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The Top 15 Cities in the United States

BY **TANVI CHHEDA** | SEPTEMBER 08, 2021

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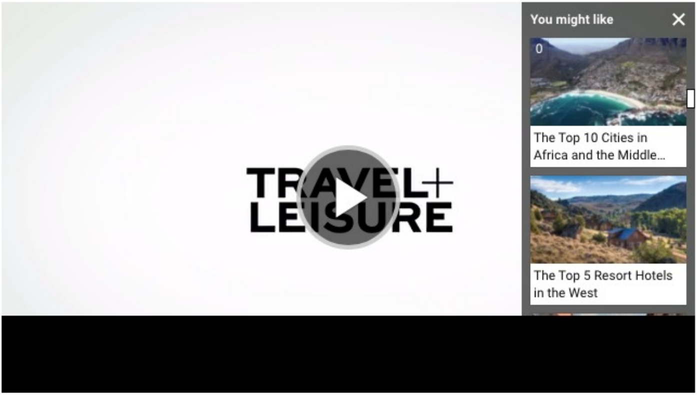
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This year's World's Best Awards survey was open for voting January 11 through May 10, 2021, as destinations around the world were lifting COVID-19 restrictions. Survey rules have always allowed readers to reflect on their travel experiences over a three-year period. We hope that this year's honorees will inspire your own travels as you get back out into the world.

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As travelers sought outlets for their wanderlust over the past year, they turned to their own proverbial backyards, stretching the definition of "drive market" perhaps further than it's gone before. Southern cities continue to steal the hearts of T+L readers, thanks to the wonderful mix of warm hospitality, approachable size, excellent food, and striking architecture.

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Every year for our World's Best Awards survey, T+L asks readers to weigh in on travel experiences around the globe — to share their opinions on the top cities, islands, cruise ships, spas, airlines, and more. Readers rated cities on their sights and landmarks, culture, cuisine, friendliness, shopping, and overall value.

Enchanting Savannah, Georgia (No. 3); Williamsburg, Virginia, with its historic district (No. 9); free-spirited and musical Nashville (No. 11); and Asheville, North Carolina (No. 15), gateway to the Blue Ridge Mountains, were all among this year's winners. "Savannah is the jewel of the South," one reader declared of the highest-ranking Southern city. "Bustling and up-and-coming, full of history and culture," another noted, citing interesting attractions like the American Prohibition Museum.

Several readers found themselves drawn to Asheville's spectacular highlands. "It's the mountains around Asheville that really make this city special." Another reader noted, "Asheville's proximity to the Blue Ridge Parkway is one of its best features." The Southern city's food and beer scene was also high on readers' lists. And how could it not be, with destination-worthy spots like Cúrate, the tapas bar from Katie Button, and Buxton Hall Barbecue, known for its pulled-pork plates and fried catfish?

New York, with its knack for reinventing itself — even in the face of adversity, as it comes out of a pandemic — moved up to the No. 5 spot this year. "New things to do every time you visit. Love the bookstores and vintage shops in the Village," shared one reader. "When I arrive in New York, I feel exhilarated," wrote another reader. "Endless places to explore, wonderful little local restaurants, and then there are the theaters," a third commented.

Honolulu came in at No. 10. One reader praised its "great weather, great beaches, many historical sites, and some of the best food." Another encouraged fellow travelers to venture beyond the primary tourist area. "There are great neighborhoods, farmers' markets, and out-of-the-way restaurants worth seeking out."

As many travelers look for outdoor attractions, Chicago's open-air venues and sites were on the top of T+L readers' lists. Several recommended the Chicago River architecture boat tour, while another wrote, "Don't miss Grant Park Symphony Orchestra under the stars in Millennium Park."

Ultimately though, Charleston prevailed among T+L readers, earning the No. 1 spot nine years in a row. Read on to find out why it took the top position on this year's list of the best cities in the United States, as well as the complete list of favorites.

1. Charleston, South Carolina

IDEAS
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WBA Hall of Fame honoree. Score: 88.61

With its charming architecture and powerhouse culinary scene, Charleston has reigned as T+L readers' favorite U.S. city for an impressive nine years running. "How could you not love those cobblestoned streets? The beautiful, colorful houses and gas lanterns. Take a carriage ride...or catch a boat," wrote one reader. "Charleston is such a historic treasure with beauty at every corner. Also heaven for foodies. King Street has excellent shops, bars, and restaurants and is great for nightlife." But there's also plenty of all-ages appeal. "There is an abundance of activities to choose from for couples', families', and friends' getaways," wrote one visitor turned local, who also touted the city as "one of the friendliest places I have visited."

2. Santa Fe, New Mexico

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WBA Hall of Fame honoree. Score: 86.92

3. Savannah, Georgia

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WBA Hall of Fame honoree. Score: 86.40

4. New Orleans

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WBA Hall of Fame honoree. Score: 86.21

5. New York City

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WBA Hall of Fame honoree. Score: 84.61

6. San Antonio, Texas

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Score: 84.36

7. Chicago

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WBA Hall of Fame honoree. Score: 83.89

8. Bend, Oregon

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Score: 83.41

9. Williamsburg, Virginia

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Score: 83.40

10. Honolulu

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Score: 83.40

11. Nashville

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Score: 83.39

12. Fort Worth, Texas

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Score: 82.25

13. Austin, Texas

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Score: 81.71

14. Carmel-by-the-Sea, California

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Score: 81.66

15. Asheville, North Carolina

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Score: 81.50

See all of our readers' favorite hotels, cities, airlines, cruise lines, and more in the World's Best Awards for 2021.