

ULTRALIGHT CAMPING GUIDE

BACKPACKER

THE OUTDOORS AT YOUR DOORSTEP

Your Lightest Load Ever!

33 ways to slash weight, spend less, and double your hiking comfort

Where Solitude Still Reigns

30 crowd-free sanctuaries hand-picked by rangers, guides & our map experts

FREE MAPS!
NEW HIKES
NEAR YOU

AUGUST 2009



81 NAVIGATION
SUMMER SURVIVAL
SKILLS WEATHER
FIRST AID
WILDLIFE

THE BEST CITIES TO RAISE AN OUTDOOR KID

Which towns offer the ideal mix of accessible trails, inspiring teachers, and great recreational resources? We worked with The Outdoor Foundation to identify America's top 25 places to beat nature deficit disorder. *By Jason Stevenson*



Top place to raise a...



BIRDER

Ithaca, NY

> Sapsucker Woods is home to dozens of avian species and Cornell's world-famous Lab of Ornithology.



ICE CLIMBER

Conway, NH

> Two climbing schools, four-season cliffs at Cathedral Ledge, and a loooong ice season



KAYAKER

Sylva, NC

> A virtual nest of rivers with every class of rapids a kid (or parent) could want, Sylva is home to American Whitewater association.



NATURALIST

Missoula, MT

> Local outreach by the University of Montana's College of Forestry and Conservation gets kids into the woods.



PADDLER

Pittsburgh, PA

> City summer camps teach skills required to canoe, kayak, and raft PA's river network.



PARK RANGER

Flagstaff, AZ

> Start with the Grand Canyon's Junior Ranger program; graduate to N. Arizona University's 13-week ranger training program.



ROCK CLIMBER

New Paltz, NY

> Gateway to the 'Gunks and the famous crag's thousand-plus climbing routes



SKIER/SNOWBOARDER

Salt Lake City, UT

> Forty feet of annual powder covers back-country slopes and bowls—plus a half-dozen resorts—just minutes from downtown.



THRU-HIKER

Rutland, VT

> In the heart of New England's mountain kingdom and at the nexus of the Appalachian and Long Trails



RANKING

1

BOULDER, CO

Pop: 94,673 Median home: \$328,400 Overall score: 85

33

Teens work summer jobs as junior rangers in city's mountain parks

27

Named America's "Smartest" and "Most Livable" town by *Forbes*; 105 miles of bike paths

25

Yes, we live here, but Boulder wins on its merits. Longs Peak and the Indian Peaks Wilderness (120 square miles of elk, trout, wildflowers, and glaciers) are less than an hour away.

key**HOW TO READ THESE BOXES**

Pop. ('07) Median home sale price ('09) Overall score

33

Amenities Score based on climate, scenery, air quality, local activities

33

Livability Employment rates, school quality, commute, cost of living, recreation resources

33

Proximity The first two ratings look at features (Would you be inspired to get out?) and logistics (Could you live here?). This number represents distance to trails, parks, and peaks.

RANKING

2

JACKSON, WY

Pop: 9,631 Median home: \$495,000 Overall score: 77

26

Family climbing days led by world-famous Exum Mountain Guides

27

Outdoor companies like Cloudbell born here; ACT scores 10% above national avg.

24

Cheek-to-jowl with the Tetons, Yellowstone, and a bajillion elk, bison, and bears; a half-day or less to Wind Rivers and Idaho's empty Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness

RANKING

6

SEATTLE, WA

Pop: 563,374 Median home: \$315,200 Overall score: 66

16

Mountaineers Club and REI organize thousands of hikes, clinics, events

24

Home to Microsoft, Starbucks, Amazon—plus MSR, Cascade Designs, Outdoor Research, REI

26

Sits equidistant from distinct climate zones and topography in the Olympics, Cascades, and Mt. Rainier National Park; sea kayak in the San Juan Islands when you tire of snowy peaks

