helped shape African American legacy. The 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 its bounty. 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

RHODE ISLAND

POPULATION METRO 1,618,268

HIGHLIGHTS

- 8 UNIVERSITY RANKING
- 26 CHANGE IN HOME PRICES

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

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.



70 ROCHESTER

NEW YORK

POPULATION METRO 1,072,877

HIGHLIGHTS

- 17 PEOPLE
- 29 UNIVERSITY RANKING

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

Look back through its history far enough and you'll discover that Rochester, just a shade above a million in population today, 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 redbrick, old-world charm, 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. This pipeline of talent could turn the trickle of new companies into a torrent as the war for a highly educated workforce intensifies. 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. To say nothing of its #36 Educational Attainment rank.



71 COLUMBIA

SOUTH CAROLINA

POPULATION METRO 824,278

HIGHLIGHTS

16 CHANGE IN UNEMPLOYMENT RATE

44 WEATHER

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

Like most state capitals, South Carolina's Columbia is an economically diversified, highly livable jewel too often overlooked by tourists and potential residents. While Columbia's #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. The Riverbanks Zoo & Garden extends for 170 acres along the Saluda River and features an aquarium, zoo with more than 2,000 animals. 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.



72 VIRGINIA BEACH

VIRGINIA

POPULATION METRO 1,761,729

HIGHLIGHTS

6 SAFETY

24 ATTRACTIONS

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

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.



73 GREENVILLE

SOUTH CAROLINA

POPULATION METRO 895,942

HIGHLIGHTS

9 CHANGE IN CIVILIAN LABOR FORCE

45 MUSEUMS

With a location as beautiful as it is central, Greenville is open for business—and it's investing in infrastructure to keep that momentum.

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 ranks #45 for Museums. While Falls Park on the Reedy is a lovely natural oasis in the center of the city (resulting in a #48 ranking for 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).



74 STOCKTON CALIFORNIA

POPULATION METRO 742,603

HIGHLIGHTS

- 8 WEATHER
- 12 PROSPERITY

From agricultural center to bedroom community to downtown hot spot, Stockton is a city to watch in the Golden State.

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 NORTH CAROLINA

POPULATION METRO 666,216

HIGHLIGHTS

- 17 UNIVERSITY RANKING
- 1 CHANGE IN FAMILY INCOME

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

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 "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. This in addition to restaurants, coffee shops, and locally dedicated restaurants, breweries and purveyors. 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 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.



76 DAYTON OHIO

POPULATION METRO 803,543

HIGHLIGHTS

- 21 CHANGE IN UNEMPLOYMENT RATE
- 22 CHANGE IN HOME PRICES

The arts fly high in this aerospace hub.

The first thing Dayton might bring to mind is airplanes, being the place where the Wright brothers developed and manned the world's first flying machine. You can immerse yourself in all things aviation at spots such as Huffman Prairie Flying Field and the National Museum of the U.S. Air Force. However, the Gem City is also the state's epicenter of the arts. The Bach Society, Dayton Opera, Dayton Ballet, Dayton Philharmonic Orchestra, Dayton Contemporary Dance Company and the Dayton Playhouse are just some of the organizations that thrive here. The Contemporary Dayton and Dayton Art Institute are but two of several galleries. Dayton performs well in our Museums subcategory, at #62.

Along with a #68 ranking for Nightlife, the city hit #80 for Programming. 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 for F-15 sustainment engineering studies. The city stayed on course during the pandemic, ranking #21 in the nation for Change in Unemployment Rate and #22 for a Change in Home Prices.



77 AKRON OHIO

POPULATION METRO 703,845

HIGHLIGHTS

- 8 CHANGE IN UNEMPLOYMENT RATE
- 38 FORTUNE 500 COMPANIES (TIE)

Water and wealth distinguish the Ohio metropolis.

Stan Hywet Hall & Gardens was once the family home of F.A. Seiberling, cofounder 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.



78 DETROIT MICHIGAN

POPULATION METRO 4,317,848

HIGHLIGHTS

- 2 CHANGE IN UNEMPLOYMENT RATE
- 15 INSTAGRAM HASHTAGS

The world seems to be rooting for Comeback City. It's got a new arena, culture, streetcar... and its unshakeable local pride.

