This City Was Voted Best in the U.S. for the 12th Straight Year by T+L Readers, Who Say It 'Can Compete With Any European Capital'

See the No. 1 pick and 14 more top cities in the United States, according to our annual "World's Best Awards" survey for 2024.

By **Elizabeth Cantrell** | Published on July 9, 2024

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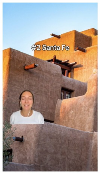
15 Best Cities in the U.S.

Wherever *Travel + Leisure* readers go in the United States, they look for cities with palpable history, walkable downtowns, regional cuisine, and robust cultural and artistic institutions. Many states in the South and West were highly represented this year, but readers did recognize a few classic Northeast destinations this year. One characteristic that seemed to capture readers' hearts, no matter the destination? A strong identity, and a sense that the city was unlike others elsewhere in the country.

TRAVEL+ LEISURE
WORLD'S BEST AWARDS 2024

PHOTO: TAYLOR MCINTYRE/TRAVEL + LEISURE

15 Best Cities in the U.S.



How Voting Works

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 hotels, resorts, cities, islands, cruise ships, spas, airlines, and more. Over 186,000 T+L readers completed the 2024 survey. A total of more than 700,000 votes were cast across over 8,700 properties (hotels, cities, cruise lines, etc.).

Cities were specifically rated on the criteria below:

- Sights/landmarks
- Culture

- Food
- Friendliness
- Shopping
- Value

For each characteristic, respondents could choose a rating of excellent, above average, average, below average, or poor. The final scores are averages of these responses.

What Readers Loved

Readers rewarded past favorites like Chicago (No. 9), Honolulu (No. 4), and New Orleans (No. 9), all of which returned to the list, and once again showed their love for Charleston, which ranked No. 1 for the 12th year in a row. But for the first time, Annapolis (No. 12) and Aspen (No. 10) appeared in the rankings, indicating that readers are increasingly drawn to new regional culture and outdoor hubs. New Mexico and Texas also had a strong showing this year — each state claimed two spots on the list, for Sante Fe and Taos, and Fort Worth and San Antonio, respectively.

The Full List

1. Charleston, South Carolina

PHOTO: TAYLOR MCINTYRE/TRAVEL + LEISURE

The Holy City earned the top spot yet again, thanks to its combination of historic architecture, walkability, and Southern hospitality — and, as many readers noted, its unbeatable culinary scene. "Charleston can compete with any European capital for its arts, entertainment, active lifestyle, and food," said one voter. Many visitors noted that they had come to the city several times for different types of trips, such as couples' weekends, family vacations, or friends' getaways, and that they found new things to experience each time. Another reader chimed in that Charleston was, "a great example of a city that holds to their roots, but also strives to be current and welcoming to everyone."

WBA Hall of Fame honoree. Reader score: 87.99

2. Santa Fe, New Mexico

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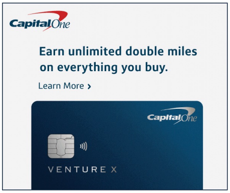

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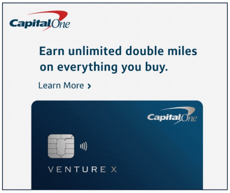

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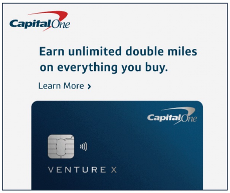

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PHOTO: SEAN PAVONE/GETTY IMAGES

This artsy Southwestern destination has ranked high on our list for nearly 20 years, and it's not just because of the 320 days of sunshine it receives each year, though it certainly doesn't hurt. "Santa Fe is like its own country within a country," gushed one reader. "It's such a unique blend of culture and history that you don't see in the rest of the USA." Another visitor called its downtown, with Pueblo-style buildings and independent galleries, "a photographer's dream and a shopper's delight."

