



**THE PAST YEAR SHOWED US ALL THAT HAVING ACCESS TO THE OUTDOORS IS ESSENTIAL FOR OUR HEALTH AND WELL-BEING. IT ALSO MAGNIFIED THE INEQUITIES INHERENT IN THAT ACCESS. FOR 2021'S BEST TOWNS PACKAGE, WE CHOSE 13 OF THE COUNTRY'S MOST DIVERSE PLACES AND EVALUATED THEM ACCORDING TO THE FACTORS THAT MATTER TODAY: SUSTAINABILITY, AFFORDABILITY, AND OUTDOOR EQUITY. HERE ARE THE CITIES OF TOMORROW.**

**WHERE**



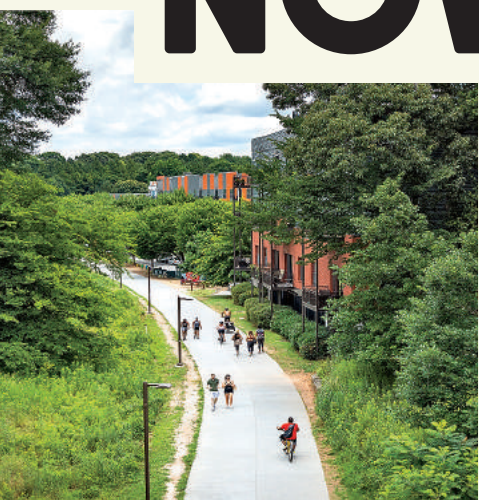
**TO**

**LIVE**



**NOW**

**(AND IN THE RAPIDLY CHANGING FUTURE)**



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: CAYCE CLIFFORD; ANDREW HETHERINGTON; BRAD TRONE; ANDREW HETHERINGTON; CAYCE CLIFFORD (2); BRAD TRONE; ANDREW HETHERINGTON; CAYCE CLIFFORD (2); MAREA PRODUCTIONS

**IN THE TWO DECADES** since we began running our annual list of the best places to live, our goal has always been to surprise you. We've found little-known towns that were on the verge (yes, there was a time when Bend, Oregon, held that distinction) and helped you see enduring outdoor hot spots in a novel light. We've focused on new adventure draws and emerging craft-beer scenes. We've made our selections by committee, by submission, and by executive decision fiat. This time, we're taking a different approach.

As Americans struggled with challenges brought on by COVID-19, nature became an antidote. "During the pandemic, the wealthy fled urban areas for country homes, while suburban-ites spread out in backyards and visited nearby parks," says Ronda Chapman, equity director at the Trust for Public Land (TPL). "In too many cities, however, residents without shaded, tree-lined streets and close-to-home public green spaces found it much more challenging to get outside." This made us ask: How do our most diverse cities fare when it comes to important factors like green infrastructure and outdoor access?

We looked through a few different lenses. First we examined 2020 demographic data from personal-finance website WalletHub, representing the socioeconomic and cultural diversity of cities across the U.S. Of course, how diverse a place is doesn't predict how inclusive it is. So we dug deeper, with on-the-ground reporting about how these cities are getting more people of color outside—and how they're falling short.

Next up: the sustainability lens. There's

no separating outdoor from green equity. Creating safe and reachable parks is as much an access issue as it is an ecological one. Advancing clean-energy legislation that doesn't just benefit white communities promotes environmental justice and supports our climate future. We looked at how the most multicultural cities compare with a recent report from WalletHub that rated the 100 most populated places according to their green policy and investment. Those that scored the highest made it to our second tier. Then we factored in affordability—and the pandemic-fueled changes to the housing market—by only selecting cities with a median home price of less than \$600,000.

"We've often said that the pandemic has been an amplifier of inequities that were already there," says José González, founder of the outreach and advocacy organization Latino Outdoors. "If we take old redlining maps and overlay them with COVID-19 numbers, with lack of park access, with other failing health components, you see a very strong correlation."

Solving structural inequities is a matter of redesigning these maps, says González. While we're seeing signs of this in recent legislation and renewed efforts from local stewards and nonprofits, there's still a lot of work to be done. There also needs to be increased emphasis on making these outdoor spaces more culturally inclusive. "There might be a great trail system that's reachable from the city, but if I go and get this feeling of *this is not for you*, then that is a barrier. Each of us has a responsibility to change the narrative surrounding who is welcome in the outdoors," González says. —Erin Riley

**OUR RATING METRICS**

**DIVERSITY:** A 2021 report from personal-finance site WalletHub ranked the 501 most populated cities based on the diversity of their socioeconomic, cultural, household, and religious makeup. The rankings drew on 13 specific metrics, including educational attainment and languages spoken. On the scorecards we include for each city, we provide that city's WalletHub ranking.

**SUSTAINABILITY:** A 2019 WalletHub report ranked the 100 most populated cities according to investment in green initiatives. It used 28 metrics, including air quality and the ability to get to work using public transportation. Again, on our scorecard, we give the WalletHub ranking.

**AFFORDABILITY:** Median home prices are based on projections through May 2021 provided by the real estate website Zillow.

**OUTDOOR EQUITY:** In addition to our own reporting, we used data from a 2021 Trust for Public Land report on the percentage of each city that consists of parkland, along with the percentage of residents of color who live within a ten-minute walk of a park.



THE LOCAL

← **TAMMY SHAKUR, OUTDOOR GUIDE**

“Atlanta is actively investing in getting more people outside. After a catastrophic flood in 2002 in the Vine City neighborhood, the Trust for Public Land partnered with the city, local outdoor organizers, and community leaders to construct 16-acre Cook Park as a way to foster community. Since opening in June, it’s been a gathering place for this underserved area.”



Clockwise from top left: Piedmont Park; Tammy Shakur; Wylie Street in Cabbagetown; New Realm Brewing

## ATLANTA, GEORGIA

### AN EXAMPLE OF URBAN-OUTDOOR BALANCE IN THE FACE OF RAPID GROWTH

If you haven’t been to the South’s largest city in a few years, you might not recognize it. From the expansion of the Atlanta BeltLine, which will soon be a 33-mile path that connects 45 neighborhoods in the heart of the city, to a \$5 million investment in 20 more miles of protected bike lanes, this bustling metropolis is banking hard on livability and open space. And that’s just the start of one of the largest urban green

initiatives in the country. The 280-acre Westside Park will open this October, eclipsing Atlanta’s central Piedmont Park by some 100 acres. Along with the soon-to-expand, 2.4-mile Proctor Creek Greenway that intersects Westside Park, local nonprofits recently completed construction of the Westside BeltLine Connector Trail, which connects the park to 11 neighborhoods. On the densely populated southwestern edge, the city purchased nearly 13 acres in 2020, not far from the 135-acre Cascade Springs Nature Preserve. This new swath will bring parkland to the predominantly Black areas of Cascade, East Point, and Greenbriar, part of mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms’s campaign commitment that every neighborhood

planning unit in the city have its own park. (Recent data from the TPL shows that minority communities have access to 49 percent less park space per capita than residents in neighborhoods that are majority white.) All this upcoming development comes on the heels of the completion of the state’s first purpose-built singletrack, Southside Park. In response to a shortage of affordable housing driven in part by an influx of out-of-staters lured by the growing financial-technology industry, the city plans to create grant programs to keep legacy residents in their BeltLine-adjacent homes. While other cities in the region focus on frenzied growth, Atlanta continues to prioritize longtime communities. —Muriel Vega

