

TOP 200 TOWNS FOR OUTDOORSMAN

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After months of extensive research, we've compiled a list of the Top 200 towns for hunting and fishing in America. We've all visited those towns, the ones with the river running through them, the woodlands nudging the outskirts and the cafe that's crowded at 5 a.m. with duck hunters and trout guides.



Maybe it's a Western mountain town tucked into drop-dead scenery. Or a whitewashed New England village or a charming Southern river city. Maybe it's a Midwestern county seat or a coastal vacation spot with forever views of the blue-green beyond.

On the way out of these bergs we've fantasized about moving to these places where life seems simpler, the people friendlier and where the economy is nourished by postcard-perfect vistas. Where the fish are always biting, the bucks are big and farmers greet hunters with easy smiles and open gates.

Some of us live in these spots. But many more hunters and fishermen are looking to sink their roots in a new hometown, to raise a family where campsites outnumber condos or to retire to a place where it's as easy to catch a bass as it is to catch a commercial flight.

That's why Outdoor Life has evaluated towns across America to find the places that offer world-class hunting and fishing, easy access to public land and water and vibrant economies that remain affordable and hospitable.

These places exist in every state, towns where you can step out your back door with a fly rod or a shotgun and find abundant fishing and hunting opportunity in sight of the municipal water tower. Areas with decent weather and accessible public land and gun laws that don't criminalize hunters. Places where the economy is vibrant but the pace of life is slow. Towns with good schools and hospitals and a strong sense of community.

Places where you can wear fishing waders or a camouflage hunting jacket into a bar and not call attention to yourself.

Some towns, like Cody, Wyoming, are frequent occupants of best-places lists. Blue-ribbon trout fishing, trophy big-game hunting and proximity to public land make it a regular destination for sportsmen. But our research revealed that it also has low crime, affordable housing and relatively little sprawl. Other places, like Bismarck, North Dakota, surprised us. But the huge diversity of fishing in the Missouri River and Lake Oahe and public-land wingshooting in every direction from the state capital cemented its designation as a top town.

Demographers say America's small towns are disappearing as youngsters migrate to cities for work or college, then move to suburbs to raise families. But our research indicates that small towns are thriving, especially those trade centers with populations between 5,000 and 15,000. These are the places where rural landscapes abut the city limits, where wildlife habitat is healthy and intact, where there are plenty of "retail therapy" opportunities. And where you can always find a "hunter's breakfast" on the cafe menu.