WBA Hall of Fame honoree. Reader Score: 87.43

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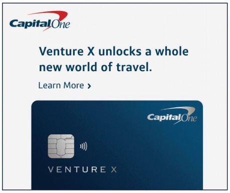

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3. Savannah, Georgia

PHOTO: HEATHER DURHAM/TRAVEL + LEISURE

Readers adore Savannah for its leafy parks, great shopping, carriage rides, and cemetery tours. "This is one of my family's favorite cities,"said one reader, adding "We try to get to Savannah and Tybee Island each year." The Starland District, in particular, is thriving these days, with the debut of Hotel Bardo and must-visit restaurants like Brochu's Family Tradition.

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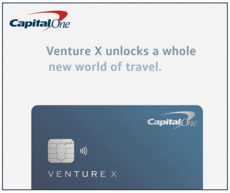

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WBA Hall of Fame honoree. Reader Score: 85.27

4. Honolulu, Hawaii

PHOTO: OKIMO/GETTY IMAGES

This island capital earned top marks for the natural beauty of its beaches, volcanoes, and hiking trails. But travelers also praised its shopping and Native Hawaiian traditions. "Aloha spirit abounds!" explained one visitor. "You can relax, go to a luau, go for a hike, go shopping, dive with turtles and dolphins. There is something for everyone." Another traveler appreciated their interactions with locals, saying, "The people are the friendliest I have found on any of my travels, and the culture is mesmerizing."

Reader Score: 85.17

5. New Orleans, Louisiana

PHOTO: TESSA DESJARDINS/TRAVEL + LEISURE

"It is ALL about food and drink in NOLA," declared one reader. It's a sentiment that's widely shared — visitors most often praise the city's eclectic mix of cuisines (like Creole, Vietnamese, Filipino, and barbeque) and its legendary bars and restaurants. Many travelers also appreciated the city's laid-back vibe (it is the Big Easy, after all.) "New Orleans is a great walking around, let's-pop-into-this-place-kind-of-city," according to one visitor. Others noted its superb history tours, festivals, and markets.

WBA Hall of Fame honoree. Reader score: 84.53

6. San Antonio, Texas

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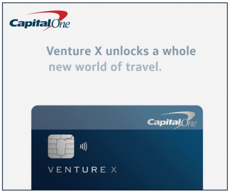

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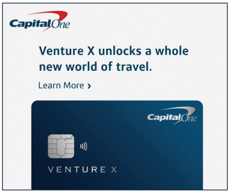

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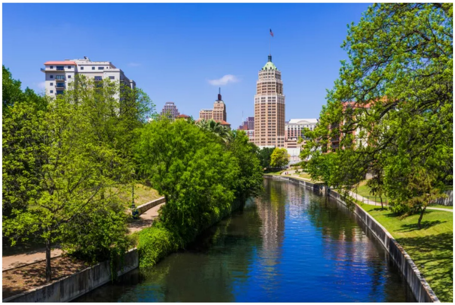

PHOTO: DSZC/GETTY IMAGES

Historic sites like the Alamo and the Mission are two notable entry points into this south Texas city. But contemporary attractions also abound — Museum Reach, a three-mile pedestrian park along the San Antonio River, has many public art installations. Readers also love strolling along the River Walk, which one reader said was "probably one of the nicest places we have ever visited in the States. It was exceptionally maintained and absolutely beautiful."

Reader Score: 83.20

7. Fort Worth, Texas

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PHOTO: BENEDEK/GETTY IMAGES

"Cosmopolitan meets ranch" is how one reader described this thriving metropolis, whose slogan is "Where the West Begins." Though Fort Worth retains its cowboy image with one of the country's best rodeos and a daily cattle drive through the streets of the stockyard district, it's not all ten-gallon hats — the cultural institutions, such as The Kimbell Art Museum, are world-class. "There are almost 20 theaters. You can attend the ballet, the opera, and symphony orchestra concerts," noted one visitor.

Reader Score: 83.19

8. New York, New York

PHOTO: ALESSANDRA AMODIO/TRAVEL + LEISURE

The city that never sleeps lives up to its name: from Broadway shows, to iconic museums, to next-level shopping, to some of the world's best restaurants, you'll never be bored in the Big Apple. As one reader summed it up: "What can one say that hasn't already been said? NYC is a great place to visit. Costly, yes. Worth it? Absolutely. Reasonably clean? Yes. Fun? That goes without saying."