### ATLANTA SCORECARD

POPULATION: .....  
**5,911,000**  
 (UP 1.9 PERCENT FROM 2020)

MEDIAN HOME PRICE:  
**\$325,929**

DIVERSITY: ○○○  
**85**

SUSTAINABILITY: ■■■ **53**

PERCENTAGE OF CITY THAT’S PARKLAND:  
**8.9**

PERCENTAGE OF RESIDENTS WHO LIVE WITHIN A TEN-MINUTE WALK OF A PARK:  
**72**

PERCENTAGE OF RESIDENTS OF COLOR WHO LIVE WITHIN A TEN-MINUTE WALK OF A PARK:  
**71**

## NORTH LAS VEGAS, NEVADA

### THE NOT-SO-SISTER CITY

While many people think relocating to Las Vegas is tantamount to moving to Disney’s Epcot Center, it’s actually one of the most livable areas in the country. A slew of new arrivals—drawn to the city’s low cost of living, nominal property taxes, and proximity to public lands—has led to a pandemic-fueled boom. You’ll see plenty of DON’T CALIFORNIA ON MY NEVADA T-shirts around town, as fleeing Golden Staters have instigated skyrocketing housing prices and created a short supply of real estate south and west of the Strip. But less than ten miles north, the smaller hub of North Las Vegas is expanding to meet the demand. The city sits at the northern edge of Las Vegas Valley, a hot spot of outdoor

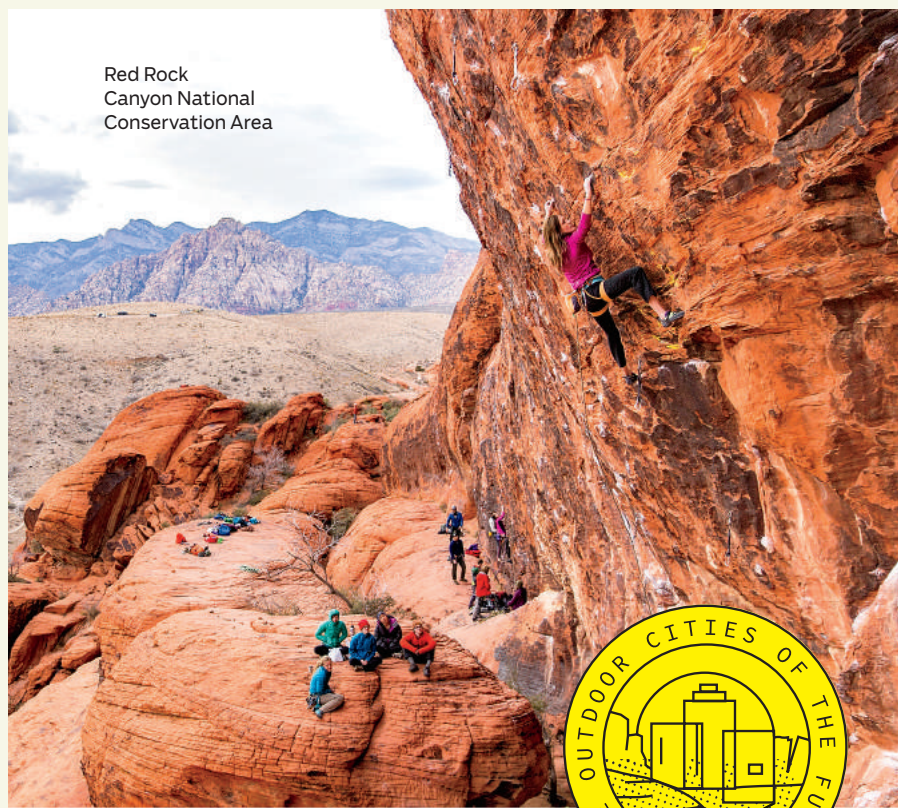
recreation, from hiking the Valley of Fire and kayaking the Colorado River to climbing at nearby Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area, 18 miles west. North Las Vegas has more than two dozen urban parks already, and as of 2019, it began building a network of more than 70 miles of trails to connect them. Its residents, 47 percent of whom are Hispanic or Latino, Black, Asian, Pacific Islander, or Native American, all live within two miles of a park. While master-planned communities are under construction, which will keep the supply of affordable housing high, those who come here for nature will be happy to know that they’re not buying into suburban sprawl. Most of the state—48 million acres—is federal land and can’t be developed. And thanks to a bipartisan bill now making its way through Congress, more than two million acres will likely receive wilderness designation, including a 51,000-acre expansion of the Red Rock area. After all, a real estate boom is great, but a billion-year-old desert landscape is (we hope) forever. —Andrea Bennett

JON GLASSBERG/LOUDER THAN IT

### THE LOCAL

**JERRY HANDREN, AUTHOR OF MOJAVE LIMESTONE**

“The west and northwest areas of Las Vegas, around the Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area, have long attracted the best climbers in the world. But there’s a great deal of unclimbed rock all around the city, with new routes popping up all the time.”



Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area



### NORTH LAS VEGAS SCORECARD

POPULATION: .....  
**265,224**  
 (UP 3.5 PERCENT FROM 2020)

MEDIAN HOME PRICE:  
**\$315,660**

DIVERSITY: ○○○  
**87**

SUSTAINABILITY: ■■■ **46**

PERCENTAGE OF CITY THAT’S PARKLAND:  
**26.2**

PERCENTAGE OF RESIDENTS WHO LIVE WITHIN A TEN-MINUTE WALK OF A PARK:  
**63**

PERCENTAGE OF RESIDENTS OF COLOR WHO LIVE WITHIN A TEN-MINUTE WALK OF A PARK:  
**66**



### TOWNS ON THE RISE

**NEWBURGH, NEW YORK**  
 Population: 34,293  
 Newburgh was once dubbed the murder capital of New York, and while the small city on the Hudson River still has its challenges, a wave of investment from New York City transplants is driving a revival. A city-wide trend is transforming vacant lots into parks and historic buildings into restaurants, boutique hotels, and artist studios. An event space called Lodger hosts dinners and art shows in a former undertaker’s office; Wireworks is a new coworking hub and artist studio in a renovated factory; and Graft Cider ages brews in an old textile plant. The town is also near the region’s best adventures. Stewart State Forest’s 20-plus miles of singletrack are just west of town, the multi-pitch trad routes of the

Shawangunk Mountains (a.k.a. the Gunks) are 30 minutes north, and the Hudson River offers paddling galore only steps from downtown. —Graham Averill

**FAYETTEVILLE, WEST VIRGINIA**  
 Population: 2,806  
 The state recently began an initiative that pays remote workers \$12,000 to move to certain towns—and also covers a year’s worth of outdoor recreation. The smart ones will skip the perks and head straight for Fayetteville. Sitting on the edge of our newest national park, New River Gorge, with a footprint not much bigger than its small town square, Fayetteville has two world-class rivers in its backyard, the New and the Gauley, as well as more than 3,000 sport and trad routes on sandstone cliffs, paddling on nearby Summersville Lake, and a growing network of mountain-bike trails that starts on the edge of downtown. —G.A.

# PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA

## A CITY FOCUSING ON ITS GREEN HISTORY

Philadelphia might have a reputation for being an industrial city full of rowdy sports fans who exclusively eat cheesesteaks, but those who only see the grit are missing all the green. The quantity of space devoted to parks and recreation is impressive. Not only was the city designed to draw residents outdoors as far back as the 17th century, but it continues to build on that legacy. Two miles northwest of City Hall along the Schuylkill River's banks, 2,050-acre Fairmount Park is a conservation triumph, established in the 1800s to protect the city's primary water source. It's composed of hardwood forest, serpentine creeks, and more than 50 miles of trails.

According to the TPL, 95 percent of residents live within a ten-minute walk of a park. In 2020, visits to those spaces spiked more than 50 percent, and it isn't slowing down. Nor is investment in the city's future as an outdoor hub. More than 40 community organizations are working to complete the Circuit Trails, a sprawling multi-use system stretching from downtown Philadelphia into surrounding counties that's now more than 350 miles long, and will be 800 miles when it's finished. This year in South Philly, the 350-acre FDR Park, designed by the sons of Frederick Law Olmsted, will get \$4.5 million for a welcome center that will offer equipment rentals; future financing will go toward preserving the park's wetlands and increasing accessibility.

The city is also on its way to a carbon-free future. Its Climate Action Playbook includes the goal of 100 percent clean energy for municipal operations by 2030, and complete neutrality by 2050. —Kate Morgan

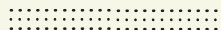
### THE LOCAL

#### JAMIE R. GAUTHIER, PHILADELPHIA CITY COUNCIL MEMBER

"We have an annual summer program that closes designated streets to traffic to create opportunities for children to play and foster community among neighbors."

### PHILADELPHIA SCORECARD

POPULATION:



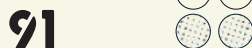
**5,734,000**

(UP 0.3 PERCENT FROM 2020)

MEDIAN HOME PRICE:

**\$217,485**

DIVERSITY:



SUSTAINABILITY:



PERCENTAGE OF CITY THAT'S PARKLAND:

**13.2**

PERCENTAGE OF RESIDENTS WHO LIVE WITHIN A TEN-MINUTE WALK OF A PARK:



PERCENTAGE OF RESIDENTS OF COLOR WHO LIVE WITHIN A TEN-MINUTE WALK OF A PARK:



# CHARLOTTE, NORTH CAROLINA

## SO MUCH MORE THAN A BANKING HUB

No offense to Utahns, but Park City *should* be a great adventure town. Look at those natural assets. But Charlotte? Charlotte isn't even in the mountains. It's a banking center in North Carolina's Piedmont. Yet the Queen City is rapidly evolving into a hot spot for adventure, thanks to growing greenways.

The heart of the city's outdoor community is the Whitewater Center, a 1,300-acre recreation area along the Catawba River, which has plans to expand its acreage this year. In addition to rafting opportunities for all levels, the Center also has climbing, hiking, and mountain-biking options.

And while Charlotte isn't known for an abundance

of greenspace, that will change when the 606-acre Mountain Creek Park opens this fall with 18 miles of new hiking and biking trails. A greenway master plan years in the making aims to build 30 more miles of trails by 2023, including the missing pieces of the Cross Charlotte Trail, a 26-mile route that runs from South Carolina through the city center to the University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

But the town's sustainability initiatives go beyond new parks and greenways. Charlotte aims to be a living laboratory for the circular economy, which involves gradually stepping away from the reliance on nonrenewable resources. First up is a public-private partnership to create an innovation center that showcases closed-loop recycling systems, and a revamped program that rewards participants who use recycled goods to develop new products. —G.A.

### THE LOCAL

#### ERIC SUPIL, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF TRIPS FOR KIDS CHARLOTTE

"This town is full of people looking to get outside. We serve as that first outdoor experience and help people get out of their comfort zone."



Downtown Charlotte

### CHARLOTTE SCORECARD

POPULATION:

**2,132,000**

(UP 3.8 PERCENT FROM 2020)

MEDIAN HOME PRICE:

**\$302,570**

SUSTAINABILITY:



DIVERSITY:



PERCENTAGE OF CITY THAT'S PARKLAND:

**6.1**

PERCENTAGE OF RESIDENTS WHO LIVE WITHIN A TEN-MINUTE WALK OF A PARK:

**39**

PERCENTAGE OF RESIDENTS OF COLOR WHO LIVE WITHIN A TEN-MINUTE WALK OF A PARK:

**40**



Aurora Reservoir



THE LOCAL  
 ← JAVI PEREZ (LEFT), CO-OWNER OF THE CHELUNA CRAFT BREWERY IN AURORA  
 “We host a run club every Tuesday night, and from the brewery you can quickly reach Bluff Lake Nature Center and run miles of trails surrounded by greenery and wildlife.”

## AURORA, COLORADO

AN AFFORDABLE, MULTICULTI ALTERNATIVE TO DENVER

Aurora was once written off as a sprawling Denver suburb with a mostly white and aging population, but this vast expanse of plains ten miles east of the capital has emerged as the state’s most multicultural city.

Aurora lacks a backdrop of majestic, snowcapped peaks but has a unique, eastern Colorado beauty. You won’t find a traditional downtown, but there are 8,000 acres of open space, 103 miles of trails, and the white sand and clear water of Aurora Reservoir, which gives landlocked residents a beach fix and access to wind-surfing, scuba diving, and paddleboarding.

Those outdoor riches are complemented by diversity that nearly rivals New York City. Aurora is approaching a majority-minority status, with a vibrant culinary scene that includes Burmese, Laotian, and a James Beard–nominated food hall to fuel active endeavors. —Jen Murphy

## JACKSONVILLE, FLORIDA

A BEACH TOWN THAT’S WORKING ON PARK ACCESS

Over the past decade, Jacksonville experienced one of the largest increases in new residents of any U.S. city, an influx driven by that perennial American quest for more space, a mellow climate, low taxes, a robust job market, and miles of beaches. In a

THE LOCAL  
 DARYL JOSEPH, JACKSONVILLE DIRECTOR OF PARKS, RECREATION, AND COMMUNITY SERVICES

“Jacksonville is the country’s largest city by area. Much of that land is untouched nature. We’re working hard to make that accessible to all of the city’s neighborhoods.”

place once lauded for having the most parkland of any metropolis its size, access has changed as a result of that population growth; while 15 percent of Jacksonville is parkland, just 35 percent of residents are within a ten-minute walk of those areas.

But the city is working on changing that. It’s developing the Emerald Trail, a 30-mile biking and walking system that will also link 14 of Jacksonville’s neighborhoods to urban creeks. The first phase, which connects the historic downtown area of Brooklyn with the 4.8-mile S-Line Urban Greenway, is set to be completed later this year.

The city continues to add to its public-land acreage. In November 2020, the 7 Creeks Recreation Area, located in the city’s underserved Northside neighborhood, opened with 5,600 acres, seven parks and preserves, and 30 miles of trails. Despite its fast growth, Jacksonville is actively working to regain its reputation as a parks capital.

