



Madison consistently ranks among the greenest cities in the country.

Jerry Luterman

# Wisconsin's 12 BEST TOWNS

While there is no debate among Wisconsinites that our state is the nation's best, it's a tougher task to ID Wisconsin's best towns. So we left that up to you, with the help of an online survey. Reader Carley Sauter of Shorewood summed it up this way: "The whole point of Wisconsin's greatness lies in the fact that it is not dependent on any one town for anything. We are a state of great towns, rather than a state of one huge city." With due respect to all of Wisconsin's great towns, we highlight here the top vote-getters.



John Hasse

Wausau annually hosts national kayaking competitions at Whitewater Park on the Wisconsin River.

# 1 Madison

## Best Green Town

When it comes to being environmentally conscious, few towns in Wisconsin can compete with Madison.

A cab company that runs on clean propane? Madison's got it. One of the best urban bicycle systems in the country? Check. A locavore restaurant with a nationally acclaimed chef? That's here, too, along with countless other eco-friendly initiatives that help make Madison a hub for all things green in Wisconsin.

- "Madison, hands down. Milwaukee has the finest park system on Earth but has been resting on its laurels for decades. Madison has the most vibrantly green economy, the best new bicycle commuter infrastructure, plans for a new light rail system and a streetcar, plus progressive urban planner mayors." – Carley Sauter, Shorewood

Runner-up: **Bayfield**

# 2 Wausau

## Best Outdoor Activities Town

Name an outdoor activity and it's highly likely you can do it in Wausau. Skiing on Rib Mountain, kayaking on the Wisconsin River at Whitewater Park and hiking the Ice Age Trail are just the tip of the, ahem, iceberg when it comes to enjoying Wisconsin's outdoors here.

- "Tons of parks, Rib Mountain, snowmobile trails, fishing in Lake Wausau and the Wisconsin River, kayaking championships. And, there are a lot more green areas than other cities." – Mark Ninnemann, Ringle
- "I can paddle a kayak and catch a musky or a walleye in the same place!" – Andrew Plath, Wausau
- "From downhill skiing at Granite Peak in the winter to boating and kayaking the Wisconsin River in the summer, there is always something to do. The area also offers great whitetail hunting and fishing opportunities." – Ryan Plamann, Mauston

Runner-up: **Eagle River**

# 3 Bayfield

## Best Harbor Town

Bayfield's beauty and charm have long beckoned travelers to its Lake Superior shoreline.

From the Apostle Islands National Lakeshore and historic lighthouses to kayak tours of sea caves and sailing on the Great Lake, this harbor town is classically quaint.

- "The view is like none other in the state." – Julie Thomas, Whiting, Indiana
- "It's an unexpected little New England-style town. It's close to the Apostle Islands, and Apple Fest is also great." – Mark Fortin, Waukesha

Runner-up: **Manitowoc–Two Rivers**



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The protected Lake Superior waters near Bayfield provide for some of the best sailing in the state.

# 4 Milwaukee

## Best Arts & Entertainment Town

Few cities can compete with the diversity of Milwaukee's

arts offerings. From hosting national acts at the Bradley Center and the Marcus Center for the Performing Arts to showcasing local and regional talent at intimate venues like the Riverside, plus world-renowned art collections at the Milwaukee Art Museum and Marquette's Haggerty Museum, Milwaukee's arts and entertainment scene packs a punch all year long.

• "Opera, rock, rockabilly, country, folk, rap. Milwaukee has everything. Biggest music festival in the world, at least a dozen great venues – Cathedral Park and Jazz Estate for jazz; the riverfront and Lakefront Brewery for polka and a fish fry; the Riverside, Rave and Shank Hall for rock, alternative, hip-hop, country ... I could go on for days." – Margaret York, Green Lake

• "Symphony, museums, restaurants ... all within walking distance of each other. And oh yes, the overstuffed Renaissance Book Shop is worth many hours of browsing (take your GPS)." – Rachel Pearson, Florence, Oregon

Runner-up: **Madison**

# 5

## Madison

### Best Foodie Town

A diverse population plus a vibrant university culture equals an eclectic array of restaurants in our state's capitol. Dig in to a bowl of authentic Pad Thai on State Street or head to the Capitol Square for high-end locavore dining. Stock up on produce from the nation's largest producers-only farmers' market or walk to Willy Street for organic fare. Whatever tickles your (food) fancy, Madison's got it covered.

• "Madison is still the best place to get every food imaginable. The area offers flavors for all taste buds, from a hamburger stacked with onion straws, lettuce, bacon sauce and topped off with a fried egg at The Old Fashioned on the Square, to countless international restaurants along State Street and elegant spots like Johnny Delmonico's, where the staff serves up quality food and entertainment." – Shannon Paprock, Mount Horeb.

