

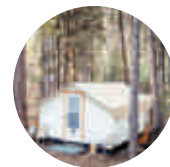
Skyrocketing prices. All-cash offers. Million-dollar tear-downs. With housing costs rising, the great cities of the West—San Francisco, Denver, even L.A.—are creating an existential challenge. Where can you find the right house at the right price, a reasonable salary, and maybe a decent restaurant for date night? We've come up with 20 compelling options, from a culinary boomtown in the Rockies to a revitalized fishing port in Oregon to the windward coast of Oahu. We'd be happy to call any of these places home. **BY CHRISTINE RYAN**



BOISE TASTEMAKERS
KIRSTEN GROVE
AND LAURA TULLY AT THE
ATLAS BAR. OPPOSITE:
NEVADA CITY, CA



1



NEVADA CITY, CA

2



VENTURA, CA

3



BOISE, ID

4



PRESCOTT, AZ

5



VANCOUVER, WA

NEVADA CITY, CA

1 WHERE THE SUMMER OF LOVE NEVER ENDED

MULTIDISCIPLINARY
ARTIST TEHYA SHEA IN
HER STUDIO

Ask Matthew Ticciati to describe his first Halloween after moving to Nevada City in the Sierra Foothills, and at first you get the happy clichés of rural life: the whole town dressing up, every porch lit with a jack-o'-lantern, the neighbor who gives out 2,500 pieces of candy. But then the clichés stop. "The best costume? A kid who came as No Face from the

▼
Glamping meets foosball at Erin & Dan Thiem's Inn Town Campground.



▼
Nevada City's downtown, which dates back 150 years



▼
L.A. music producer Joshua Henry returned to his hometown to open The Curly Wolf espresso house.



Japanimation classic *Spirited Away*. That was pretty great,” he says. Lots of Gold Country towns have quaint main streets and good schools and affordable Victorians like the one Ticcianti and his wife are fixing up—but fellow parents who would dress up their 10-year-old as a Hayao Miyazaki character? That takes a certain artsy sensibility, which is exactly what’s luring big-city escapees like the Ticciantis to Nevada City. It also doesn’t hurt that the alt-folk musician Joanna Newsom hails, famously, from here.

That counterculture dates back to the 1960s, when young back-to-the-landers drifted away from the Bay Area to colonize a half-empty logging town. Today, those hippies have become the establishment, and the town they rescued boasts a 150-year-old brick theater that still stages live plays and dance performances; a foundry turned venue that books the likes of John Doe and Bonnie Prince Billy; not one but two annual film festivals; and a charter K-8 school dedicated to the arts. Because when it comes to a solid grounding in Japanese cinema, you’ve got to start them young.

N C A L

LOCAL LOWDOWN

“IN MANY WAYS, NEVADA CITY HAS ALWAYS BEEN AN ALTERNATIVE CULTURE, FROM ITS GOLD-MINING DAYS TO WHEN IT BECAME A HAVEN FOR ARTISTS AND MUSICIANS. THE TOWN HAS A WAY OF PICKING ITS PEOPLE.”

—Tehya Shea
Artist

RUNNERS-UP

► RENO

This city regularly appears on Livability’s Top 100 Best Places to Live list, and this past year *Entrepreneur* magazine cited it as one of the country’s 50 top spots for start-ups. But just as Reno’s economy has diversified beyond dice and divorce, the city’s cultural life has blossomed: The ripples created by such Midtown bars as Chapel Tavern have spread as far east as Times Square, and the Nevada Museum of Art’s ambitious programming is living up to the promise of its striking building. Population: 239,532. Median home price: \$266,000.

► SANTA ROSA, CA

At the crossroads of U.S. 101 and the (eventually) scenic Bodega Highway, Sonoma’s county seat has managed to remain affordable: Its median home price comes in lower than the state average, with household income higher than the national average. And when the SMART train comes online later this spring, Santa Rosa will be reachable from Marin by rail. This month, as it does every February, downtown’s Russian River Brewing releases its revered Pliny the Younger—if you lived here, you might actually get a taste. Population: 173,612. Median home price: \$460,000.