—Kristin Braswell

## JACKSONVILLE SCORECARD

POPULATION:

1,297,000  
 (UP 1.3 PERCENT FROM 2020)

MEDIAN HOME PRICE:

\$230,180

DIVERSITY:

69

SUSTAINABILITY:

92

PERCENTAGE OF CITY THAT’S PARKLAND:

15.1

PERCENTAGE OF RESIDENTS WHO LIVE WITHIN A TEN-MINUTE WALK OF A PARK:

35

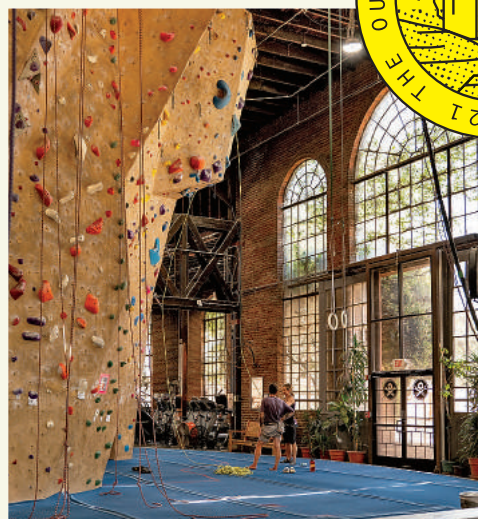
PERCENTAGE OF RESIDENTS OF COLOR WHO LIVE WITHIN A TEN-MINUTE WALK OF A PARK:

38



A creek near Jacksonville

COURTESY OF VISIT JACKSONVILLE



Clockwise from top left: Ro Sham Beaux wine bar; Addison’s Bicycle Repairium; Old Sacramento; a meal at the wine bar; tubing on the American River; Pipeworks climbing gym

## SACRAMENTO, CALIFORNIA

A SPRAWLING CAPITAL EMBRACING CONNECTIVITY

As skyrocketing home prices turn people away from many California cities, Sacramento stands apart as a relative real estate bargain. Sure, the state capital doesn’t have the outdoor cachet of smaller regional destinations like Auburn or Nevada City, but its location near the foothills of the Sierra Nevada and at the confluence of the Sacramento and American Rivers (the latter is hugged by a 32-mile parkway) makes for easy-access recreation.

Local stewards and nonprofits are working hard on the accessibility of these spaces. The city plans to connect its 450 miles of hiking and biking trails to create a regional network of 800 miles spanning five neighboring counties. In the past few years, local groups have mobilized to protect existing infrastructure. During the pandemic, Sacramento Area Bicycle Advocates

donated more than 100 bikes to essential workers, and the group has repaired some 4,000 bikes free of charge since its founding. The Folsom Auburn Trail Riders Action Coalition added 30 miles to Hidden Falls Trail, a popular—and often overrun—hiking and biking destination.

Although the city’s population increased by 411,000 between 2005 and 2016, per capita emissions fell 26 percent. In 2017, Electrify America, a Volkswagen subsidiary, selected Sacramento to implement its Green City zero-emission vehicle plan, a significant step toward the city’s goal of becoming carbon-neutral by 2045.

The plan, which aims to reduce carbon emissions and the number of single-occupant cars on the road, has led to partnerships with several car-sharing services, including Gig, the largest free-floating EV-sharing company in the U.S., and Envoy, which sets aside 73 percent of its EV fleet for use in disadvantaged communities, with stations in these areas. —Katie Rodriguez

## SACRAMENTO SCORECARD

POPULATION:

2,155,000  
 (UP 1.5 PERCENT FROM 2020)

MEDIAN HOME PRICE:

\$432,001

DIVERSITY:

26

SUSTAINABILITY:

8

PERCENTAGE OF CITY THAT’S PARKLAND:

9.7

PERCENTAGE OF RESIDENTS WHO LIVE WITHIN A TEN-MINUTE WALK OF A PARK:

83

PERCENTAGE OF RESIDENTS OF COLOR WHO LIVE WITHIN A TEN-MINUTE WALK OF A PARK:

83

THE LOCAL  
 CHRISTA LINDSEY, OUTDOOR GUIDE  
 “The American River Parkway is the heart of recreation in the city. You don’t need a car to get there. In many neighborhoods, you can walk out your door and within ten minutes be on a bike trail that will take you there.”

## AURORA SCORECARD

POPULATION:

388,723  
 (UP 2.3 PERCENT FROM 2020)

MEDIAN HOME PRICE:

\$428,633

DIVERSITY:

94

SUSTAINABILITY:

54

PERCENTAGE OF CITY THAT’S PARKLAND:

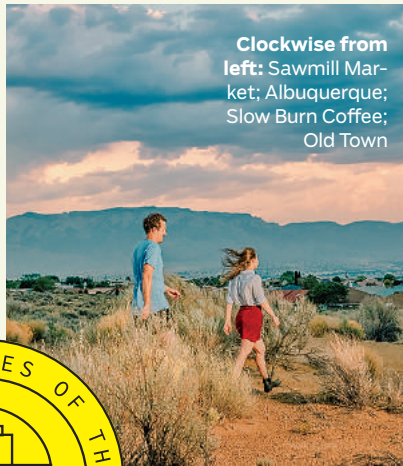
11.2

PERCENTAGE OF RESIDENTS WHO LIVE WITHIN A TEN-MINUTE WALK OF A PARK:

87

PERCENTAGE OF RESIDENTS OF COLOR WHO LIVE WITHIN A TEN-MINUTE WALK OF A PARK:

89



Clockwise from left: Sawmill Market; Albuquerque; Slow Burn Coffee; Old Town



**ALBUQUERQUE SCORECARD**

POPULATION:  
 .....  
**929,000**  
 (UP 1.5 PERCENT FROM 2020)

PERCENTAGE OF CITY THAT'S PARKLAND:  
**28.8**

MEDIAN HOME PRICE:  
**\$258,244**

PERCENTAGE OF RESIDENTS WHO LIVE WITHIN A TEN-MINUTE WALK OF A PARK:  
**90**

DIVERSITY:  
**78**

PERCENTAGE OF COLOR WHO LIVE WITHIN A TEN-MINUTE WALK OF A PARK:  
**90**

SUSTAINABILITY:  
**33**

**ALBUQUERQUE, NEW MEXICO**

**THE FORGOTTEN END OF THE ROCKIES NO LONGER**

Nestled in the plains just beyond the foothills of the Sandia Mountains, Albuquerque has long been a gateway to the treasures of northern New Mexico. But the abundant hiking and horseback riding in Cibola National Forest, world-class skiing at Taos, and blue-chip trout fishing in the Rio Grande have been largely inaccessible to many of the city's residents. It ranks only 40th in outdoor access among America's hundred largest cities—in a state where nearly half the land, some 35 million acres, is public.

City and state governments are well into new efforts to remedy that. About a year before the pandemic, New Mexico's Economic Development Department established an Outdoor Recreation Division (ORD) in order to advance its recreation economy (which, at more than \$2 billion, has grown faster than the state GDP overall) and to

help underserved youth gain wider access to the outdoors via the Outdoor Equity Fund. The fund prioritizes low-income communities—important for a city whose poverty rate is 60 percent higher than the national average—and in 2020 awarded more than a quarter-million dollars to recipients, including nonprofits and grassroots organizations in Albuquerque.

For 2021, the fund's budget has more than tripled—enough to get some 30,000 young New Mexicans outside. The ORD's current infrastructure fund also includes some \$300,000 to improve 42 miles of the Rio Grande Trail that run through the heart of Albuquerque. Moreover, the city has doubled down on conservation, electing its first sustainability officer and establishing aggressive goals, which include reducing energy usage by 65 percent in the next four years and powering municipal operations solely with renewable energy by 2030. Before, Burqueños were largely on their own. With these efforts, the city and state are moving closer to bringing the outside to everyone.

