

[Outside Magazine, August 2010](#)

Best Towns 2010: Boise, Idaho

The winner for best overall town in the western U.S. is Boise, Idaho.

By **Sam Moulton**

What makes a great adventure town? Every year, that same question is at the core of the debate over our Best Towns list. The answer, of course, depends on what you're into. That's why, this time around, we decided to try and please everyone. Instead of compiling a single catchall list, we picked the best places for our favorite sports: running, cycling, skiing, paddling, and surfing—and because some of us like a little of everything, the best multi-sport meccas, too. But while the quality of the sporting life was a defining factor, it wasn't the only one. For a town to make the list, it also had to be balanced—culturally vibrant, with a resilient economy and a sane housing market. Reconciling all that wasn't easy, but the result is a surprising list of places we're sure are about to get the attention they deserve. Even if some of the locals don't want it.



POPULATION (METRO) 606,376

MEDIAN HOME PRICE \$169,900

HOMETOWN HERO Kristin Armstrong, 2008 Olympic triennial gold medalist, bicycling advocate, supermom

THE LIVING: Boise, to put it mildly, has been on a roll. Government, education, and health care remain core industries, but dozens of high-tech startups have moved to town, joining behemoths like Hewlett-Packard and Micron Technology. And while its population has more than doubled in the past 30 years and jaded locals bemoan the sprawl, Boise has managed its growth impressively well: The city is home to nearly 2,000 acres of parks and a 25-mile greenbelt. The outlying areas feel a bit bland, but the older neighborhoods have that Boulder vibe—cruiser bikes, farmers' markets, and prayer flags—only with reasonably priced homes.

THE PLAYGROUND: With a few play waves already in city limits, a \$6.7 million whitewater park in the works, and life-list runs on the Payette and Salmon within a two-hour drive, the paddling is exceptional and only getting better. There's also a healthy triathlon community and a robust road-biking scene. In winter, before or after work, you can get a quick ski in—nordic or alpine—at Bogus Basin Ski Area, just 16 miles up the road. (Tip: The climb up is also a classic road ride.) And those brown hills above town are laced with more than 135 miles of hiking and mountain-biking trails. Yup, you're going to need a bigger Rocket Box.

THE NEIGHBORHOOD: The Northend neighborhood is as good as Idaho gets: You can walk to the local coffee shop, bike downtown via paths, plant some veggies at the community garden, or hop on singletrack at the end of your block.