Detroit has been on top of the world, it's been as low as you can go. How low? It wasn't until 2018 that 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 have 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.



79 MODESTO CALIFORNIA

POPULATION METRO 543,194

HIGHLIGHTS

- 11 WEATHER
- 18 PROSPERITY

Already sunny and diverse, Modesto's strategic location to Silicon Valley has the city ready for take off.

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.



80 CHATTANOOGA TENNESSEE

POPULATION METRO 556,209

HIGHLIGHTS

- 4 CHANGE IN UNEMPLOYMENT RATE
- 18 PARKS & OUTDOORS

Affordable living amidst an outdoor bounty.

Tucked at the base of Lookout Mountain on the banks of the Tennessee River, Chattanooga has earned its Scenic City moniker, as well as its “Best Town Ever” accolades by Outside magazine in 2015. The town certainly boasts the adrenal bonafides: from climbing the Tennessee Wall to river and trail running, and mountain biking just outside of city limits. To say nothing of craft breweries like Heaven & Ale to speed recovery time. No wonder it ranks #18 for Parks & Outdoors. Gig City also boasts internet speeds of up to 10 gigabits per second 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 Redfin, up 17% annually and rising quickly. 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.



81 BUFFALO NEW YORK

POPULATION METRO 1,130,175

HIGHLIGHTS

- 23 PROFESSIONAL SPORTS TEAMS (TIE)
- 24 SIGHTS AND LANDMARKS

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

Long and erroneously viewed as a faded Rust Belt afterthought overshadowed by Toronto’s global ascent and the tourist magnetism of Niagara Falls, Buffalo has quietly gone about its work of reinvention. The second most populated city in the state behind New York City 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.



82 HARRISBURG PENNSYLVANIA

POPULATION METRO 571,013

HIGHLIGHTS

- 37 SAFETY
- 52 PEOPLE

This small Pennsylvania dynamo has economic horsepower to spare.

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 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.



83 RICHMOND

VIRGINIA

POPULATION METRO 1,269,530

HIGHLIGHTS

- 18 FORTUNE 500 COMPANIES (TIE)
- 27 SIGHTS AND LANDMARKS

Mellow and understated by design, Richmond's is a quiet influence on the union. And not just because it's a direct 90-minute drive from D.C.

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 restaurants (ranking #41 in the nation) and the galleries of Broad Street still reward exploration on foot or bike.



84 WICHITA

KANSAS

POPULATION METRO 637,690

HIGHLIGHTS

- 28 WEATHER
- 29 CHANGE IN CIVILIAN LABOR FORCE

Development takes off in the cultural hub of Kansas.

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 1,200 restaurants and 30 food trucks together ranking #56 in the country. Rounding out this small cultural powerhouse are big-city icons like the Wichita Grand Opera and Ballet Wichita. Development is occurring all over: in the Historic Delano District and downtown, where the new \$75-million Riverfront Stadium for Minor League Baseball opened in April 2021 and where developers are turning 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.



85 WORCESTER

MASSACHUSETTS

POPULATION METRO 941,338

HIGHLIGHTS

- 16 CHANGE IN HOME PRICES
- 20 SAFETY

A city characterized by deep thinkers and bold designers.

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 nationally. Given the academic chops, it's not surprising the city ranks #41 for Educational Attainment by citizens (more than 30% of residents hold a bachelor's degree or higher).

With manufacturing, education and healthcare driving economic performance, 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 to increase walkability and placemaking downtown.

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 indicates a town getting noticed.



86 GRAND RAPIDS

MICHIGAN

POPULATION METRO 1,062,392

HIGHLIGHTS

- 15 SAFETY
- 46 CONNECTIVITY

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

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.



87 TULSA

OKLAHOMA

POPULATION METRO 990,544

HIGHLIGHTS

- 22 WEATHER
- 32 GOOGLE TRENDS

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

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'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 year is pivotal for Tulsa: 100 years since the race massacre that murdered dozens of Black Tulsans and injured hundreds more, all by a deputized white mob that destroyed Greenwood, at the time the wealthiest Black community in America and known as Black Wall Street. Greenwood Rising, Tulsa's new history museum and memorial, is vital to confronting a tragedy that was kept quiet for decades.