—Murat Oztaskin



THE LOCAL

**↑ LAURA FLORES, PROGRAM DIRECTOR FOR LATINO OUTDOORS**

"The first phase of the Every Kid, Every Way, Every Day initiative will establish a task force to advance the use of outdoor classrooms and organize an outdoor-learning week in late September for thousands of students across the state."



**TOWNS ON THE RISE**

**KALISPELL, MONTANA**

Population: 24,565  
 Located in the middle of the Flathead Valley, about 30 miles southwest of Glacier National Park, Kalispell has been the region's agricultural and industrial hub for decades, but several new projects are shifting to tourism and sustainability. The city recently broke ground on the Kalispell Parkline, replacing old railroad tracks to develop a two-mile-long linear park and multi-use trail. The industrial businesses that used to occupy the town's center have moved to the outskirts, making room for stores, restaurants, and multi-family housing. The city wants to keep Kalispell affordable for locals who have called it home for generations. —G.A.

ROBBYN ARELLANO (FLORES)

# FORCES OF NATURE

W. KAMAU BELL, THE HOST OF *UNITED SHADES OF AMERICA*, SITS DOWN WITH FELLOW COMEDIAN AND ACTIVIST BARATUNDE THURSTON FOR A LIVELY CONVERSATION ON WHAT WE LEARN ABOUT THIS COUNTRY WHEN WE ENGAGE WITH COMMUNITIES VERY DIFFERENT THAN OUR OWN

**W. KAMAU BELL and BARATUNDE THURSTON** have seen a lot of the U.S. over the past year. Bell's been filming the sixth season of his Emmy Award-winning show *United Shades of America*, which, since launching on CNN in 2016, has taken viewers to the far corners of the country and shown us how to talk to one another. Thurston has been recording the third season of his podcast *How to Citizen*—a roving call to arms about tapping into our collective power to effect change—and filming his upcoming PBS series, *America Outdoors with Baratunde Thurston*, which explores our relationships with the natural spaces we work and play in. The show premieres in early 2022. Despite knowing each other for more than a decade, the two haven't had time to catch up recently, so they sat down to talk about the outdoors, race, climate change, and the future of America's cities and towns.

**BARATUNDE THURSTON:** It's been a while since we've talked *not* on social media, so I'm excited just to hang out with you. I know I've spent a lot of the past year working on my cooking skills, fighting racism, and trying to watch everything on every streaming service. What have you been up to?

**W. KAMAU BELL:** Yeah, I got the certificate that says you've finished Netflix. But really, I was too busy parenting. When the pandemic happened, I didn't think I'd be filming *United Shades* in the fall, so I had pitched a bunch of things, and a couple of them got picked up. When *United Shades* went ahead, I suddenly had too many things happening. A friend of mine, Kate Schatz, who wrote *Rad American Women A–Z*, and I have been working on a book—an anti-racist workbook, for lack of a better way to describe it—that comes out next year. And I'm also working on a four-part documentary film project. *United Shades* helped me get into the

documentary film world, so I'm excited about directing projects that don't have my face in them—I want to make sure I'm not always relying on my face to support my family.

**But it's such a great face! I also had to shift my business away from reliance on that. Last August, I launched a podcast, How to Citizen, which is in its third season now. I started slowly getting back out in the world, first by trying to grow everything my backyard could handle, then negotiating with the squirrels for my share, and in April this year I started filming my new show with PBS, America Outdoors.**

Well, you're an outside person, but you know me enough to know that *Outside* magazine is not a place you would expect me to be. I was worried that I might be matched up with somebody who'd ask: "So, do you still wear those shoes that are just toes?" I'm glad we're not having that conversation.

**No, I won't be asking you what your favorite brand of carabiner is. When I interviewed you for my book How to Be Black over ten years ago, we touched on this but didn't get too far into it. So now I get to ask, what was your relationship with the outdoors growing up?**

I think about the summers I spent in Mobile, Alabama, at my grandmother's house. At some point in the day, you had been inside long enough and it was time to go outside. There wasn't really an activity set up for you. It was just like: Go, and come back when you're hungry or it's dark. It was mostly getting into *Little Rascals*-type adventures with kids in the neighborhood. You know, walking around the streets, buying fireworks from an old lady's house, literally playing in the ditch next to the train tracks. Things that I look back on and think, Why did we do that? Mobile is not rural, but compared with where

I live now, Oakland, California—and compared with what we think of as urban—it was rural.

**My Playground Was a Ditch by the Train Tracks could be a nice blues album if you decide to keep doing work that doesn't require your face. My own childhood was filled with outdoor adventures like Boy Scouts, road trips, and camping with my mom. After that I grew pretty disconnected from nature. Then America Outdoors comes along, and it gives me a chance to reconnect with that part of me and with people across the country.**

**When I look at what you've done with United Shades, you're a role model for me. You get to see so much of this country and hang with all sorts of people, and you keep getting renewed for more seasons and winning more Emmys!**

I am on a plaque somewhere in the showbiz hall of fame by virtue of the fact that it's six seasons of a show. It ain't *Friends*, but it's still alive.

**You're doing much more of a public service than Friends. One thing I've found is that I get changed by the process of storytelling. It's one thing to form opinions based on reading something. It's another thing to interact directly with another human being in their context, on their front porch.** *United Shades of America* has radicalized me, which is hilarious, because I don't think that was anybody's intention. In the first season of the show, we did an episode about policing in America. I was in police cars, talking to recruits, going to dinner at a policeman's house. And then last year we did an episode that was basically "Defund 101," explaining what defunding the police means and why I thought it was a good idea. You'll see the response after an episode and sometimes be



**"YOU HAVE TO KEEP RAISING THE STAKES OF YOUR COMMITMENT TO THIS NEW DAY," BELL SAYS.**

like: You know, people got a good point. Sometimes I think: I didn't say it right, I need to be clearer next time. A lot has changed since the first episode of season one, when I hung out with the Ku Klux Klan.

**OK, you brought it up! I remember when your show premiered, and I saw you hanging with the Klan at a cross burning, and I was like, Hell, no! That is not for me. How do you think about that episode now?**

When the show first started, it was very much a guy who was figuring out how to be on TV, how to put his voice in the show, how to navigate the people who don't have the same agenda as him for the show. That first episode was like: Wow, look at these Klan members; they really believe these things. And then by season five, we're doing an episode called "Where Do We Even Start with White Supremacy?" that actually explains what structural and institutional racism is. Instead of talking to the Klan, we talked to ex-Klan members about what the deal was and how they got out. Some opinions have changed, but I've also gotten clearer and sharper about how to express them.

**We've been through a lot as a country: COVID-19, the election, the insurrection, the reminders of systemic racism. I'm worried that the problems and divisions run too deep, with too many of us afraid to look honestly at our history. I could write a whole book on my diagnosis and prescription.**

Even I have referenced our time now as post-COVID. There's a natural impression for us to be like, We're through something. I think the election did some of that, too. But I think we're going to look back in a decade and go, we were still in the middle of it. If things keep drifting in the direction they are, in ten years' time, it'll still be called the United States of America, but I think it will qualitatively feel different. Right before we started talking, I was like, what year did the Berlin Wall go up? We're in a place of not just one Berlin Wall, but several Berlin Walls going up in every city. I think that we are much closer to *The Hunger Games* than we realize, unless there's a certain percentage of us who make it our purpose to try to figure this out in a way that actually helps some of those people on the other side

and doesn't drive them away. I think that America needs a serious universal civics lesson.