► FREMONT, CA

Named one of the 50 Best Places to Live by *Money*, Fremont has a lower median home price than many other Bay Area cities, along with great weather, a diverse population, and a prime location. The fourth-largest municipality in the Bay Area, Fremont sprawls from the top of Mission Peak all the way to BART’s terminus and the Dumbarton Bridge—making a commute to San Francisco or Silicon Valley doable. Population: 239,532. Median home price: \$805,500.



THE WOMEN BEHIND
KITKITDIZZI BOUTIQUE
(KITKITDIZZI.COM),
WHICH SPECIALIZES IN
HANDMADE PRODUCTS

VENTURA, CA

LOCALS FLOCK TO SAN
BUENAVENTURA STATE BEACH
PARK FOR PRIME SURFING
AND BEACH VOLLEYBALL

2 THE OFF-RAMP TO PARADISE

For decades, Ventura was a drive-through beach town, somewhere you stopped for gas and a lungful of sea air while on your way to Santa Barbara. But that's changed recently. Houses don't languish on the market; rentals are heating up. In part, you can credit companies like The Trade Desk, a product of Ventura's municipal tech incubator that

▼
A bronze statue of Father Junipero Serra at Ventura City Hall



▼
Captain Pancho Mayoral of Island Packers (islandpackers.com), which leads trips to the Channel Islands.



▼
Iron & Resin (ironandresin.com) sells surf, skate, and outdoor gear.



recently went public, and Island Packers, which runs the Channel Islands boat concession. And, of course, Patagonia was founded here in 1973.

But you can also credit Ventura's lack of polish. "People are discovering that if you just want to chill, not feel any pressure to dress a certain way, you can do that here," says Marlyss Auster, head of the city's Visitors and Convention Bureau.

And despite the boomlet, it's a place where you can still patch together a mix of surfing and part-time work and live the beach-town dream.

Take Chipper "Bro" Bell. He's Patagonia's "cultural ambassador" and has been with the company for 23 years. When he needed to go part-time to raise his kids and run his surf school, they let him take four months a year off. For 14 years in a row. He loves Ventura because you can be in the mountains one day and surfing with dolphins the next. "No, we're not fancy like Newport Beach, bless their Spanish-Mediterranean hearts, or Santa Barbara, with their no-billboards law," Bell says. "But it's a great community."

SCAL

LOCAL LOWDOWN

"THE BEACHES ARE PERFECT AND THE OCEAN IS SO RICH WITH BIODIVERSITY. YOU CAN SPEND ALL YOUR TIME ON THE WATER AND SEE DOLPHINS AND WHALES ALMOST EVERY DAY."

—Pancho Mayoral
Sea captain

RUNNERS-UP

► IRVINE, CA

This O.C. town was engineered for livability back in the 1960s. What it lacks in an actual downtown, it makes up for with 350 miles of bike lanes and trails, an infinitesimal crime rate, a robust economy, a multicultural population, and the Orange County Great Park. (Although the park's expansion hasn't yet reached the promised 1,300 acres, you can visit the working gardens of its Food + Farm Lab and ride the carousel.) Housing here isn't particularly cheap, but you'll get your money's worth. Population: 250,308. Median home price: \$725,000.

