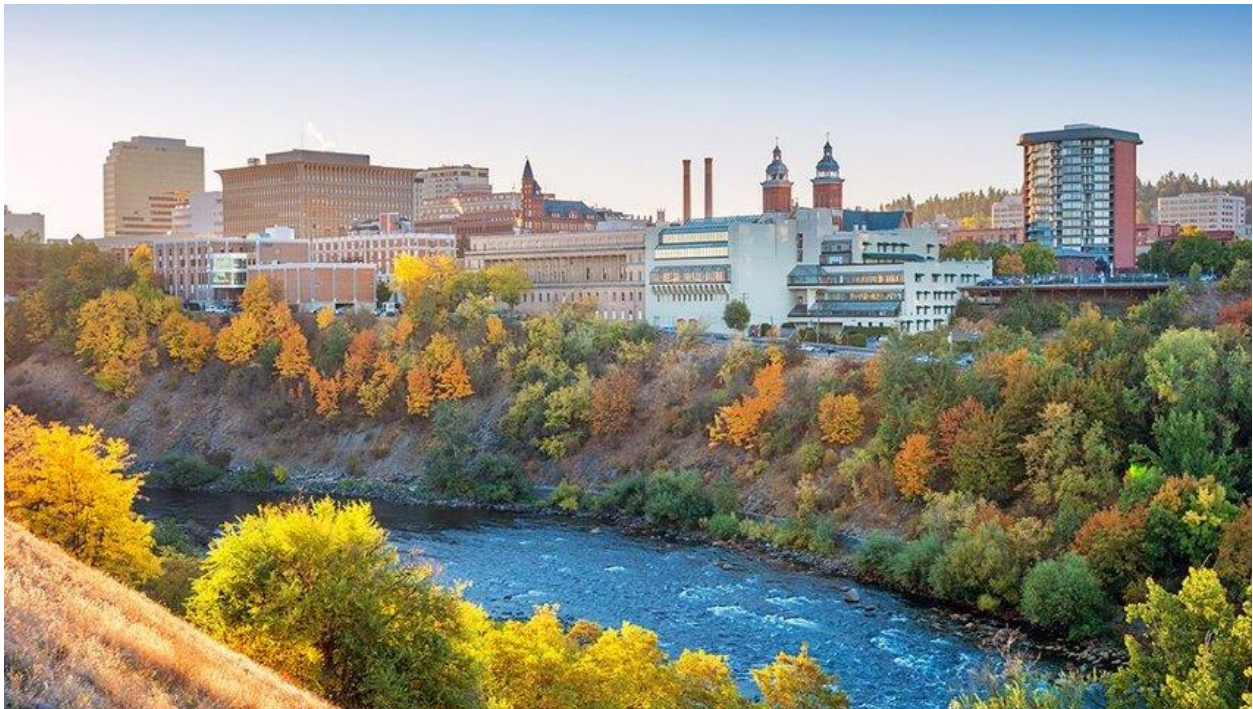


5 U.S. Cities You Don't Know, But Should

(Courtesy of Cynthia Barnes, The Discoverer)

Bright lights, big cities — the United States has them from coast to coast. While each has its unique appeal, some cities get a little less attention than they deserve. Maybe it's because they're eclipsed by a shinier sister city in close proximity, maybe they lack great airport connections ... or maybe their visitors' bureau just doesn't have the budget to promote them to the top of the "best of" lists. Regardless, these uncrowded and under-the-radar destinations are the perfect places to unwind, explore, and congratulate yourself on your exquisite, eclectic taste.

Spokane, Washington



Credit: [benedek](#)/ Shutterstock

Waterfalls, wine, and wilderness, oh my! Often overshadowed by Seattle, one of Washington's best-kept secrets can be found in [Spokane](#) on the eastern, "sunny" side of the Evergreen State. (The name Spokane means "Children of the Sun" in Salish, one of the local indigenous languages.) Outdoor enthusiasts will find four seasons of fun with extensive hiking, cycling, and kayak trails, while fans of snow sports can enjoy five ski resorts located less than two hours away.

The city is home to Spokane Falls, the largest urban waterfall in the U.S., which is easily viewable from both of the downtown's two parks. Breakfast buffs won't want to miss perfect eggs and pancakes at [Frank's](#), a historic diner operating since 1906 in a repurposed train car. Farm-to-fork foodies should stop in at [Wild Sage Bistro](#), and also take advantage of the city's abundant farmers' markets. Washington is second-largest wine producer in the United States, and Spokane has its own "Cork District" featuring a cluster of 15 local wineries.

