

What makes the Best Small Towns?

You'll find them **in the bends of rivers and at the bases of mountains, blending into the landscape** rather than disrupting the scenery. They offer a **respite from the frantic pace** that often comes with living in a major metropolitan area. They are filled with **unpretentious people** who want to **preserve** what makes their places **unique**.

The best small towns provide **beautiful locales** that inspire both **creativity** and **activity**. Their downtowns remain **homages to the past**, offering **unhurried atmospheres** where residents savor conversations as much as they savor morsels. The best towns draw hundreds, if not thousands, of tourists who come to experience what residents enjoy every day – **authentic character and characters, cultural gems** and **fantastic outdoor settings**. What these places have in common is the uncommon **ability to change lifestyles, shift points of view** and **nourish souls** with simple pleasures. They offer something **unique** and **unforgettable**.

Essential Ingredients:

Ideals

- quaint character
- laid-back lifestyle
- high community involvement
- stable economy
- high quality employers and job opportunities
- entrepreneurial spirit
- high level of employment
- good income distribution
- high home values
- affordable housing opportunities
- great schools
- youth programs and outreach
- educational opportunities for all ages

- healthy population growth
- energy and resource conservation
- low crime
- low pollution
- public transportation system
- enhanced bike and pedestrian access and safety
- consistent and compelling wayfinding

Play

- gateways to year-round outdoor adventures and captivating natural attractions
- direct, enhanced access to rivers and mountains
- a system of trails that encircles and connects the entire community
- places to recharge and relax
- central park spaces and green areas for folks to gather, connect and play
- recreation facilities and amenities for all ages and interests
- lawn games
- comfortable outdoor reading spaces
- outdoor movie screen
- nature trails for education and discovery
- water features
- tree houses

Community

- lively community festivals and cultural events
- farmer, purveyor and artisan markets
- tourism information and amenities
- creative outdoor sports shops to connect and outfit locals and visitors to surrounding assets (fishing, biking, hiking, running, kayaking, rafting, Nordic and alpine skiing, etc.)
- excellent restaurants and foodie community with emphasis on local purveyors and ingredients
- a range of food options and environments (from food trucks to 4-course wining and dining)
- general store with quality groceries and necessities
- craft breweries, distilleries, wineries
- coffee houses
- pubs and beer gardens
- progressive technologies
- events venues
- live music
- night life
- museums
- community gardens
- health and wellness amenities and services
- local historic information and displays
- attractive and comfortable lodging
- boutiques and shopping attractions
- co-op work spaces for professionals and non-profits

- artists' work spaces and galleries
- craftspeople workshops
- public art display (sculpture, murals, art walks, etc.)
- performing arts venue
- approachable town hall and offices
- public parking

Some Exemplary U.S. Small Towns Worth Studying (populations less than 10K)

Astoria, OR
population: 9,477

Calistoga, CA
population: 5,208

Cedar Key, FL
population: 896

Clayton, NY
population 1,978

Cooperstown, NY
population: 1,833

Crested Butte, CO
population: 1,519

Eureka Springs, AK
population 2,073

Haley, ID
population 8,014

Hood River, OR
population: 7,319

La Pointe, WI
population 309

Lewisburg, WV
population 3,830

Marfa, TX
population: 1,899

Newtown Borough, PA
population 2,384

Paia, HI
population: 2,668

Phoenicia, NY
population 309

Port Townsend, WA
population: 9,117

Provincetown, MA
population: 3,000

Ripon, WI
population: 7,733

Salida, CO
population: 5,409

Sedona, AZ
population: 10,000

Stockbridge, MA
population: 1,947

Telluride, CO
population: 2,291

Traverse City, MI
population 5,018