

BEST PLACES

→ TO LIVE ←

For years we've been hearing that location no longer matters: As long as you're logged on you could be anywhere.

But the reality is, that only gets you so far. Physical community still matters, and so does being able to log off and get lost. Truly, you are where you live. Use our 2008 guide to help you choose wisely.

BEST CITY

Portland, OR

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BEST COLLEGE TOWN

Bloomington, IN

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BEST ADVENTURE MECCA

Leadville, CO

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BEST GREEN LIVING

Rural Washington County, VT

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BEST EXPAT DREAM

South Island, New Zealand

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Grabbing a brew at the Hotel Oregon; reviewing the wares at the Portland Farmers Market; a morning run along the Willamette's Eastside Esplanade



Two-Day Test-Drive

DAY ONE

Ride 40 miles to Lake Champlain, and drop into the Magic Hat Brewery in South Burlington for a history lesson on microbrews. Then get your buddy to drive over (with bike rack) and meet you for dinner at the Kitchen Table Bistro in nearby Richmond.

DAY TWO

Drive to Bennington and fill up on maple syrup-drenched goodies at the Blue Benn Diner before your day hike on the Appalachian Trail off Main St./VT 9. If you can make the 22-mile trip, stay overnight by the fire tower on Glastenbury Mountain, and head back down the Long Trail in the morning.

Besides, there are times — and they seem to occur at the most unlikely moments, like when I'm scraping ice from the solar panels in zero-degree weather, or shoveling manure — when it occurs to me that ease and convenience are highly overrated.

The environmentally conscious life, like the craggy hills surrounding our home, demands something of a person. There's a resolve and physicality in it. Embracing this doesn't make me more virtuous, but it might make me more human.

+ FOUR MORE GREEN LOCALES

HIGHLAND CO., VA

Highland County will soon be home to the state's first wind farm. Allegheny Power's turbines will power 15,000 homes among deep mountain valleys, sheep and cattle farms, and vast woodlands in one of the least-populated counties in the East.

DOLORES, CO

With 321 days of sun a year, PV cells will provide enough juice for all modern conveniences plus a plasma screen, the growing season is long, and omnivore sportsmen can reap the abundant deer and elk as well as the trout in the Dolores River. You'll also enjoy the San Juan Mountains, 10 miles away, and knowing the area has been continuously inhabited for 10,000 years should convince you of the sustainability of life here.

PLACERVILLE, CA

Solar power is subsidized at up to 50 percent, the American River offers hydropower (plus Class V rapids), and orchards and vineyards thrive alongside small livestock. Thirty minutes from Intel's digs in Folsom, and another 30 to the state capital, Sacramento, you can go green while working to help others do the same.

TOWNS CO., GA

More than half of Towns County is national forest. On the North Carolina border, this is a one-stoplight, Wal-Mart-free, southern Appalachian area. The growing season is long, livestock are plentiful, lots are large and for sale, organic peach farming is a viable career choice (georgiaorganics.org has the start-up tips you need), and the drought will end, eventually.

The Finalists, c. 2013

Best Places: The Comebacks



Denver's new light rail

They were once great towns but then fell into decline for various reasons. Now they're poised to top our list in the next few years. Move now, before housing costs skyrocket and entrepreneurs start elbowing each other for market space.

RICHMOND

In Shockoe Bottom, wedged between the Virginia state capitol and Old Tobacco Row beside the James River, abandoned tobacco warehouses have become apartments and lofts, the 1922 National Theater has just been renovated, and micro-breweries are opening like tulips in March. Walking and biking here are both safe ways to commute (thank you, Richmond Critical Mass!), and there are hundreds of miles of bike paths and Class IV rapids in the area. A \$350 million research center is partially operational and sure to bring more high-paying jobs plus the inevitable upscaling that comes with them around downtown's new biotech park.

DENVER

Sure, Denver has always had great jobs, a thriving economy, a get-anywhere-nonstop airport, and plenty of sun. But the city lacked the personality of Boulder, and smog trapped in the surrounding mountains made a mess of air quality. New Denver is on the way. The city is installing one of the largest public transit projects in history, a \$6 billion plan that will reach Aurora and Boulder; Mayor John Hickenlooper has instituted Greenprint Denver, a five-year ecoplan to reduce city greenhouse gas emissions; and the Bilbao effect is running full throttle since the opening of the Museum of Contemporary Art's new home last fall.

SPokane

The Kendall Yards Project is one of the largest brownfield cleanups in the nation and will connect downtown Spokane to the student district around Washington State University and Gonzaga University with a \$1 billion pedestrian neighborhood containing residential, commercial, and office space. An infusion of \$3 billion in private funds is bringing new housing and shops, and re-opening the 1931 art deco Fox Theater. Thanks to Hoopfest, the country's largest 3-on-3 basketball tournament, Spokane's downtown is covered by Wi-Fi. Fifteen major trailheads in town attract bikers and hikers; a 37-mile trail leading from downtown straight to some serious rock climbing and Class IV rapids on the Spokane River (you can put your kayak in from the busiest bridge in the city) all make Spokane adventure-easy.

BALTIMORE

Ever seen *The Wire*? Yeesh. So what's Baltimore doing on this list? Hopeless as some districts of this city have been, it has incredible potential. The arts scene is thriving, thanks to Maryland Institute College of Art (consistently ranked one of the country's top art colleges); two world-class fine arts museums, the Baltimore Museum of Art and the Walters; one of the country's largest museums of folk art, the American Visionary Art Museum; and the up-and-coming Contemporary Museum. More young artists than ever are forgoing what was once the obligatory move to New York and taking advantage of cheap rents for both studio and gallery space to begin their careers. If SoHo's history is any guide, yuppies will be next. And don't forget it's only half an hour from all the cultural offerings in the nation's capital.

MILWAUKEE

The home of Harley Davidson has seen its per capita income rise sharply, thanks to an influx of tech jobs. And \$500 million in downtown condo investment has sparked a reverse migration. With its Great Lakes-side real estate, the city has always offered after-work water rec, but new in the past decade: Milwaukee Riverwalk and a new addition to the art museum.

THE DALLES, OR

Fewer than 12,000 people live in The Dalles, on a bend in the Columbia River 40 minutes from Mount Hood, but that won't last for long. Google just opened a new base of operations here, seeking to sustainably tap the town's incredibly cheap hydropower for a giant server farm. With the engineers should come improved public schools, if not fashionable boutiques.

PROVIDENCE

Like many New England towns, Providence went downhill fast when the textile mills that had largely supported the town closed during and after the Depression. But beginning with Waterplace Park in the '90s, the old "Venice of the Northeast" slogan stopped seeming like a bad joke. Now the city center's brick industrial buildings are being converted to residences, and the surrounding area features delicious Cape Verdean and Portuguese eats along with a few cool late-night haunts. Never short on arts and culture, Providence today boasts Johnson and Wales's culinary school, David Byrne's alma mater Rhode Island School of Design, and the creative class's preferred Ivy, Brown University. And if you've had your fill of the Boston Red Sox, you can gain cred as a member of the Pawsox nation.

The Milwaukee Art Museum's Quadracci Pavilion