Albuquerque, New Mexico

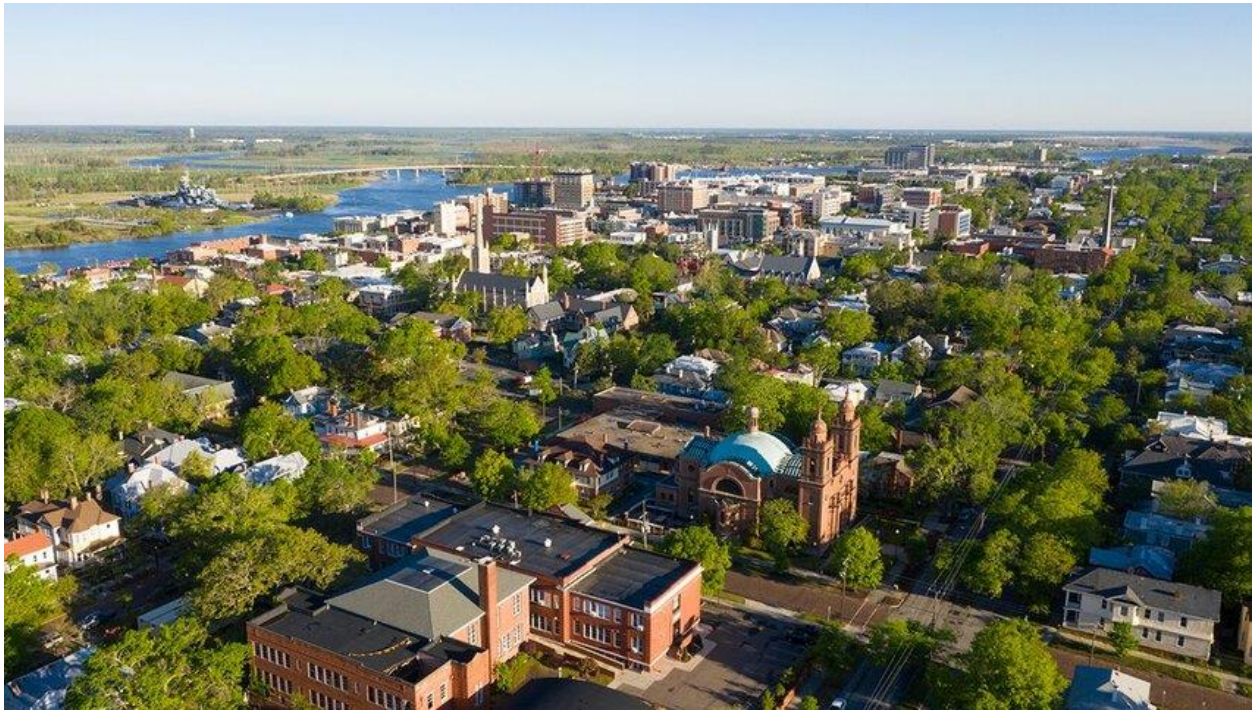


Credit: [gmeland](#)/ Shutterstock

Albuquerque is rightly famed for its [International Balloon Fiesta](#), which takes place each October and is the largest gathering of its kind in the world. But Burqueños know there's a lot more to love in this city (which was named after a Spanish duke) including almost limitless sunshine, interesting architecture, and a food scene that goes way beyond green chile. Who needs Provence when you can stroll fragrant lavender fields before brunch at [Los Poblanos](#) or Champagne when award-winning sparkling wines are bubbling up at [Gruet](#)?

Albuquerque was founded in 1706, and the adobe buildings in Historic Old Town aren't to be missed. Step into the 1792 San Felipe de Neri Church, a popular spot for weddings, and browse the boutiques and galleries surrounding the plaza. (The nearby [Albuquerque Museum](#) has a great collection of colonial artifacts and a number of works by Georgia O'Keeffe.) Vintage fans can get a (neon) glow-up along Central Avenue, part of historic [Route 66](#). For a bird's-eye view of the city and the Sangre De Cristo Mountains, take the 2.7-mile aerial tramway up to Sandia Peak.

Wilmington, North Carolina



Credit: [ChrisBoswell](#)/ iStock

Nestled between the Atlantic Ocean and the Cape Fear River, this vibrant waterfront city serves as the gateway to the Cape Fear Coast and was the first capital of the colony of North Carolina. While others may flock to Myrtle Beach and Charleston, visitors to [Wilmington](#) will find themselves with choice, uncrowded beaches, a lively riverwalk, many historic sites, and [Masonboro Island](#), a pristine reserve on an 8.4-mile long barrier island. Accessible only by boat, its salt marshes and tidal creeks provide splendid habitat for birds, fish, and sea turtles.

Wilmington's historic district is packed with gracious and gorgeously landscaped mansions, and in the spring the city explodes in a riot of azaleas. Those who are interested in military and naval history won't want to miss a visit to the [Battleship North Carolina](#), which played a pivotal role during World War II. The food scene deserves praise too, with sparkling fresh seafood playing a starring role among Southern comfort food favorites.

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania



Credit: [Sean Pavone](#)/ Shutterstock

Boasting some of the nation's most dramatic skylines, Pittsburgh has 446 road, pedestrian, and rail bridges that cross the three rivers that converge in this hilly corner of western Pennsylvania. The Allegheny and the Monongahela meet at the "Golden Triangle" to form the Ohio River at [Point State Park](#). Soak in Steel City's stellar views by riding one of Pittsburgh's two historic [funiculars](#) (inclines) that traverse the steep hills and wander through the more than 90 neighborhoods that comprise the city.

Known as an epicenter of steel (from which the NFL team gets its name), Pittsburgh's first two glass factories opened in 1797 and by 1920, 80% of the nation's glassware came from the area. Today the city is a hub for glass artists, and the [Pittsburgh Glass Center](#) draws students and artists from around the world. Pittsburgh is also an emerging [culinary hotbed](#), inspired by both its rich ethnic culture as well with cutting-edge fusion cuisine from ambitious young chefs who channel the revolutionary spirit of hometown icon Andy Warhol onto (art glass) plates.

Salt Lake City, Utah



Credit: [DenisTangneyJr](#)/ iStock

Powder hounds rejoice: Flights into [Salt Lake City](#) can have skiers and snowboarders on [world-class slopes](#) just an hour or so after landing at SLC's impeccable airport. But beyond the snow sports, Utah's capital city can brag about an exceptionally safe and walkable downtown, convenient public transportation, [elegant hotels](#), and [a food scene](#) that makes the most of the Church of Latter Day Saints' (Salt Lake is the denomination's headquarters) international outreach.

Temple Square offers plenty of free events, including the opportunity to listen to the Tabernacle Choir and many other musical concerts and cultural events. But secular selections are also available: the city's downtown boasts a surprising number of gay (and gay-friendly) bars, along with shopping, sushi, and sporting events — don't miss the Jazz playing at Vivint Arena.