

WHERE TO LIVE NOW

25 DREAM TOWNS

#1

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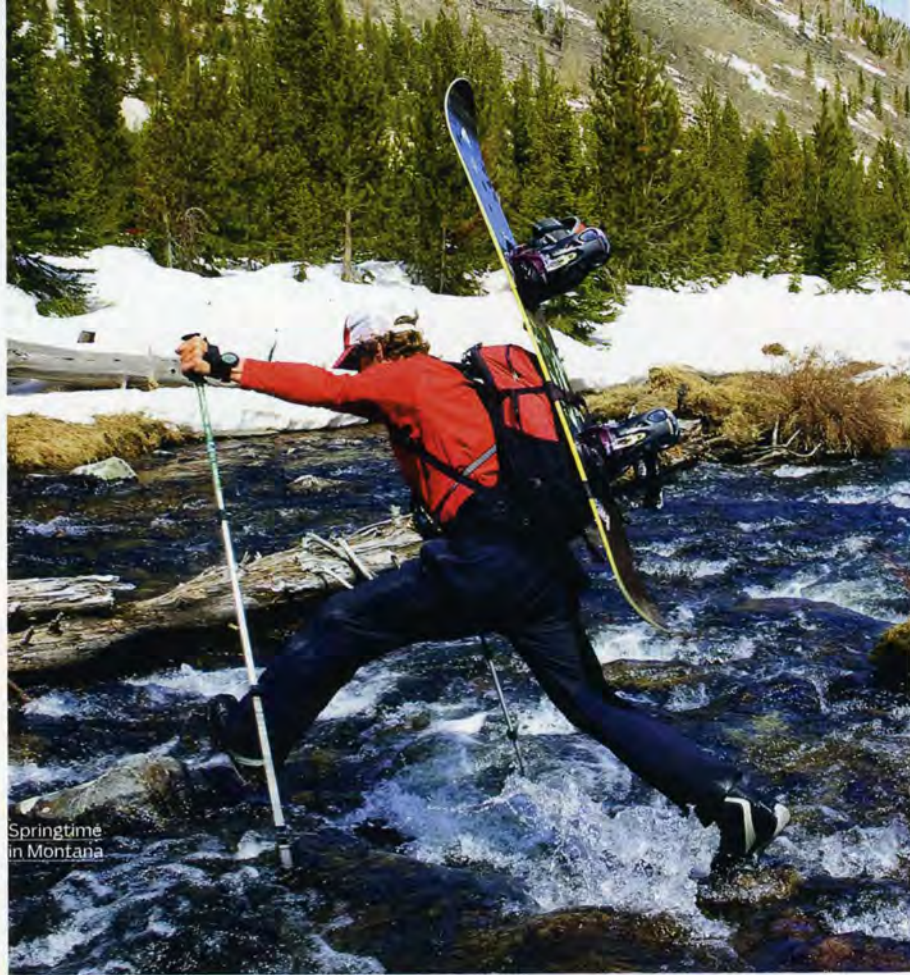
DESTINATIONS



BEST TOWNS 2010

Unusual Suspects

Where do you end up when you want a community with incredible access to the outdoors, affordable homes, and solid jobs? Some very surprising places. Introducing the top 25 towns in America for cycling, paddling, running, surfing, skiing, and—because you might want everything—all of the above.



Springtime
in Montana

infamous Tuckerman's Ravine is just a 15-minute drive away. —R.K.

BEST FOR SKIING (WEST)

> Bozeman, Montana

POPULATION 39,282

MEDIAN HOME PRICE \$259,500

HOMETOWN HERO Greg Mortenson, co-founder of the Central Asia Institute and founder of Pennies for Peace

THE LIVING: Last year, Bozemanites did something that's rarer in Montana than buying a two-wheel drive: They voted to raise their own taxes so the county could afford to purchase (and then preserve) ranches that might otherwise have been sliced and diced by developers. Translation: They put their money where their boots, bikes, and skis go. Cradled by 10,000-foot peaks, hyaline streams, and ragged wilderness, the fastest-growing town in the state has a bustling college campus and brains to match: Residents may wear cowboy hats, but the Ph.D. rate is twice the national average. Free live music in city parks during summer and community sporting events like the spectacular 20-mile Bridger Ridge Run keep the blood flowing.

THE SKIING: The joke is that there are two seasons here: winter and August. But with two ski areas and 350 inches of annual snowfall, most locals don't mind. Just 20 minutes away, Bridger features backcountry-style big-mountain runs—now with less hik-

ing required, thanks to the new Schlasman's lift (beacons required)—plus 18 miles of nearby cross-country ski trails. Forty-five minutes south of town, Big Sky Resort and Moonlight Basin offer a combined 5,512 acres of glades and bowls. When the lifts stop running, head to Cooke City or Beartooth Pass for backcountry-corn laps. (And when it all melts, it's time to fish.)

THE NEIGHBORHOOD: Bozeman's too small for any 'hood to be far from anything, but living south of Main can mean living as little as a few hundred yards from trails that run all the way to Yellowstone, 90 miles south. —TIM NEVILLE

RUNNER-UP

> Salt Lake City, Utah

It's a decidedly atypical ski town. But this is (mostly) a good thing, because in SLC (pop. 1,130,293) you can do things such as: get a job at a high-tech firm like eBay, Unisys, or 3M; afford a nice home (median price, \$250K); see Jazz games; fly direct to Paris; or just head a half-hour up the canyons to Alta, Snowbird, Solitude, and Brighton, four of the best ski resorts on the planet. —S.M.