88 BIRMINGHAM

ALABAMA

POPULATION METRO 1,085,330

HIGHLIGHTS

- 15 CHANGE IN CIVILIAN LABOR FORCE
- 32 CHANGE IN UNEMPLOYMENT RATE

Magic City has many new tricks.

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 to the Alabama Theatre.



89 LANCASTER

PENNSYLVANIA

POPULATION METRO 540,999

HIGHLIGHTS

- 21 CHANGE IN HOME PRICES
- 32 SAFETY

From the Amish to protons, a borough diversifies.

The country's oldest Amish settlement is here and 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).



90 LOUISVILLE

KENTUCKY

POPULATION METRO 1,257,088

HIGHLIGHTS

- 22 SHOPPING
- 30 ATTRACTIONS

A bourbon boom, a culinary hot spot, a horse race for the ages and the heart of The Greatest. There's nothing this city doesn't have.

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.



91 ALLENTOWN

PENNSYLVANIA

POPULATION METRO 837,610

HIGHLIGHTS

- 19 SAFETY
- 19 CHANGE IN HOME PRICES

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

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 and PPL Corporation, 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 ahead.

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.



92 LAKELAND FLORIDA

POPULATION METRO 686,218

HIGHLIGHTS

- 1 CHANGE IN CIVILIAN LABOR FORCE
- 28 SAFETY

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

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.



93 LITTLE ROCK ARKANSAS

POPULATION METRO 737,015

HIGHLIGHTS

- 35 CHANGE IN UNEMPLOYMENT RATE
- 42 WEATHER

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

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 that will likely surprise many people unfamiliar with it—more proof that city officials have sharpened their pencils on the economic development front. Dillard's Department Stores, Windstream Communications and Acxiom are just a few of the corporations headquartered in a city that has 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.



94 SCRANTON PENNSYLVANIA

POPULATION METRO 555,642

HIGHLIGHTS

- 20 PROSPERITY
- 29 SAFETY

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

Scranton's scrap is in its name, when the fearless Scranton brothers amalgamated smaller railroad lines to create an eponymous transportation hub for their steam engine empire in the mid-1800s. A couple of decades later came the electric lights and electric streetcars. You can still see the bright Electric City neon sign downtown and the Steamtown National Historic Site 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.



95 FAYETTEVILLE

NORTH CAROLINA

POPULATION METRO 519,101

HIGHLIGHTS

- 32 CHANGE IN FAMILY INCOME
- 35 SAFETY

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

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. The urban renewal started a decades ago with the opening of Festival Park and its catalyzing of entertainment and shopping nearby. In fact, Fayetteville today ranks #68 in our Shopping subcategory in the nation.



96 DELTONA

FLORIDA

POPULATION METRO 646,288

HIGHLIGHTS

- 4 CHANGE IN FAMILY INCOME
- 17 CHANGE IN UNEMPLOYMENT RATE

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

With its roots as retirement village a few decades back, Deltona has grown quickly and strategically, powered by its enviable location—30 miles from both Daytona Beach and Orlando.

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.



97 CLEVELAND

OHIO

POPULATION METRO 2,056,898

HIGHLIGHTS

- 1 CHANGE IN UNEMPLOYMENT RATE
- 16 PROFESSIONAL SPORTS TEAMS (TIE)

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

There are few American cities with a rebirth story like Cleveland's. More than 50 years after the Cuyahoga River (in) famously caught fire, Cleveland is poised like it hasn't been since the town was known (un-ironically) as "The City of Champions." 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.



98 DES MOINES

IOWA

POPULATION METRO 680,439

HIGHLIGHTS

- 29 EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT
- 37 CHANGE IN UNEMPLOYMENT RATE

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

As young talent reconsiders big cities, Des Moines checks a lot of boxes. Set on the Des Moines River among the state's famous rolling cornfields, Iowa's state capital is a business mecca with an artsy side. Add in the low cost of living, and is it any wonder that prairie-cool Des Moines, ranking #37 in our Change in Unemployment Rate subcategory, is one of the fastest-growing cities in the Midwest? Des Moines earns an impressive #29 for Educational Attainment among its citizenry—always a good sign for attracting 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.