**We definitely need more spaces to be able to see each other and connect on a human level. I've found in filming *America Outdoors*, I'll know I'm talking with someone who has very different politics than me, but we'll literally be standing on common ground, both enjoying nature, and that's an opening. You've brought the stories of so many people to the rest of us. What places did you like traveling to for the show and what connections have stuck with you?**

The show is all about meeting people, and I wanted to stay in touch with everyone I met when we filmed in Puerto Rico. I would also say this about your hometown of Washington, D.C.—it's being hit hard by gentrification, but the thing I really respect about it is that you get to see Blackness at all levels. Every time I'm there, I say, "I could live here." My wife, Melissa, who's from the Bay Area, is like, "No, every day has to be 55 degrees at some point."

**Oh, I remember when the weather was predictable!**

We've had to be wildfire refugees two years in a row now. That day in the middle of the pandemic when we looked out our windows and, instead of seeing the blue sky and the sun, it was red—that day changed me forever. I was surprised the past two years, and this year I'm like, we should probably start thinking about where to go when we have to leave because of the wildfires. Again, I'm admitting a significant level of privilege that I can do that.

**I feel you. There are times when I've looked at a map, searching for a climate-safe place to live, but I'm realizing that nowhere is safe. There's fire or smoke or floods or all of the above and then some. Now it's coming into focus that we are all going to go through it.**

I see it through my kids. There are days when they go to school and can't go outside. The hardest part of the pandemic wasn't restaurants or to travel, it was playgrounds being shut down. There's no substitute for being outside. And there was nothing I could compare that moment in time to. I don't have the experience from childhood.

**I'm used to thinking about the generational break with technology—parents not relating to their kids' use of TikTok or something. But "Dad, why is the sky red?" is not something we had to ask our parents. That impact of it will, of course, be felt unevenly, like with COVID-19 or recessions, but even in the U.S., with all our might, rich people can't yet buy their own private clean air for an outdoor playground for their kids.**

No amount of individual American exceptionalism can fix that. You can't buy your way out of it, not individually. But collectively we can.

**I've been watching your career for over a decade, and you care about representation of people and stories we often don't hear about. Why do you care so much about sharing these untold stories?**

Because it makes for better television. You know, when *United Shades* was first pitched to me, it was called *Black Man, White America*. The idea was that I would go to white places every week. First of all, there's no way you'd get to six seasons on that show. When people see me coming now, they usually say, "Hey, Kamau's here!" If we went with that show, it'd be white people like, "Here comes this Black guy to make fun of us." I couldn't do something that I didn't believe in, and there are more stories to tell when you're looking for people whose stories haven't been told in this country. That's just math.

**I love math. So you get to spend time in a lot of cities with different politics and have an up-close view of some of the divisions in this country. We both live in liberal California cities, where that division and inequality is rampant. Where I live in L.A., that's especially evident in the lack of affordable housing.**

I mean, Oakland is one of those places that's regularly on the list of top places to live in America, but then you know people who are having to move out because they can't afford it anymore.

**All right, Kamau, we're coming to the end. The people deserve to know. What's your real agenda?**

I'm trying to promote the same agenda that *Sesame Street* is trying to promote. We should be smarter, kinder, and more cooperative. We should



Bell at the Oakland Museum of California

notice the people in our neighborhood. We should be OK with the one who doesn't look like somebody we expect in our neighborhood.

**I have no idea what's going to happen after I out you as part of the *Sesame Street* agenda. Lots more people seem to have signed up for the liberty-and-justice-for-all mission, which is great. But a lot of folks are uncertain about how to move forward, how to get past this high-intensity moment of awareness around race and inequality. What I usually tell people would take more space than we have here, but it's a combination of moving through the fear and shame that an**

**honest accounting of history might generate, committing to using whatever power we have for some collective benefit. You've been in this game as long as I have. You understand this country better than most. What's your advice to media outlets, including *Outside*, that want to do better at race?**

The big thing you have to accept is that you're going to get things wrong, and you have to be willing to admit to your mistakes and not equivocate an apology. You're only going to show people you've changed over time. So if *Outside* magazine hires a person to write an article who is of a perspective that's never been in *Outside* magazine before, and everybody claps and they

tweet it out, but then that person or others like them never get an article in *Outside* magazine again, then you're full of shit. You have to keep raising the stakes of your commitment to this new day. When they asked me if I wanted to be on the cover, I was like: This is going to be the lowest-selling issue of *Outside* magazine ever. I spend a lot of time outside, but I'm not known as an outside person. So what if some executive goes: Well, look, this issue sold X, and normally we sell X plus three, so we can't do this again. Then whose fault is that? Is it mine? Is it the person who agreed to this? Or is it an indicator that we need to keep working on this, educate our audience, and figure out how to expand on it and make it work?

**NORFOLK SCORECARD**

POPULATION:  
**241,056**  
(UP 1.9 PERCENT FROM 2020)

MEDIAN HOME PRICE:  
**\$241,245**

SUSTAINABILITY:  
 **57**

PERCENTAGE OF CITY THAT'S PARKLAND:  
**5.4**

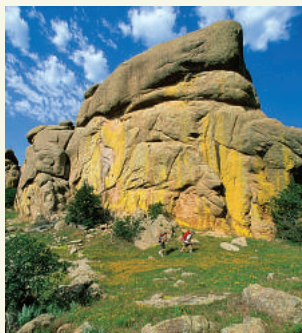
PERCENTAGE OF RESIDENTS WHO LIVE WITHIN A TEN-MINUTE WALK OF A PARK:  
**76**

PERCENTAGE OF RESIDENTS OF COLOR WHO LIVE WITHIN A TEN-MINUTE WALK OF A PARK:  
**75**

DIVERSITY: **99** 



**Clockwise:** Downtown Norfolk; Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge; Mea Culpa Café in Tulsa



**TULSA, OKLAHOMA**

AN EMERGING ADVENTURE HAVEN IN THE GREAT PLAINS

As young workers search for more affordable living, over 900 of them have been wooed by Tulsa Remote, a program that pays people \$10,000 to live and work in the city for a year. As of last fall, 97 percent ended up staying.

With good reason. At Turkey Mountain Urban Wilderness Area, a multimillion-dollar improvement project is in the planning stages and will restore ecology, enhance trails, maximize access, and keep hundreds of acres wild. Later this year, the 918 Trails Network will link 12 paths that trace 100 miles through six city parks, making it possible to bike all the way from the town of Skiatook in the north to underserved neighborhoods like Springdale and South Peoria.

Of the cities on our list, Tulsa ranked the most resilient to climate change, thanks largely to flood-control efforts from the mid-eighties that created detention ponds to hold water after severe storms. These measures were bolstered last July when Congress passed the Water Resources Development Act, allocating \$133.5 million toward improving a 20-mile-long levee system along the Arkansas River, further buttressing the city. —**Matt Kirouac**

**NORFOLK, VIRGINIA**

A COASTAL HUB USING OUTDOOR SPACES TO FIGHT RISING SEA LEVELS

Norfolk is one of the fastest-growing midsize cities in the country. But its location near the mouth of the Chesapeake Bay, where the James and Elizabeth Rivers meet, has made it one of the most at-risk: the area is bearing more of the brunt of rising sea levels than any other region on the eastern seaboard. To combat this, civic leaders are turning to natural solutions to address flooding.