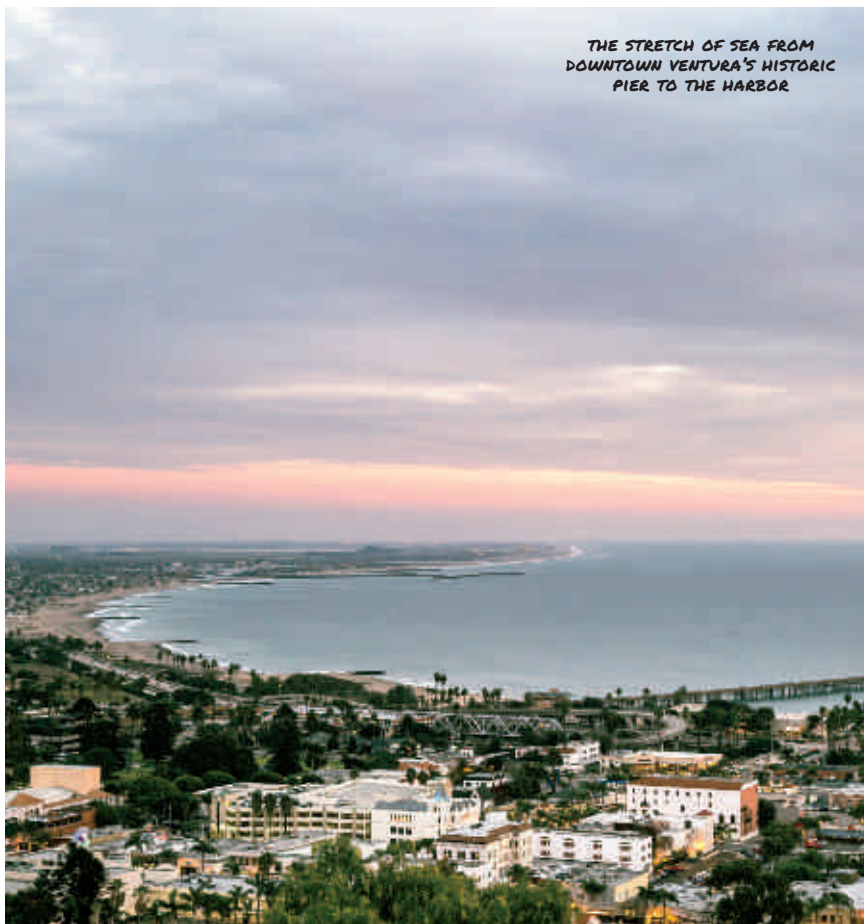
► KOOLAUPOKO, HI

Not only is Koolau, on the southeastern side of Oahu, an option for the work-from-anywhere crowd; it's also a mere 30-minute drive from downtown Honolulu. The median income is high for Hawaii, and the district—which encompasses Kailua, Kaneohe, and Waimanalo—is part of the statewide Blue Zones Project, intended to promote healthy living by adding sidewalks and upgrading school lunches. Population: 118,326. Median home price: \$766,500.

► LOS ALAMITOS, CA

Despite landing the 12th spot on Livability's 100 Best Small Towns list, Los Alamitos is the very definition of under the radar. (It's home to California's Joint Forces Training Base.) Located midway between Long Beach and Anaheim, the town has a strong school system and relatively low taxes and housing prices—none of which may sound exciting, but affordability in Orange County? That's worth paying attention to. Population: 11,609. Median home price: \$605,000.

THE STRETCH OF SEA FROM
DOWNTOWN VENTURA'S HISTORIC
PIER TO THE HARBOR



BOISE, ID

FASHION STYLIST
LAURA TULLY AND INTERIOR
DESIGNER KIRSTEN
GROVE AT BOISE'S ATLAS BAR

3 FOOD TOWN ON THE RISE

When Rob Scheffler first visited Boise, one February weekend in 2015, he fell in love. "It was Walnut Creek and Tahoe and San Luis Obispo and Minneapolis all in one, with its rolling foothills and ski slopes and college-town exuberance and Midwest niceness." It wasn't until after he moved here from the San Francisco Bay Area that Scheffler discovered

▼
Boise native Grant Shealy runs
Neckar Coffee (neckarcoffee.com).



▼
Grilled cheese at Bleubird (bleubirdboise.com), served with fig
preserves and tomato-basil soup.



▼
Inside the handsome Slow by Slow
Coffee Bar (slowbyslow.com), one
of the city's best craft coffee shops.



he'd also be able to eat well. Very, very well—thanks to restaurateurs like Dave Krick (Red Feather Lounge), chefs like State & Lemp's Kris Komori (nominated last year for a James Beard Award), and cool-kid entrepreneurs like Grant Shealy (whose pop-up coffee stand, Neckar, will soon morph into a brick-and-mortar shop).