RANKING

3

DURANGO, CO

Pop: 13,922 Median home: \$290,000 Overall score: 72

29

Trail Trekkers hiking program for kids, plus free fly-fishing lessons

22

Tax-supported open space and trails; 70,000-sq.-ft. rec center with climbing wall

21

Surrounded by San Juans and uncrowded 14ers; Animas River runs through town (A+ fly-fishing and rafting); short drives to Mesa Verde, CDT, Arches, Moab, the Weminuche

RANKING

7

COLORADO SPRINGS, CO

Pop: 360,890 Median home: \$180,000 Overall score: 63

19

14,000 acres of parks and open space; 265 miles of trails in town

20

Home to high-tech businesses and Air Force Academy; #1 big city in U.S., says *Money* mag

24

Hiker and trail runner's paradise with Pikes Peak and Garden of the Gods nearby (with 350 more miles of trails); Great Sand Dunes, Vail, and many 14ers all within a few hours

RANKING

4

FLAGSTAFF, AZ

Pop: 52,894 Median home: \$289,548 Overall score: 69

23

Sixth-graders spend a week studying ecology near Humphreys Peak

21

Home to N. Arizona University, USGS satellite office, and emerging green-job sector

25

Gateway to Grand Canyon, Glen Canyon, and Arizona's only 12,000-foot peaks; 1 hour to sweet Sedona hiking/biking; located in world's largest contiguous ponderosa pine forest

RANKING

8

BURLINGTON, VT

Pop: 38,889 Median home: \$253,000 Overall score: 63

15

Kids can enroll in weeklong wilderness-survival summer camp

26

Healthiest city in U.S. (CDC); home to IBM, 3 colleges, Burton Snowboards, Ben & Jerry's

22

Minutes from trailheads in Adirondacks and Green Mountains; pedal to Lake Champlain's islands (and Canada) on the 12-mile Island Line Trail

RANKING

5

JUNEAU, AK

Pop: 30,711 Median home: \$320,630 Overall score: 68

27

Highest percentage of Boy Scouts in the West (13%, ages 10-17)

18

Lowest state/local taxes in the country; \$2,000 pipeline rebate in '08; 5 outdoor shops

23

An unrivaled cornucopia: Glacier Bay National Park (ice, bears), Tongass National Forest (trees, bears), and Admiralty Island (fish, bears) total nearly 40 million acres



RANKING

9

FORT COLLINS, CO

Pop: 118,652 Median home: \$210,000 Overall score: 62

16

Outdoor rec classes abound: hunter safety, birding, geocaching

21

University town; New Belgium Brewery sponsors summer "Bike-In" movie nights

25

A gateway to Rocky Mountain National Park and Roosevelt National Forest; Poudre River paddling and foothills parks are even closer; 45 minutes to world-class fishing and skiing



RANKING

13

HOOD RIVER, OR

Pop: 5,831 Median home: \$345,000 Overall score: 59

22

Local nonprofit offers cheap kids' windsurfing lessons on the Columbia

17

City aquatic center hosts Saturday kayaking practice; 35 outdoor classes at rec center

20

Trails along Columbia Gorge offer America's best waterfall hiking; world-class hiking and mountain biking in Gifford Pinchot NF; 11,239-foot Mt. Hood an hour from town

RANKING

14

MANCHESTER, NH

Pop: 108,580 Median home: \$165,250 Overall score: 58

16

10 Scout troops & 4 Venture crews camp at local 3,500-acre reserve

23

#1 small city in the East, says *Money*; Southwest airlines hub with direct flights to 18 cities

19

1-hour drive to White Mountain National Forest, Atlantic seashore, and Appalachian Trail; a few more hours gets you to Presidentials, Acadia, Baxter State Park, Green Mountains

RANKING

10

LEBANON, NH

Pop: 12,729 Median home: \$138,000 Overall score: 62

19

Free ice-fishing classes from NH Fish & Game on Mascoma Lake

23

Nearby Dartmouth College means high local IQ; nation's lowest unemployment at 4%

20

Connecticut River, Appalachian Trail, and 23-mile rail trail pass through town; less than 2 hours to heart of White and Green Mountains; Olympic-caliber skiers and skiing nearby