BEST FOR SURFING (EAST)

> Charleston, South Carolina

POPULATION 659,191

MEDIAN HOME PRICE \$217,900

HOMETOWN HERO Ever since founding



BEST TOWNS 2010



Big Sky
Resort
Montana



Montana's
Beartooth
Mountains

his eponymous surf shop with his dad in 1965. Tim McKeivin has been a tireless advocate for surfers' rights

THE LIVING: Water is a way of life for Charlestonians: The city is surrounded on three sides by the Cooper and Ashley rivers and Charleston Harbor. And while some four million people visit each year to experience this graceful, 340-year-old city's sweet-tea hospitality, Charleston is more than a charming southern belle. It's got top-notch restaurants, including three consecutive James Beard Award-winning chefs (the only other town that shares this distinction is New York City), a thriving arts scene in the Design District on King Street, and a robust economy: The unemployment rate is well below the national average, while the cost of living remains surprisingly sane.

THE SURFING: With half a dozen annual contests and a stoked crew of local surfers, the Charleston area, especially Folly Beach, is home to one of the East Coast's most vibrant surf scenes. The water remains warm enough to trunk it for about seven months a



BEST TOWNS 2010

year, and though the continental shelf sucks some of the power out of the waves, it's consistently rideable and occasionally epic (like when hurricanes brush the coast). Two of the most popular spots are the Folly Beach Pier, which works on all swells, and the Washout, where the waves break with more power. When it's flat or too windy to surf in town, you can stand-up-paddleboard in the surrounding marshes and sounds.

THE NEIGHBORHOOD: Folly Beach (pop. 2,412), a six-mile-long barrier island, is the closest beach to downtown Charleston (15-minute drive) and has the best surf. It's also more easygoing—and affordable—than the other nearby island communities. —MARK ANDERS

RUNNER-UP

> St. Augustine, Florida

St. Augustine (pop. 12,707) is a rare Florida bird. Not only does this laid-back city offer some of the state's most consistent surfing; you can actually afford to buy a bungalow right on the sand (median price, \$225,000). The town pier has a beginner-friendly beach break; you'll find bigger waves at the point break at Matanzas Inlet. Can't work in your pajamas? Jacksonville, 40 miles down the road, is home to several *Fortune* 500 companies. —S.S.

BEST FOR SURFING (WEST)

> Encinitas, California

POPULATION 61,593

MEDIAN HOME PRICE \$889,000

HOMETOWN HERO Professional surfer Rob Machado, whose annual surf contests are both kid- and enviro-friendly

THE LIVING: Bordered on two sides by egret-and-heron-filled lagoons, this once sleepy surfers' enclave in San Diego's North County has quietly been cultivating its public spaces. A community-wide initiative is adding millions of cubic yards of sand to the area's eroding beaches, and smart community projects are still, despite the state's overall woes, in the works: Blueprints for a 44-acre park in the Cardiff-by-the-Sea neighborhood feature a skate park, a dog run, and a couple of pools. And the best part? The mom-and-pop-shop-filled downtown has something rare in Southern California: a commuter train that will whisk you into downtown San Diego in just 30 minutes.

THE SURFING: While good surf strings almost the entire San Diego coast, you'll never battle traffic to catch the swell here: Even



the most inland houses are only a four-minute drive to the water. Swami's, the much-hyped point break underneath the gold-domed self-realization temple, is as consistently good and long as advertised, but Encinitas is also home to a handful of beginner- and paddleboard-friendly reef breaks like Cardiff Reef and Pipes. Of course, surfers aren't the only ones enjoying the warm (no wetsuits needed half the year) water: The greater San Diego area is a triathlon hot spot, and that buoy off Moonlight Beach marks a turnaround point for the swim-cap-clad crowd.

THE NEIGHBORHOOD: Once a slummy enclave of slack-jawed surfers, Leucadia, a.k.a. "Funky Leucadia," sits cliffside above Beacon's, a lesser-known reef break. The houses are a little older, but you can find homes in the \$600K range a few blocks from the beach. —ALICIA CARR TROXELL

RUNNER-UP

> Kailua-Kona, Hawaii

Kona (pop. 30,889) might be better known as the site of the Ironman World Championships, but the surfing is so good that it used to be reserved for island royalty. Newbies will find gentler breaks at Pine Trees, while hard-chargers will prefer the bigger

Folly Beach



barrels at neighboring Lymans and Banyans. But here's the clincher: Housing prices are less than half what you'll find on Oahu's famed North Shore. —A.C.T.

BEST FOR ROAD RUNNING

> Denver, Colorado

POPULATION 2,552,195

MEDIAN HOME PRICE \$247,000

HOMETOWN HERO Mayor John Hickenlooper, who recently helped launch the country's largest bike-sharing program

THE LIVING: Denver is soaking up its 300 days of sun. Literally. Over the past two years, 17 solar- and wind-energy companies have moved to the Denver area. And while the cost of living remains near the national average, Denver's economy has been steadily humming away. Thanks to strong aerospace, aviation, and information-technology industries, the Mile High City is now home to the nation's second most highly educated workforce. Equally impressive is its dedication to public transportation. When it's completed in 2017, Denver's FasTracks project, a network of rail and bus routes along the Front Range, will be one of the country's largest mass-transit systems.

THE RUNNING: Forty running competitions a year. Eight hundred and fifty miles of paved trails. More than 200 parks (the country's largest park system). A "zillion" running clubs, according to a few sources (we lost count after 50). Add it up and it's easy to see why Denver is one of America's fittest cities.