It's also thanks to locals like Dave Yasuda. He isn't a chef or a restaurateur, but he is part of what's bringing Boise's food scene to a simmer: a passionate, involved audience. Yasuda, who works in marketing for American Wagyu-beef distributor Snake River Farms, recently jumped in to fill a culinary gap in town. "There's a really nice *bánh mì* shop here, and a lot of places serve a good bowl of pho, but there's no place for ramen." So he and a few friends borrowed a brewery's tasting room to make it happen. Thirty dollars got you octopus salad, marinated pork loin, and noodles flown in from California, plus a green-tea saison and a ginger Berliner Weisse. "We did two seatings, 112 people," says Yasuda. "If there's a ramen person out there who wants to open a ramen place, there's a demand in Boise!" Noted.

M T N S

LOCAL LOWDOWN

"BOISE'S DEFINITELY A KICK-YOUR-FEET-UP KIND OF PLACE. PEOPLE HAVE THEIR EYE ON THE LATEST TRENDS AND DESIGNS, BUT AT THE END OF THE DAY, WE'RE A CASUAL COMMUNITY."

—Kirsten Grove
Interior designer

RUNNERS-UP

► FORT COLLINS, CO

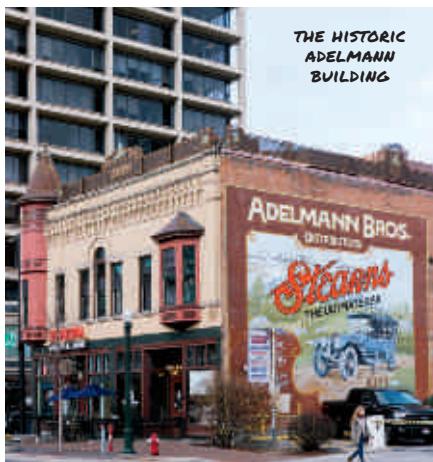
The city may be famous for craft beer—its 20-odd breweries range from the upstart Funkwerks to the stalwart New Belgium Brewing—but its equally vibrant tech sector is jump-starting the local economy. Throw in Colorado State University and a nonprofit start-ups incubator called the Innosphere, and Fort Collins's enviably low unemployment rate makes even more sense. Don't overlook the award-winning public schools and the location right on the doorstep of Rocky Mountain National Park. Population: 156,511. Median home price: \$325,000.

► CANMORE, ALBERTA

The last stop on the drive into Banff, this mountain-ringed community is the kind of small town you might not think exists anymore: New arrivals are greeted as soon-to-be-old friends, the major chains are absent from the main street, and everyone turns out for the big pancake breakfast in Centennial Park on Canada Day. Real estate prices may be high relative to other towns in Alberta, but the property tax rate is one of the lowest in the province. Unlike Vancouver, B.C.'s 15 percent surcharge, Alberta hasn't yet enacted foreign-buyer penalties. Population: 13,077. Median home price: \$600,000 Canadian.

► PROVO, UT

Home of Brigham Young University, this traditionally conservative municipality now also plays host to Google Fiber; a cheeky restaurant called the Black Sheep Café that serves farm-to-table Native American cuisine; and a legit brewpub. Provo led *Outside's* 2014 list of Best Adventure Towns—hello, red rock country!—and it ranked third on the *Entrepreneur* list of 50 best start-up cities. Population: 115,866. Median home price: \$225,000.



THE HISTORIC
ADELMANN
BUILDING



DAVID AND
SARAH KELLY,
OWNERS OF
BLEUBIRD



BLEUBIRD'S
CRANBERRY
SAGE SODA



JUNIPER
RESTAURANT
(JUNIPER
ON8TH.COM)