At the center of these plans is the routinely overflowing Elizabeth River, which threatens low-lying areas, such as the historically Black Chesterfield Heights and Grandy Village neighborhoods. The solution: green spaces capable of absorbing water. The Ohio Creek Watershed Project will include a restored tidal creek, as well as wetlands, trails, and a sports field, when it's completed in 2023. It will be connected to downtown by the 10.5-mile Elizabeth River Trail, a multi-use urban path. —**Leah Small**

THE LOCAL


**MICHELLE BROWN-BURDEX, PROGRAM COORDINATOR AT GREENWOOD CULTURAL CENTER**

"Gathering Place, a 66-acre riverfront park, is such an advantage for our community because it's so accessible. I'd like to see similar examples replicated in north Tulsa, where it's desperately needed."

**TULSA SCORECARD**


POPULATION:  
  
**774,000**  
(UP 1.0 PERCENT FROM 2020)


MEDIAN HOME PRICE:  
  
**\$150,067**

DIVERSITY: **75** 

SUSTAINABILITY:  
 **79**

PERCENTAGE OF CITY THAT'S PARKLAND:  
**6.8**

PERCENTAGE OF RESIDENTS WHO LIVE WITHIN A TEN-MINUTE WALK OF A PARK:  
**60** 

PERCENTAGE OF RESIDENTS OF COLOR WHO LIVE WITHIN A TEN-MINUTE WALK OF A PARK:  
**64** 

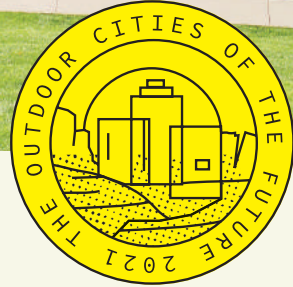
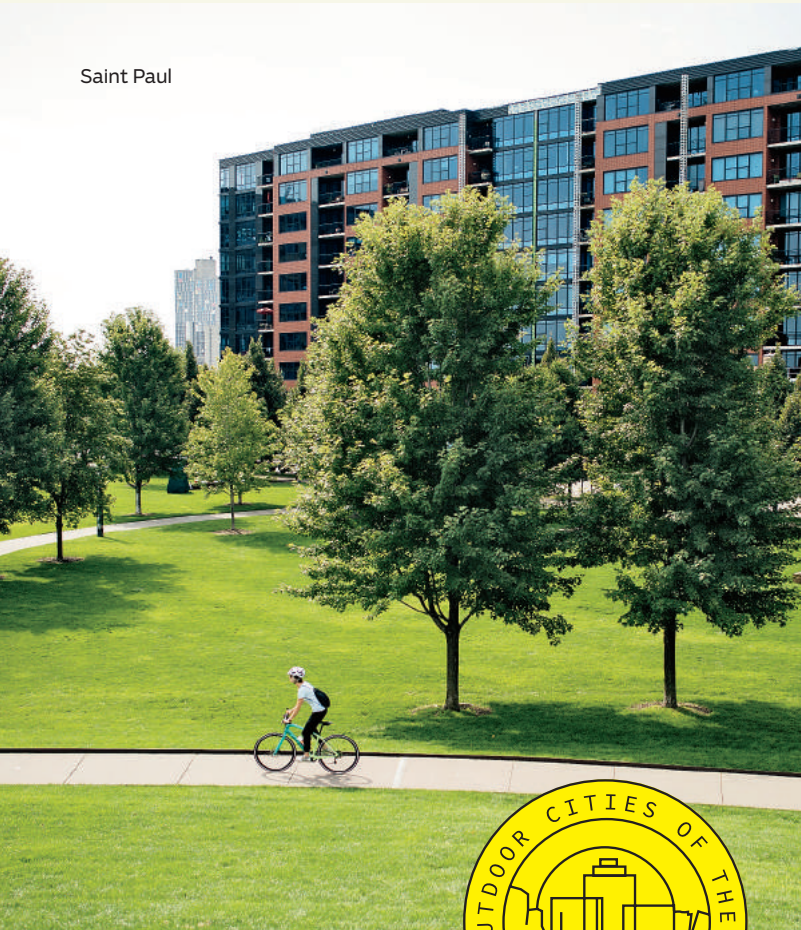


THE LOCAL

**KEISHA BACHELOR, ↑ FOUNDER OF CYCLIQUE**  
"Riding around Norfolk, you just see bodies of water and greenery. We have our fair share of commuting trails, but many paths are centered on connecting residents to serene spaces."



Saint Paul



## SAINT PAUL, MINNESOTA

### THE TWIN CITY SHEDDING ITS UNDERDOG IMAGE

With 26 miles of Mississippi River waterfront, the thriving state capital has always had beautiful bones, with distinct neighborhoods and ample greenspace. But its first Black mayor, Melvin Carter, is making impressive strides in building a city that, in his words, “works for all of us.” Increased investment in equitable and dispersed parks, immigrant and refugee resources, and outdoor programming for adults and youth of color are making it easier for everyone to get outside.

In May, the TPL ranked Saint Paul second nationwide, giving the city high marks for accessibility and greenery. To that end, Saint Paul’s in-progress Highland Bridge neighborhood, a mixed-use development on 135 acres along the river, will feature 55 acres of public land when it’s completed in the next decade.

A year ago, the Parks and Rec-


reation Department introduced programming both for and led by residents of color, from winter ice fishing on Como Lake to Latino family hiking outings where only Spanish is spoken. In April, the department’s Decompressing while BIPOC was a popular recurring event that invited people to gather at a park along the river and be in nature.


In partnership with the Great Plains Institute, Saint Paul developed a Climate Action and Resilience Plan, which was adopted by the city council in December 2019. It focuses on achieving carbon neutrality in operations by 2030. To wit: the new Highland Bridge development will be 100 percent carbon-free, powered by hydroelectric sources.

For decades, Saint Paul has played the role of humble sibling to Minneapolis. But this laid-back little city has finally hit its stride and in many ways is outpacing its bigger, blingier twin.

—Stephanie Pearson


### SAINT PAUL SCORECARD

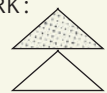
POPULATION:   
**310,368**  
(UP 1.6 PERCENT FROM 2020)


MEDIAN HOME PRICE:   
**\$267,898**

DIVERSITY:   
**28**

SUSTAINABILITY:   
**17**

PERCENTAGE OF CITY THAT’S PARKLAND:   
**15.3**

PERCENTAGE OF RESIDENTS WHO LIVE WITHIN A TEN-MINUTE WALK OF A PARK:   
**99**

PERCENTAGE OF RESIDENTS OF COLOR WHO LIVE WITHIN A TEN-MINUTE WALK OF A PARK:   
**99**

#### THE LOCAL

**ASHA SHOFFNER, SAINT PAUL COORDINATOR OF ENVIRONMENTAL AND OUTDOOR EDUCATION**  
“The BIPOC Outdoors Twin Cities Facebook page went from 100 members in June 2020 to more than 1,000 today. It’s a great way to find folks to recreate with that you know aren’t going to question your presence.”