99 SPRINGFIELD

MASSACHUSETTS

POPULATION METRO 699,480

HIGHLIGHTS

- 33 SAFETY
- 38 FORTUNE 500 COMPANIES (TIE)

A history of basketball, a future in biotech.

If the fact that Theodor Geisel, aka Dr. Seuss, hailed from here doesn't grab your attention (and 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.



100 LANSING

MICHIGAN

POPULATION METRO 546,772

HIGHLIGHTS

- 6 CHANGE IN FAMILY INCOME
- 34 UNIVERSITY RANKING

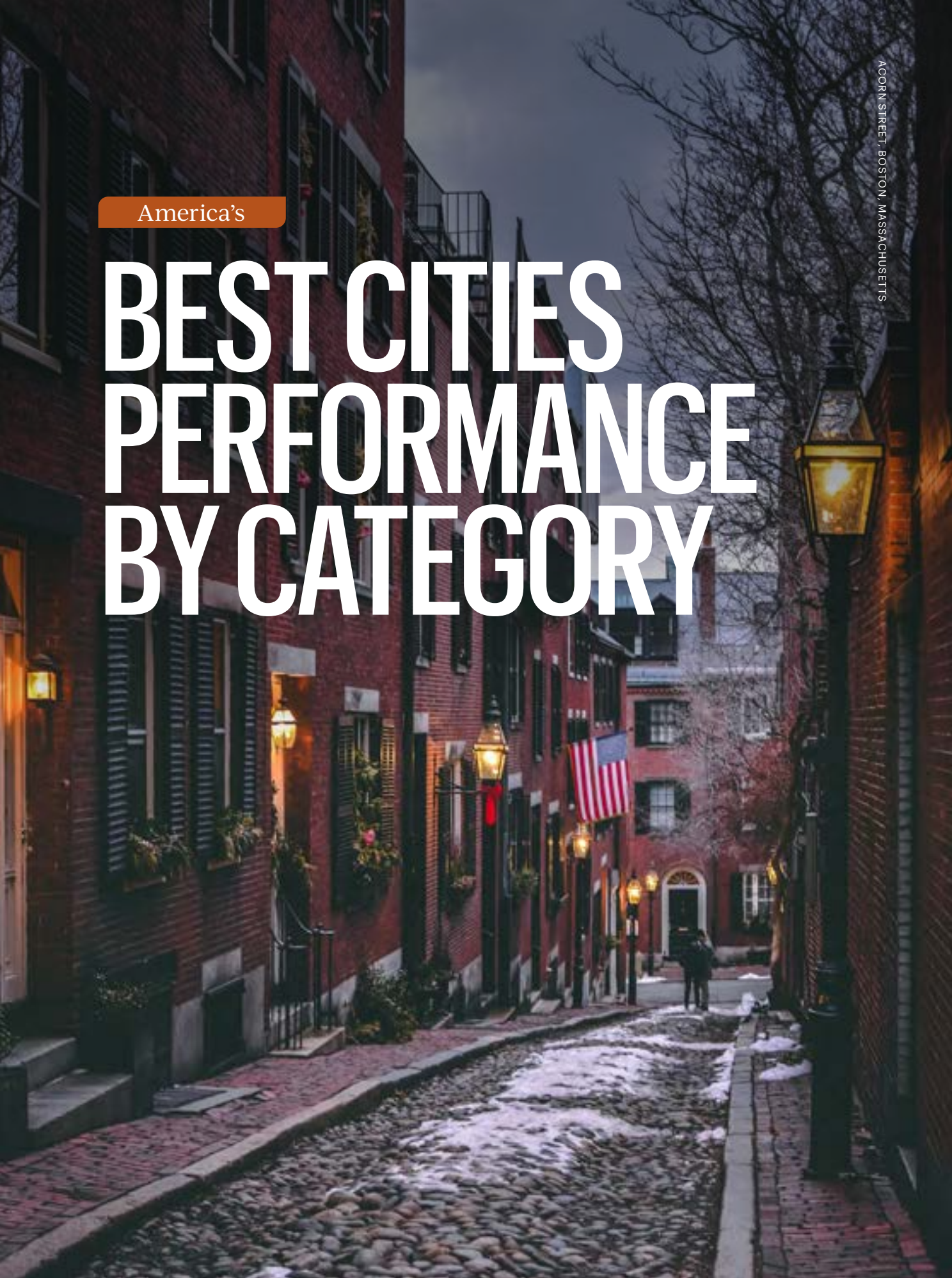
New tech provides the Michigan capital with an insurance policy for growth.

