

Where to find the best quality of life

Looking for a residential upgrade? Go west

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If small-town life holds special appeal for you, look out West.

Seven of the 10 highest-ranked cities that offer the best quality of life are in Western states, according to a new study by Bizjournals.

Topping the list is Bozeman, Mont., where it can get awfully cold — even dropping below freezing on the occasional summer night — but there are plenty of compensations.

Like the stunning view of the Rocky Mountains. And the strong local economy. And the intellectual and cultural activity at Montana State University.

The Bizjournals study compares the performances of America's 577 micropolitan areas in 12 statistical categories. The 10 communities with the highest scores have been designated as "dreamtowns," indicating that they offer an outstanding quality of life.

Bozeman tops the list because of its strong showings in several categories:

- Its number of small businesses grew by almost 28 percent during the past five years, topping all but two of the 577 communities in the study group.
- Bozeman's population increased by 15.3 percent in half a decade, ranking 11th in micropolitan America.
- The local share of adults with bachelor's degrees, 41 percent, is sixth among all of the nation's small communities.

Profiles to the top 10 dreamtowns are [here](#).

Bizjournals' study was inspired by the heavy public interest in small-town life and business opportunities. More than 1.7 million people move from metropolitan areas to small cities or rural counties each year, according to U.S. Census Bureau research.

The study identifies the small communities that would be most attractive to people considering such a move. The highest scores go to well-rounded places with strong economies, light traffic, moderate costs of living, first-class educational systems, and good access to big-city attractions. [Click here](#) for the study's methodology.

The study group was the nation's 577 micropolitan areas, which are defined as regions that are economically dependent on central cities with 10,000 to 50,000 residents. All metropolitan areas have specifically been excluded from the report. [Click here](#) for the top-to-bottom standings of all micropolitan areas.

Bizjournals has also identified the communities with the highest quality-of-life rankings for America's four major regions. [Click here](#) for a region-by-region breakdown.

These are the three best small communities in each part of the country, according to the study:

- **East:** Easton, Md.; Barre, Vt.; and Lebanon, N.H.-Vt.
- **South:** Kill Devil Hills, N.C.; Oxford, Miss.; and Hilton Head Island-Beaufort, S.C.
- **Midwest:** Pierre, S.D.; Rolla, Mo.; and Hays, Kan.
- **West:** Bozeman, Mont.; Jackson, Wyo.-Idaho; and Durango, Colo.

The raw data used in Bizjournals' study comes from two federal agencies, the U.S. Census Bureau and the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis. All of the figures are the latest, most comprehensive statistics available at the micropolitan level.

Los Alamos, N.M., leads three of the study's 12 categories: most management or professional jobs, most college degrees and most advanced degrees. The only other multiple winner is Palm Coast, Fla., which has seen the strongest population growth

and the biggest increase in the number of small businesses. ([Click here](#) for the leaders in the categories.)

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