RANKING

15

HARRISONBURG, VA

Pop: 40,468 Median home: \$181,000 Overall score: 56

15

Quiet town within an hour of 2 national forests & 1 national park

17

Unemployment is 6.4%—and falling; active student culture with 8 colleges within 50 miles

24

Surrounded by superb kayaking, hiking, fishing, and cycling (try the 32-mile Southern Traverse singletrack); minutes to Shenandoah NP, and a little more to W. Virginia wildlands

RANKING

11

ASHEVILLE, NC

Pop: 68,889 Median home: \$175,000 Overall score: 61

20

One K-8 charter school teaches Outward Bound curriculum

19

Honors include: "Best Places to Live," "Happiest City for Women," & "Beer City USA"

22

Set in the Blue Ridge Mtns., just hours from Great Smokies and a half-million acres of Pisgah National Forest (with its 950 miles of trails, waterfalls, and backcountry camping)

RANKING

16

EUREKA-ARCATA-FORTUNA, CA

Pop: 128,864 Median home: \$236,706 Overall score: 56

18

Humboldt State offers Trinity Alps hikes, Dutch oven cooking classes

19

NorCal arts hotspot; 6 outdoor gear & watersports shops ring the bay

19

Nearby Redwood National Park offers the world's tallest trees; Humboldt Bay NWR attracts 200 bird species; Mt. Shasta and the Lost Coast Trail are just hours away



RANKING

12

PORTLAND, ME

Pop: 62,825 Median home: \$192,100 Overall score: 59

20

Subsidized youth and community sailing classes in the harbor

21

L.L.Bean flagship store (and discount outlet) only 15 minutes away in Freeport

18

31-mile urban trail network; 3 hours to Acadia National Park and 4 hours to Mt. Katahdin (northern terminus of the Appalachian Trail); best sea kayaking on East Coast

Hometown Heroes

Three cities and two states with get-the-kids-out programs worth joining—or emulating

ALBUQUERQUE, NM

> **Program** Each year, the Bosque Ecosystem Monitoring Program enables 2,000-plus students to perform field research along the Rio Grande with University of New Mexico biologists.

MILWAUKEE, WI

> **Program** The Urban Ecology Institute teaches 15,000 inner-city students about the environment and green jobs at riverfront parks.

PRIOR LAKE, MN

> **Program** Jeffers Pond Elementary wraps environmental topics into all core subject areas, thanks to an on-site naturalist and wetlands.

MINNESOTA AND WISCONSIN

> **Program** Through the School Forests initiative, more than 450 student bodies manage outdoor "classrooms" in nearby woodlands and marshes, learning about sustainability and Leave No Trace.

RANKING

17

SEVIERVILLE, TN

Pop: 11,757 Median home: \$151,100 Overall score: 55

- ☀️ 15 Smoky Mountain Field School links students to NPS scientists
- 🏠 17 Not as congested as Pigeon Forge and Dollywood; low TN taxes attract jobs & workers
- 📍 23 10 minutes to trailheads leading into the heart of Great Smoky Mountains National Park; close to numerous put-ins for canoeing and fishing on the French Broad River

RANKING

18

BOZEMAN, MT

Pop: 27,509 Median home: \$253,000 Overall score: 54

- ☀️ 15 Mountaineering Assoc. & Outdoor Science School teach joint youth classes
- 🏠 18 College & emerging high-tech town; 15% percent of commuters bike or walk
- 📍 21 Most homes within 15-minute walk of mountain trailhead; 1-hour drive to Yellowstone; surrounded by wildlife and stunning national forests (Gallatin, Beaverhead, Deerlodge)

RANKING

19

RAPID CITY, SD

Pop: 59,607 Median home: \$150,000 Overall score: 53

- ☀️ 10 SD Game, Fish, and Parks building new outdoor-ed facility
- 🏠 31 5.3% unemployment rate; no SD income tax; cost of living is 15% below national average
- 📍 13 Sits in the shadow of the Black Hills and 7,242-foot Harney Peak—the highest point east of the Rockies; Badlands and Wind Cave National Parks are a short drive away