WBA Hall of Fame honoree. Reader score: 83.16

9. Chicago, Illinois

PHOTO: TUNART/GETTY IMAGES

Whether you want to take in some of America's great architecture on a Chicago River tour, catch a baseball game at Wrigley Field, or find the best deep-dish, you can do it all in this dynamic, walkable city, which also received praise for its easy-to-navigate public transportation. "I love Chicago. The food, the sports. Did I mention the food? From a cultural perspective it's fantastic because of how many people are from all over the world. Multiple parts of town have different vibes that keep it fresh and exciting to visit," said one reader.

WBA Hall of Fame honoree. Reader Score: 82.44

10. Aspen, Colorado

PHOTO: DCRANE08/GETTY IMAGES

While this mountain town is mostly known for its first-rate skiing (and celebrity-spotting at Hotel Jerome,) T+L readers also noted its year-round appeal and spectacular scenery. From hitting the trails, to checking out the renowned Baldwin Gallery, to having a drink at the legendary Woody Creek Tavern, readers found Aspen to be "a very well-rounded town full of great shops, museums, and restaurants."

Reader Score: 82.41

11. Taos, New Mexico

PHOTO: MONA MAKELA PHOTOGRAPHY/GETTY IMAGES

This small city packs a punch. Located in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains, it's an adventure paradise for hiking and skiing, as well as rafting the Rio Grande. It's also home to Taos Pueblo, a 1,000-year old continually inhabited Adobe community, and a rich Indigenous culture. Readers were also charmed by the town's many independent galleries and shops. "Taos is for athletes, artists, and open minded travelers," said one reader.

Reader Score: 81.36

12. Annapolis, Maryland

PHOTO: RICHARD T. NOWITZ/GETTY IMAGES

Appearing on our list for the first time, this coastal city — known as "the sailing capital of the United States"— received top marks not only for its nautical charms, but also its historic sites, walkable downtown, and of course, crab cakes. Annapolis is also home to the U.S. Naval Academy, and many readers touted football games as a can't-miss activity. "I love the culture and activities available in Annapolis. Whether you're visiting for educational purposes or coming to enjoy the Navy football games, you will definitely have a good time," said one voter.

Reader Score: 81.26

13. Nashville, Tennessee

PHOTO: TAYLOR MCINTYRE/TRAVEL + LEISURE

Readers can't get enough of the nightlife in Music City. Whether it's a lively honky tonk on Broadway, a Grand Ole Opry performance, or an open mic night at a quiet cafe, visitors are spoiled for choice when it comes to hearing top-notch artists. And while things can certainly get rowdy, "it's not all bachelorette parties and cowboy hats," as one reader notes — there are dozens of places to catch great theater and art. The city's strong culinary scene and efficient airport also received praise.

Reader Score: 81.18

14. Boston, Massachusetts

PHOTO: VIOLET SMIRNOVA/TRAVEL + LEISURE

This New England capital captivates all types of travelers, whether you're a history buff intent on walking the Freedom Trail, a baseball lover looking to catch a game at Fenway Park, or a gourmand seeking the best Italian food in the North End. "It's a perfect mix of old and modern," claims one reader. Visitors also appreciated that the highly walkable city has distinct neighborhoods, each with a unique feel. Plus, Boston has welcomed several noteworthy hotels in recent years, including the first Raffles property in North America, which opened this September.

Reader Score: 80.75

15. Alexandria, Virginia

PHOTO: PHOTOS BY COYLE/GETTY IMAGES

This historic city, which is just five miles from Washington D.C. but feels worlds away, strikes the perfect balance between sophisticated and small-town. Readers were drawn to its picturesque waterfront of Old Town, and also praised attractions like the The Torpedo Factory Art Center and the Mount Vernon Trail, ideal for bird watching and easy bike rides.

Reader Score: 80.44

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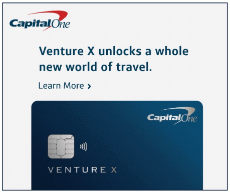

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