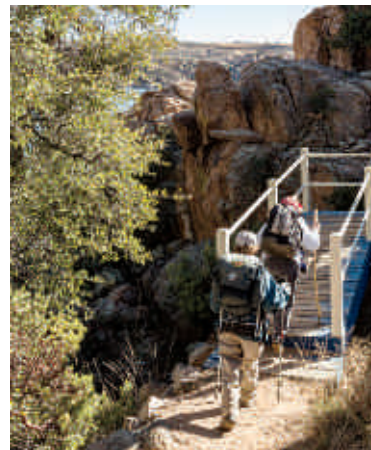
PRESCOTT, AZ

PRO
MOUNTAIN-BIKER
CHLOE WOODRUFF
AT CONSTELLATION
TRAILS

4 THE ADVENTURE- SEEKER'S PLAYGROUND

When Chris Hosking moved to Prescott 10 years ago, the small, mile-high city—the capital of the Arizona Territory—was already popular with hikers and bikers for its 28-mile trail network and easy access to Kaibab and the Prescott national forests. Then the lapsed industrial designer (who worked for Apple) got involved building trails, which

▼
Watson Lake loop trail, a moderate 4.8-mile hike



▼
The 1877 Palace Restaurant and Saloon (historicpalace.com) claims to be AZ's oldest frontier saloon.



▼
Whiskey Row was once home to more than 40 post-Gold Rush saloons.



turned into a city job buying more open space and easements for more trails...and now, 84 miles of mixed-use paths lace through the city's chaparral, linking the pine forests to the south with the grasslands to the north.

Which says something about how important the outdoors is to this place. Look at how Prescotters spend their free time: 10 hiking groups, a mountain-biking alliance, two equestrian organizations, and more gardening clubs than you can shake a trowel at. "We're attracting a lot of people who work out of their houses and could be anywhere," says Hosking. "They choose Prescott for the quality of life." Even teenagers are trading their screens for the woods: "About four years ago, the first high school mountain-biking team got started, and now we've got eight teams and 150 kids racing mountain bikes every weekend."

But what he's most proud of is that everyone gets along—bikers and hikers and trail runners and horseback riders. "People here have a good outlook. Sure, maybe it's the good weather. But maybe it's not having to work to death to afford to live."

S W S T

LOCAL LOWDOWN

"ALMOST ANYONE CAN RIDE A BIKE OR GET OUT AND HIKE HERE. THE TERRAIN IS SO DIVERSE, AND EVERY SEASON THERE ARE NEW TRAILS GOING IN."

—Chloe Woodruff
Olympic mountain biker

RUNNERS-UP

► LOS ALAMOS, NM

This place is more than just a historical landmark—it's an actual town, and a bang-up one at that. Thanks to Los Alamos National Laboratory (yes, home to the Manhattan Project), tech jobs are plentiful, and though housing prices aren't as low as elsewhere in the state, Los Alamos offers better schools and little crime. And, because this is New Mexico, property taxes are still far lower than elsewhere in the West. Scenery? The town is ringed by the cliff dwellings of Bandelier National Monument, a half-dozen pueblos, Santa Fe, and the eerily beautiful Valles Caldera National Preserve. Population: 11,963. Median home price: \$255,000.

► SCOTTSDALE

Hear "Scottsdale" and you think, "Desert. Resorts. Golf courses." You wouldn't be wrong, exactly—but you'd be missing the fact that Scottsdale is also a suburb for people working all over the Phoenix metro area. Due to the lingering effects of the foreclosure crisis, housing here is still more affordable than in affluent suburbs of, say, Seattle or Denver, and the schools score high in statewide rankings. Population: 235,213. Median home price: \$370,000.

► SILVER CITY, NM

Though this mining town (guess what metal?) isn't quite as well off as Los Alamos, it's in a quiet, gorgeous corner of New Mexico's Gila wilderness and has a sizable arts scene. The mining industry is still a big employer—these days, the ore being dug up is copper—and commodity prices can be volatile, but Western New Mexico University is also based here, which helps stabilize the economy. The weather is golden too: Being at 6,000-foot elevation keeps the humidity away, and the town is far enough south to boast warmer winters than Santa Fe or Taos. Population: 10,814. Median home price: \$129,000.