RANKING

20

BREVARD, NC

Pop: 6,789 Median home: \$170,000 Overall score: 51

- ☀️ 16 Pisgah Forest Institute trains educators, hosts summer science camps
- 🏠 19 Enviro studies-focused Brevard College; home to world-famous music festival
- 📍 16 Renowned for its waterfalls, gorges, and swimming holes; surrounded by Pisgah NF, which has 5,000-foot peaks and endless singletrack; only 65 miles to Great Smokies

RANKING

21

MADISON, WI

Pop: 208,054 Median home: \$208,500 Overall score: 49

- ☀️ 12 2,000-strong Madison Hoofers outdoors club offers youth program
- 🏠 30 Recession-resistant research, education, and government jobs hold unemployment to 6%
- 📍 7 Blessed with paddling—locally and across the state—and hiking (the 1,000-mile Ice Age Trail passes nearby); 52-mile rail trail connects Madison and Waukesha and allows camping

DOWN TOWNS

The stats say "don't move here!"

- **CHATTANOOGA** 59% of residents exercise ≤30 minutes a week.
- **CORPUS CHRISTI** Average heat index in July/August is 110°F.
- **MONTGOMERY** 61% of residents are obese, according to the CDC.
- **OAK HARBOR, WA** Gets 1.5 hours of sunlight on average January day.
- **PITTSBURGH** Great paddling, but #1 for soot and diesel exhaust.

RANKING

22

MINNEAPOLIS-ST. PAUL, MN

Pop: 3,208,212 Median home: \$174,100 Overall score: 48

- ☀️ 11 St. Paul Hiking Club offers Sunday and Tuesday outings
- 🏠 25 Ranks second (behind Portland, OR) in percentage of bicycle commuters
- 📍 12 Extensive local park system totals 770 sq. ft. of green space per resident; great paddling on St. Croix and Mississippi; half-day drive to Boundary Waters, Apostle Islands, NCT



RANKING

23

GLENS FALLS, NY

Pop: 14,354 Median home: \$156,600 Overall score: 47

- ☀️ 12 One of highest ratios of Boy Scouts in the East, with 6 active troops
- 🏠 19 Near Catskills arts, music, and educational resources—but with lower home prices
- 📍 16 Situated between Catskills' quieter northern peaks and Adirondacks' southern/western wilds and Great Range; 10 km of well-lit cross-country ski trails at Cole's Woods

RANKING

24

DULUTH, MN

Pop: 86,918 Median home: \$119,000 Overall score: 41

- ☀️ 11 U of Minnesota-Duluth outdoor ed dept. holds annual cooking contest
- 🏠 20 Pursuing strategic plan to lure "Creative Class" demographic through job & arts growth
- 📍 10 Modest drive to Apostle Islands, Isle Royale, and Boundary Waters; new 39-mile trail connects Duluth to 205-mile Superior Hiking Trail; Lester Park Trail runs through town

RANKING

25

WHEELING, WV

Pop: 31,419 Median home: \$85,000 Overall score: 41

- ☀️ 10 Oglebay Institute runs 3-week Junior Nature Camp in mountains
- 🏠 19 Cost of living 20% below U.S. average; Rivers to Ridges club leads camping and rafting trips
- 📍 12 World-class paddling on Little & Lower Youghiogheny Rivers; great hiking on nearby 70-mile Laurel Highlands Trail; Wayne & Monongahela NFs offer endless backpacking hours away

METHODOLOGY The stats and assumptions behind our rankings

To determine which U.S. cities offer the most fertile soil for raising outdoor kids, we crunched 38 different metrics, from the distance to the nearest national park to the density of *Boy's Life* subscribers. We looked at climate stats, outdoor education figures, and unemployment and obesity rates. We also polled BACKPACKER readers and editors—because you can't reduce everything to numbers. For a full list of metrics and sources, go to backpacker.com/outdoorkids.