After taking over the title of state capital from Detroit in 1847, Lansing became an industrial hot spot, with auto manufacturing driving its growth. General Motors remains a major employer, but Lansing's economy has diversified 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 veterinary)—the most in the country—and was the first to offer a graduate degree in nuclear physics.

America's

BEST CITIES PERFORMANCE BY CATEGORY



RANK	CITY	STATE	PLACE	PRODUCT	PROGRAMMING	PEOPLE	PROSPERITY	PROMOTION
1	New York	New York	1	1	1	41	2	1
2	Los Angeles	California	2	2	2	45	58	2
3	Chicago	Illinois	19	3	3	48	46	3
4	San Francisco	California	5	9	4	13	74	9
5	Boston	Massachusetts	23	4	20	2	61	13
6	San Diego	California	3	20	9	19	27	11
7	Washington	District of Columbia	30	12	17	15	52	4
8	Denver	Colorado	37	13	22	1	51	17
9	Phoenix	Arizona	13	17	19	27	5	22
10	San José	California	18	36	38	5	3	36
11	Philadelphia	Pennsylvania	28	10	11	37	16	15
12	Dallas	Texas	31	7	16	22	50	12
13	Atlanta	Georgia	56	11	21	20	21	8
14	Seattle	Washington	94	15	8	9	35	14
15	Austin	Texas	29	28	13	7	76	16
16	Las Vegas	Nevada	8	6	5	106	95	5
17	Houston	Texas	46	8	6	70	62	7
18	Columbus	Ohio	40	35	29	16	8	33
19	Boise	Idaho	11	60	60	30	4	64
20	Tucson	Arizona	14	38	26	50	10	39
21	Provo	Utah	12	89	108	3	53	100
22	Tampa	Florida	22	25	27	46	23	23
23	Portland	Oregon	91	26	10	14	68	20
24	Raleigh	North Carolina	26	41	41	6	89	42
25	Miami	Florida	78	14	12	77	67	6

RANK	CITY	STATE	PLACE	PRODUCT	PROGRAMMING	PEOPLE	PROSPERITY	PROMOTION
26	Charleston	South Carolina	9	42	39	18	92	44
27	Charlotte	North Carolina	65	18	28	34	30	24
28	Salt Lake City	Utah	50	29	53	24	13	48
29	Nashville	Tennessee	72	21	18	28	63	18
30	Minneapolis	Minnesota	73	16	30	35	39	30
31	Kansas City	Missouri	60	33	45	12	48	31
32	Sacramento	California	27	40	36	25	70	35
33	Colorado Springs	Colorado	36	51	48	8	96	49
34	Albuquerque	New Mexico	34	46	33	40	36	51
35	Durham	North Carolina	62	47	75	10	43	74
36	North Port	Florida	16	82	109	51	15	108
37	Cincinnati	Ohio	81	34	32	59	7	46
38	Albany	New York	93	73	86	11	11	75
39	Portland	Maine	42	69	57	33	12	81
40	Madison	Wisconsin	43	63	59	4	102	56
41	Orlando	Florida	70	5	14	102	87	10
42	San Antonio	Texas	32	30	15	58	105	21
43	Milwaukee	Wisconsin	58	39	37	29	59	43
44	St. Louis	Missouri	71	24	23	56	69	27
45	Indianapolis	Indiana	101	32	35	26	60	32
46	El Paso	Texas	7	74	51	75	83	54
47	Baltimore	Maryland	66	19	25	64	81	25
48	Pittsburgh	Pennsylvania	83	27	31	60	49	26
49	Cape Coral	Florida	4	61	69	84	75	94
50	Riverside	California	17	71	83	79	33	80