### TOWNS ON THE RISE

#### RANGELEY, MAINE

Population: 1,047  
A lot of locals left Rangeley, 120 miles north of Portland, six years ago, when the Saddleback Mountain ski resort closed. Those who stuck around focused on diversifying the area’s outdoor draws and capitalizing on its location along the shores of 6,000-acre Rangeley Lake. Locals opened a brewery and bike shop, and in December 2020, Saddleback Mountain reopened under new ownership. It now has a lift system that serves a 440-acre area with 2,000 feet of vertical drop and numerous fat-bike trails. If that’s not enough, Sugarloaf, the largest ski resort in the East, is located just 29 miles away and has a 450-acre expansion in the works. —G.A.

#### OLD FORT, NORTH CAROLINA

Population: 1,004  
Old Fort, surrounded by the Pisgah National Forest and located at the base of the Black Mountains, emptied out when manufacturing jobs were shipped overseas beginning in the eighties. Now some of those buildings are humming with life again. In 2019, Kitsbow Cycling Apparel renovated a former hosiery factory and moved its operations there. Last year, apparel and gear brand Triple Aught Design made the same move to town. Other warehouses are being turned into breweries, coffee shops, and CrossFit gyms. And the great outdoors is just minutes away. The tallest mountains in the East rise above 6,000-plus feet starting from the edge of downtown, offering gravel grinds, road climbs, trophy-trout waters, and ridgetop hiking and backpacking. A new 42-mile multipurpose trail system is in the works, and recreation gems like Kitsuma and Catawba Falls await. —G.A.

Clockwise: Ping Tom Memorial Park; Lake Michigan; a downtown café



## CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

### A THRIVING BIKE CITY GOING ALL IN

With Lake Michigan at its doorstep and more than 8,800 acres of green-space, Chicago is well provisioned for outdoor recreation, especially if you’re an urban cyclist. Over 300 miles of bike lanes give the Windy City plenty of

two-wheel cred, although unmet promises for new paths have irked residents for decades. That’s finally about to change.

This spring, mayor Lori Lightfoot announced a five-year, \$37 million plan for dedicated bike lanes. The initiative’s latest feat, the Navy Pier Flyover project, connects the north and south legs of Chicago’s famed Lakefront Trail and routes cyclists and pedestrians above and away from

road traffic, connecting 18 miles.

According to 2020 analysis by *U.S. News & World Report*, Chicago is the Midwest’s most diverse large city, and its park system is widely accessible. But bike trails are a different story. In Cook County, which includes Chicago and its suburbs, less than 50 percent of Black and 45 percent of Latino residents live within a mile and a half of a bike trail. The county is preparing its own bike-infrastructure plan to change that. Trail extensions

for greater accessibility in underserved communities and safety improvements, such as off-street trails, are part of the plan, which is slated for completion in spring 2022.

In the meantime, these communities are not waiting. Streets Calling Bike Club, a group for Black Chicagoans that formed last year, draws hundreds to meetups and introduces young people to cycling through after-school programs. —Stephanie Vermillion




### TOWNS ON THE RISE

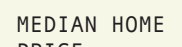
#### DESERT HOT SPRINGS, CALIFORNIA

Population: 28,878  
Desert Hot Springs has always been about relaxation, thanks to numerous mineral-water pools that dot the parched landscape. Recently, it has leaned into another natural form of leisure: marijuana. The historic spa town, 100 miles east of Los Angeles, was the first in California to legalize cultivation. The decision saved it from bankruptcy by generating a viable tax base, and in December the town council voted to lean further into cannabis tourism by legalizing the sale and consumption of weed at entertainment venues and hotels. As for the great outdoors, Desert Hot Springs sits just south of both Sand to Snow National Monument and Joshua Tree National Park, and the brand-new, 12-mile Long Canyon Trail connects less-frequented areas within the two sites. —G.A.

OPPOSITE PAGE: NATE RYAN. THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: MIKE KILLION (2); DAVID W. JOHNSON.


### CHICAGO SCORECARD


POPULATION:   
**8,877,000**  
(UP 0.1 PERCENT FROM 2020)

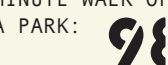
MEDIAN HOME PRICE:   
**\$293,626**

SUSTAINABILITY:   
**65**

DIVERSITY:   
**10**

PERCENTAGE OF CITY THAT’S PARKLAND:   
**10**

PERCENTAGE OF RESIDENTS WHO LIVE WITHIN A TEN-MINUTE WALK OF A PARK:   
**98**

PERCENTAGE OF RESIDENTS OF COLOR WHO LIVE WITHIN A TEN-MINUTE WALK OF A PARK:   
**98**



From left: The Colorado River; Barton Creek



## AUSTIN, TEXAS

AN OUTDOOR STRONGHOLD THAT'S PUTTING IN THE WORK

Austin doesn't need to prove its outdoor credibility: 19 state parks, 313 city parks, and over 17,000 acres of greenspace have long made it the adventure capital of Texas. But when it comes to the equity and accessibility of these spaces, Austin has some work to do—38 percent of inner-city residents don't live within walking distance of a park.

In 2020, the Austin Parks and Recreation Department (PAR) spent \$47.8 million to, among other things, upgrade 15 existing parks to make them ADA compliant. The city's commitment to accessibility also included drafting a plan for 330-acre John Treviño Jr. Metropolitan Park—named after the first Mexican-American man on the city council—which will be located in a historically underserved area of East Austin. PAR's Equity Group, established in 2020, has ramped up its initiatives, most recently hiring a program manager.

Austin has also strived to be more intersectional when it comes to its sustainability policies. Last fall the city updated its Climate Equity Plan to focus on community-wide input, and introduced local advisory groups to comment on topics like energy, transportation, and access to nature. In addition to increasing Austin's electric-vehicle usage to 40 percent and making 25 percent of existing buildings—along with all newly constructed ones—net-zero operational-carbon structures by 2030, the updated plan will help create more green jobs, protect more natural areas, and give communities of color a voice in policy-making. —Alex Temblador



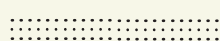
THE LOCAL

### ← TANYA WALKER, OWNER OF BLACK WOMEN WHO KAYAK

"Austin was pure country when I was growing up—the outdoors consisted only of your immediate surroundings. Today some of the city's best adventures are accessible from most neighborhoods by bike and public transit."

#### AUSTIN SCORECARD

POPULATION:



**2,117,000**

(UP 3.1 PERCENT FROM 2020)

MEDIAN HOME PRICE:

**\$540,086**

DIVERSITY: **38**

SUSTAINABILITY:

**20**

PERCENTAGE OF CITY THAT'S PARKLAND:

**10.1**

PERCENTAGE OF RESIDENTS WHO LIVE WITHIN A TEN-MINUTE WALK OF A PARK:

**62**

PERCENTAGE OF RESIDENTS OF COLOR WHO LIVE WITHIN A TEN-MINUTE WALK OF A PARK:

**63**



#### TOWNS ON THE RISE

ELY, NEVADA

Population: 5,000

This out-of-the-way place, located at the eastern end of Highway 50 an hour northwest of Great Basin National Park, has a thriving mountain-bike scene that's only getting better. To add to the 50 miles of existing singletrack that starts at the edge of downtown, the local trail club and tourism bureau are building 51 more miles: a 30-mile stretch south to 10,936-foot Ward Mountain, and a 21-mile system north to the Garnet Hill Recreation Area, a rockhounding site. Both projects, funded by a grant from the International Mountain Biking Association, are expected to be completed in a few years. —G.A.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: GREXSYS/GETTY IMAGES; BRENT HUMPHREYS/REDUX; TANYA WALKER