



## America's 10 Best Outdoor Towns

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**From Alaska to Maine, these spots offer a walk on the wild side for fans of everything from windsurfing to fly-fishing. You can even try the luge.**

*For MSN City Guides*

In choosing the “101 Best Outdoor Towns: Unspoiled Places to Visit, Live & Play” (The Countryman Press, 2007), authors Sarah Tuff and Greg Melville researched access to national and state parks, major bodies of water, hiking and mountain biking trails, and ski and snowboard terrain; population; affordability; and such downtown resources as gear shops, brewpubs and coffee houses.

This top 10 is adapted from the book; these towns have not only back doors to some of the country's best adventure terrain, but also lively, livable communities that are dedicated to playing in and preserving the great American playgrounds.

### **Lake Placid, New York**

The numbers speak for themselves: 6 million acres of the surrounding Adirondack Park, 2,000 miles of trails, 3,000 lakes and ponds and five Olympic Rings. Lake Placid has hosted the Games twice, and somehow still glows with an inimitable, warm-fuzzy feeling about winter sports. Hockey fans can check out the 1980 Miracle on Ice site at the in-town Olympic Center, also home to the [Olympic Speed Skating Oval](#) (518-523-1655), which is open to the public all winter. Then venture to the toboggan run on Mirror Lake for a plummet down a track and a skitter across the ice; if you're even braver, try the bobsled and luge runs at the [Olympic Sports Complex](#) (518-523-4436), just outside of town. In the summer, hikers hit 5,344-foot Mount Marcy while triathletes compete in the Ironman; year-round, you can refuel with the legendary UBU ale and refresh at the rustic [Adirondack Loj](#) (518-523-3441).

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## **Hood River, Oregon**

Wind—check. Water—check. White stuff—double check. Sitting along the breezy Columbia River Gorge and within a short drive of Mount Hood's many ski resorts, Hood River is blessed with the ideal conditions for outdoor action. Kiteboarders and windsurfers flock here for the 20 to 30-knot winds that pump through the Gorge; the [Big Winds](#) shop (541-386-6086) has lessons, rentals and sales. Those with a drier sensibility hop in the saddle for a cycling tour around the 35-mile Fruit Loop or off-road rides in the Mount Hood National Forest ([Discover Bicycles](#), 541-386-4820). At 11,235 feet, Mount Hood is home to five ski areas, including [Timberline Lodge](#) (800-547-1406), which boasts a National Historic Landmark as its bunkhouse and the longest ski season in North America. In town, consider staying at the stately [Hood River Hotel](#) (800-386-1859), built in 1913.

## **McCall, Idaho**

Glance inside the garage of a McCall local, and you'll start to get an idea of the head-spinning selection of adventure sports here. Those fly rods are for fishing the Payette River, the Horse Thief Reservoir, and dozens of alpine lakes that speckle the next-door wilderness ([Fly Fish McCall](#), 208-634-1324). Those chalk bags are for the rock climbing routes and bouldering problems surrounding town while the hiking boots and mountain bikes help tack the 2.3 million-acre Payette National Forest ([Gravity Sports](#), 208-634-8530). That quiver of cross-country, alpine and backcountry skis is for gliding, carving and climbing in the terrain of nearby [Brundage Mountain Resort](#) (800-888-7544), [Tamarack Resort](#) (866-649-6903) or Jughandle Mountain (Winter Carnival is a premier event here). And that snow shovel helps clear the yearly 300 inches of snow for a path to a craft beer at the McCall Brewing Company (208-634-1010).



## Salida, Colorado

It's sunny more than 300 days of the year in Salida, Colorado, a meteorological marvel that adds to those of geology. Rearing up from the Rocky Mountain hideout are more than 15 peaks topping 14,000 feet, while foaming all around is the legendary 150-mile stretch of the Arkansas Headwaters Recreation Area. Salida has become the epicenter for whitewater paddling action in the West, with not only the natural class III and IV rapids on the Arkansas but also two municipal playholes in the town's own artificial park. One of the Salida calendar highlights is the [FIBArk](#) festival, which stands for First in Boating on the Arkansas River and happens every June. Fat-tire enthusiasts take advantage of the fact that the 2,500-mile Great Divide Mountain Bike Route passes through the valley floor while hikers hoping to bag a "14er" store up on calories at [Bongo Billy's Salida Cafe](#) (719-539-4261) and [Amicas](#) Pizza (719-539-5219). Steeds stay at the [Beddin' Down](#) Bed, Breakfast and Horse Hotel (800-470-1888).

## Boone, North Carolina

The tallest mountain in the East lies not in Vermont, New Hampshire or Maine but near Boone, North Carolina. It's 6,684-foot Mount Mitchell, a centerpiece of the Pisgah National Forest and Blue Ridge Mountains, whose valleys hide hip little hiking towns like this one. Appalachian State University attracts outdoorsy students to Boone, where you're as likely to find a latte ([Espresso News](#), 828-264-8850) as a low-key country restaurant with fried chicken ([Dan'l Boone Inn](#), 828-264-8657). Paddlers hit the Nolichucky and French Broad Rivers for class III and IV rapids ([Mountain Adventure Guides](#), Erwin, Tenn., 866-813-5210) while mountain bikers wheel along the 18-Mile Ride ([Magic Cycles](#), 828-265-2211). There's even skiing here at [Sugar Mountain Ski Resort](#) (800-784-2768) and a handful of other small resorts. For a classic adventure, tackle the 40-mile stretch of the Appalachian Trail that runs through here; even in the summer, temperatures remain refreshingly cool.