RANK	CITY	STATE	PLACE	PRODUCT	PROGRAMMING	PEOPLE	PROSPERITY	PROMOTION
51	Ogden	Utah	48	98	107	21	38	104
52	New Orleans	Louisiana	53	23	7	96	91	19
53	Knoxville	Tennessee	86	57	54	49	19	57
54	Jacksonville	Florida	54	50	43	47	66	28
55	Omaha	Nebraska	39	52	42	44	73	52
56	Fayetteville	Arkansas	88	85	89	23	25	99
57	Honolulu	Hawai'i	6	44	24	31	109	41
58	Palm Bay	Florida	35	105	99	43	45	107
59	Memphis	Tennessee	84	43	44	57	57	34
60	Fresno	California	24	84	64	99	9	63
61	Lexington	Kentucky	68	78	58	62	31	67
62	Oklahoma City	Oklahoma	45	45	46	36	103	40
63	Santa Rosa	California	15	97	85	87	54	96
64	Spokane	Washington	57	79	61	101	1	60
65	Oxnard	California	10	107	95	65	104	102
66	Augusta	Georgia	41	99	94	71	37	84
67	McAllen	Texas	21	102	90	86	47	95
68	Greensboro	North Carolina	74	70	63	80	14	66
69	Providence	Rhode Island	69	55	68	73	32	76
70	Rochester	New York	107	54	52	17	84	53
71	Columbia	South Carolina	76	76	70	54	55	61
72	Virginia Beach	Virginia	25	56	50	82	88	55
73	Greenville	South Carolina	80	58	66	38	71	65
74	Stockton	California	38	103	96	85	22	88
75	Winston-Salem	North Carolina	92	65	74	89	6	97

RANK	CITY	STATE	PLACE	PRODUCT	PROGRAMMING	PEOPLE	PROSPERITY	PROMOTION
76	Dayton	Ohio	95	77	80	61	42	79
77	Akron	Ohio	97	90	78	68	29	91
78	Detroit	Michigan	98	22	47	104	26	29
79	Modesto	California	33	104	106	100	18	93
80	Chattanooga	Tennessee	89	59	62	83	34	62
81	Buffalo	New York	105	48	65	39	77	47
82	Harrisburg	Pennsylvania	87	88	93	52	64	92
83	Richmond	Virginia	49	53	49	78	85	45
84	Wichita	Kansas	64	66	67	42	98	71
85	Worcester	Massachusetts	52	95	87	55	94	73
86	Grand Rapids	Michigan	75	64	71	74	65	70
87	Tulsa	Oklahoma	47	62	55	63	106	50
88	Birmingham	Alabama	104	68	56	32	101	58
89	Lancaster	Pennsylvania	63	86	72	91	44	82
90	Louisville	Kentucky	77	49	34	88	82	38
91	Allentown	Pennsylvania	59	83	82	72	80	98
92	Lakeland	Florida	51	96	98	67	90	86
93	Little Rock	Arkansas	90	67	81	69	78	77
94	Scranton	Pennsylvania	100	101	103	92	20	103
95	Fayetteville	North Carolina	67	91	88	90	56	85
96	Deltona	Florida	102	108	104	94	17	109
97	Cleveland	Ohio	106	31	40	108	24	37
98	Des Moines	Iowa	82	72	76	66	100	78
99	Springfield	Massachusetts	61	80	100	76	93	101
100	Lansing	Michigan	96	92	102	98	28	90

SHAPE THE FUTURE OF YOUR CITY, COMMUNITY OR DEVELOPMENT.

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



RESEARCH

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

Consumer Research

Destination Assessments

Performance Benchmarking

Economic Analysis



DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

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

Real Estate Development

Tourism Development

Economic Development



BRANDING & MARKETING

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

Brand Strategy

Brand Identity

Advertising

Digital

Activation

Environment



PLACEMAKING

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

Art

Culture

Experience



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