WATSON LAKE,
SURROUNDED BY
GRANITE DELLS

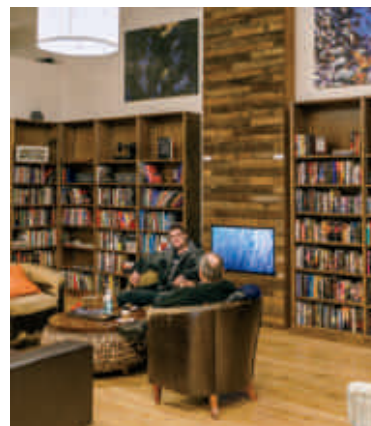
VANCOUVER, WA

ENTREPRENEUR
MAX MIKHAYLENKO
AND FAMILY
ON WATERFRONT
RENAISSANCE TRAIL

5 WHERE PORTLANDIA GOES TO GROW UP

If you're relocating to Portland and want the best value for your money, there's a good chance you won't be house-shopping in Portland. Or even in Oregon. You'll be looking in Vancouver. Not the Vancouver in Canada but the one across the Columbia River from PDX, in income-tax-free Washington State. Here's why: You have kids. That's what happened to

▼
Boomerang (boomerangvancouver.com) donates profits to local causes—and has a treehouse inside.



▼
Mikhaylenko and an old classmate founded coworking space Columbia Collective (columbiacollective.com).



▼
The Thirsty Sasquatch (thethirstysasquatch.com) offers local craft beer and regional spirits and wines.



Jody Bamford, who moved with her husband and their young daughter from a condo near the Pearl District to the suburban city six years ago. “So many families are moving to Vancouver because the public schools are all very good,” says Bamford. But the city has a lot more going for it than high test scores. “It’s so peaceful, with wide streets and sidewalks and maple trees in storybook neighborhoods,” she says. “And every little neighborhood has its own park—from our house, there are two within walking distance. It’s like Vancouver was built for kids.”

The five-year-old Vancouver Community Library definitely was. The third floor looks like a children’s museum, with tipis and a kitchen area, plus a cafe on the first floor. “We hang out there a lot when it rains,” says Bamford.

Not that the city lacks grown-up amenities: In the past few years, West Vancouver’s dormant downtown and Uptown Village retail strip have reawakened. Today, you’ll find brewpubs, wine bars, restaurants, and coffee bars—all of them bringing a little piece of Portland to the suburbs.

NWST

LOCAL LOWDOWN

“OUR RESPONSE TO ‘KEEP PORTLAND WEIRD’ IS ‘KEEP VANCOUVER NORMAL.’ LOOK AROUND AND YOU’LL SEE IT ON BUMPER STICKERS EVERYWHERE.”

—Max Mikhaylenko
Entrepreneur, father of two

RUNNERS-UP

► COOS BAY, OR

This once-faded fishing port on the southern Oregon Coast has seen its fortunes rebound, thanks to public redevelopment efforts and private enterprise. The former helped fund construction of the new Coos History Museum building and the 2014 reopening of the Egyptian Theatre, a relic of Coos Bay’s 1920s heyday. A good example of the latter is the family-friendly 7 Devils Brewing Co. public house, a civic-minded labor of love for the young couple who opened it in 2013. Population: 15,879. Median home price: \$170,000.

► WENATCHEE, WA

The farmlands of the Wenatchee Valley were once filled with orchards, and the Columbia River, which runs through the small city, powered a series of nearby hydroelectric dams. The dams are still in place, but now vineyards and wineries are gaining ground. In 2013, the not-for-profit Pybus Public Market opened in a onetime Pybus Steel warehouse, with a mix of specialty-food vendors and restaurants, as well as a weekly farmers’ market and live music on Friday nights. Population: 32,718. Median home price: \$234,000.

► ANCHORAGE

On the plus side: no state income tax (in fact, you get an annual dividend from the state), high median family income, low housing prices, and the northern lights. Weigh against those a distinct lack of sun in the winter months. Still on the fence? How do you feel about having a bull moose wander into your backyard? If the prospect of living where the wild things are gives you a thrill, then your decision is easy. Population: 299,704. Median home price: \$300,437. 🐻



THE INTERSTATE
BRIDGE TO PORTLAND

Photographs by DAVE LAURIDSEN