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## Livingston, Montana

Hollywood loves Livingston, having unpacked its cameras several times for major motion pictures—including “A River Runs Through It”—in this Montana town of 7,000. Still, Hollywood hasn’t spoiled Livingston; though well-known artists and writers have settled here, the place retains its Western charm and authentic connection to the outdoors. The angler-friendly Yellowstone River runs along the southeastern side of town, while Yellowstone National Park sits just 60 miles south. More than 2,000 miles of trails spider-web through the adjacent Gallatin National Forest, and the state’s tallest mountain, 12,799-foot Granite Peak, is found in Livingston’s backyard of the Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness. Finally, prodigious snowfall makes for excellent skiing and riding at Bridger Bowl, a 30-mile drive, and cross-country skiing and snowshoeing just about anywhere. Visit [Dan Bailey’s Fly Shop](#) (406-222-1673) for fishing tips, Timber Trails (406-222-9550) for hiking and biking gear and [Chico Hot Springs Resort](#) (406-333-4933) for a place to sleep—it’s a rustic lodge with a dash of Hollywood.



### **Ely, Minnesota**

Perhaps no place in North America is more dedicated to the pleasures of canoeing than the town of Ely, Minnesota. Perched on the edge of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area, a 1.1 million-acre chunk of the Superior National Forest with more than 1,000 lakes, Ely is the launching place for classic canoe trips of virtually any length: a day, a week, a month. Canoeists can paddle up to dozens of lakeside lodges, including the postcard-perfect cabins at [Burntside Lodge](#) (218-365-3894) for supper and a slumber. While canoe outfitters outnumber service stations, one of the most popular is [Boundary Waters Outfitters](#) (218-365-4879), which arranges guided and self-guided trips. When the mercury drops, the town transforms itself into a snowmobiling, dog-sledding, snowshoeing and cross-country skiing destination; good picks for gliding include the nearly 18-mile long Banadad Trail. Better bring a rod, summer or winter, for the fishing that holes up in shacks when it gets cold.

### **Davis, West Virginia**

Davis may have a diminutive population—624, at last count—but its dedication to the outdoors is gargantuan. [Blackwater Bike Shop](#) (304-259-5286), a local outfit owned by West Virginian mountain biker Roger Lilly, services some of the country's top riders, and will also happily rent rookies their own fat tires, and point out top trails including the 28-mile Plantation Trail. [Blackwater Brewing Company](#) (304-259-4221) keeps bikers, hikers and skiers stoked with burgers, bratwurst and craft beers while the [Bright Morning Inn](#) (304-259-5119) lodges travelers in a former 19<sup>th</sup>-century boardinghouse and saloon. And yes, there are skiers here; 150 inches of snow fall on Davis each year, creating scenic and surprisingly steep trails at [Timberline Four Seasons Resort](#) (866-438-7259) and [Canaan Valley](#) (800-622-4121). Crowds and lift lines are a rarity here.

### **Bethel, Maine**

Even if you can't be here for the annual North American Wife Carrying Championships, Bethel is worth the detour off the well-traveled Maine Coast. Here in the White Mountains and along the Androscoggin River lie some of the state's most exciting adventures, such as backpacking the new 42-mile [Grafton Loop Trail](#), which has premier views of sparkling lakes and rolling hills. The Androscoggin teems with rainbow and brown trout while the town's calendar is filled with community road runs, adventure triathlons and canoe and kayak races. Bethel is also a classic New England town with enough charm to warm cold winter nights after a day dog-sledding and cross-country skiing around the [Telemark Inn](#) or skiing and snowboarding [Sunday River Ski Resort](#) (207-824-3000). It's Sunday River that hosts the Wife Carrying Championships every fall; teams train to compete on a 278-yard obstacle course and to win the wife's weight in Red Hook beer.



## Haines, Alaska

Hundreds of spots around Alaska have unparalleled access to the outdoors, but only Haines has the Hammer Museum, one of the town's many quirks that has led to a thriving community of 2,000 kayakers, hikers, anglers and rafters. Though winter days are short—about six hours—they're filled with backcountry skiing at Chilkat Pass (Alaska Backcountry Outfitter, 907-766-2876) and dog-sledding among Itidarod and Yukon Quest competitors (Chilkoot Sled Dog Adventures, 907-766-3242) and capped with sightings of the Northern Lights. Plus, cozy restaurants including the [Bamboo Room](#) (907-766-2800) and lodgings like the [Hotel Hälsingland](#) (907-766-2000) stave off any seasonal-affective disorder. When it gets warmer, slip into Glacier Bay National Park and Preserve on a kayak to explore the 65-mile long fjord and Y-shaped bay, dotted with islands and wildlife ([Alaska Discovery](#), 800-586-1911). Glacier Bay also has rafting on class II and IV rapids while farther inland, 15,300-foot Mount Fairweather beckons to mountaineers. The adventure options are so many, you may not even have time for the Hammer Museum.

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