



THE BEST AMERICAN CITIES FOR CREATIVES (THAT AREN'T NYC, LA, OR SF)

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125,462



Not to rub it in, but: New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco, not that you care, but you didn't make this list. You either, Chicago. Instead, we found the places you may want to move the next time your landlord jacks up your rent. Or when you realize your novel is a pipe dream so long as you have to bang out 55-hour work weeks (plus commute).

Fact is, whether or not they admit it, most writers, musicians, painters, and tinkerers of every stripe aspire to remove the "struggling" from the "struggling artist" way of life. No matter what rom-coms suggest, the country is full of cities where you can find a vibrant life, in a home with room to sprawl, where you can cook or play music or just get friends together to conspire and collaborate.

This list takes into account the full livability spectrum: artistic communities (check), a good dose of nature (check), a food, craft beer/cocktail, or music scene, or all of the above (check), and a level of affordability that actually allows you to partake therein. (Apartment List's July report accounts for the housing stats, unless noted; and the population figures are the latest from the Census Bureau.) These are places where you can actually make it, the "it" being whatever you dream up.



Tampa, Florida

Metro population: 4.3 million (Tampa Bay area)

Median 1BD rental: \$990

Key stat: 1 million -- number of people who attend part of the Gasparilla Pirate Festival
I've been defending Tampa my entire life, at least to people who had never visited.

Similar to Orlando, it has many preconceptions attached. When I first moved to Miami from my hometown, most people just assumed I grew up cow-tipping (I assumed they all had gel in their hair). To this day, nothing beats the reaction when these same people visit me here, and I get the jaw-dropping reactions like: "Wait, this place is awesome."

Tampa really is a great place to live, and this is coming from someone who tried to pretend that wasn't true for more than a decade after leaving it -- only to move back from New York City. What Tampa has always had is a New England charm in a city that has a lot of Southern influence: colonial homes, water throughout the city, and people who are just here to enjoy life, not rush through it. Growing up here is still very *Leave It to Beaver*, as in my neighborhood had an actual ice cream man, and we all knew his first and last name. But a single 30-something will be glad to hear that you don't have to have kids and a white picket fence to reap the benefits of this town. Between live music, museums, a Riverwalk with outdoor bars and biking paths, Gasparilla Fest, Ybor City, and the large amount of breweries popping up everywhere (Cigar City is a big deal now!), Tampa really is coming into its own, just like its little Chamber of Commerce video says. Possibly most shocking is the development of the once only grandparent-inhabited St. Pete. It still blows me away this place is cool now. It's edgy, artsy, young, and just 20 minutes away. A boat ride from Pass-a-Grille down to Egmont Key will make anyone who doesn't live here question why they don't. (Worked for me.) -- *L.N.*