• "Madison is our favorite place in the state for a wide variety of palates." – Sandee Beaman, Mineral Point

Runner-up: **Milwaukee**



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Madison's Lombardino's Restaurant features a menu that changes seasonally.

## 6 Fish Creek

### Best Picture-Taking Town

Perched on the picturesque Door County peninsula overlooking Green Bay, Fish Creek's small-town charm and gleaming water views provide endless photo ops. Few sites can match the beauty of nearby Peninsula State Park in the fall, and spots like Sunset Beach Park speak for themselves when it comes to picture-worthiness.

• "The most beautiful town in the state of Wisconsin." – Ann Breuer, Beaver Dam

• "Fish Creek is a vibrant town surrounded by the most diverse natural wildlife spot, Peninsula State Park, with an extraordinary shoreline and forest photo opportunities accessible to photographers of nearly any age and physical ability." – Janet Mrazek

Runner-up: **Bayfield**



Wayne Reckard



Milwaukee Journal Sentinel

# 7 Mineral Point

## Best History Town

The first governor of the Territory of Wisconsin was inaugurated on July 4, 1836, in Mineral Point, making this town the birthplace of our state. This Driftless Region charmer was the first Wisconsin town to be listed on the National Registry of Historic Places, thanks to sites that honor the city's mining past and Cornish roots.

- "It is one of the earliest settlements in the state and every nook and cranny is full of history. The town is a picture postcard of the past." – Virginia Jones, Dodgeville
- "Mineral Point not only has wonderfully historic buildings, but the people are so incredibly cordial and welcoming. That warmth and friendliness make you feel like you have, indeed, stepped back in time." – Lori Lane, Mineral Point
- Mineral Point residents don't just talk about their history – they live in it! – Sharon Rowe, Mineral Point

Runner-up: **Cedarburg**

# 8 Appleton

## Best Shopping Town

Appleton's mega outlet center, the Fox River Mall, has made this city a shopping destination since the mid-'80s. With 180 retailers on site, plus many more shops in the surrounding area, Appleton has the highest concentration of retail outlets in the state. But the city is not just big-name chains; downtown Appleton offers a host of boutiques and shops for a more unique shopping experience.

Runner-up: **Lake Geneva**

There's something for everyone in the Dells, including at the Kalahari Resort.

# 9 Wisconsin Dells

## Best Family Getaway Town

With the largest concentration of water parks in the world, plenty of outdoor recreational opportunities and scores of family-friendly restaurants, it's not hard to see why Wisconsin Dells was a clear winner as the best town for a family getaway. And with a casino, world-class spa and top-tier golf courses, adults can have plenty of fun, too, while the kids are splashing away.

- "Wisconsin Dells still tops our family's list for a great getaway. Our kids really enjoy the water park at Mt. Olympus and the food at the local pizza pub is a must every time we venture to Lake Delton." – Shannon Paprocki, Mount Horeb
- "The resort town has everything for everyone. Families with kids love the water attractions and even seniors can enjoy the river rides and casino." – David Yost, Williams Bay

Runner-up: **Green Bay**

# 10 Egg Harbor

## Best Small Town

Population: 250. Small-town charm: endless. Egg Harbor has everything you seek in a small town: friendly people, unique shops, homey restaurants, and is situated on one of Wisconsin's most treasured natural resources. Travelers across the nation have heaped praise on Egg Harbor – it was named one of the top ten "coolest small towns in America" by *Budget Travel* in 2010.

- "It's a haven for artists with the performing arts, free live music

in the summer, and so much more. It has a quaint, small-town flair, and a lot of personality. The shopping is tremendous, even without the big box stores. A new beach and marina optimize the sparkling waters of Green Bay.” – Jeff Larson, Green Bay

- “Right on the lake, beautiful scenery, and easy access to all of Door County’s offerings, including theater, wineries, shopping, galleries. It’s a great vacation destination and the people are friendly. – Sue Johnston, Jackson

Runner-up: **Spring Green**



With unique shops and fun restaurants, downtown Egg Harbor is full of small-town charm.

Milwaukee Journal Sentinel/Gary Porter



Jerry Lauerman

The Kohler Waters Spa is the perfect place to relax and rejuvenate on a weekend away.

# 11 Kohler

## Best Weekend-Away Town

From luxurious resorts and world-class golf to rustic camping and a high-quality arts center, Kohler delights a varied crowd. While the town is known for its pampering services, nearby Kohler–Andrae State Park attracts the outdoor adventurers. Located just west of Sheboygan, the city is an easy drive from Madison, Milwaukee and the Fox Cities, making it the ideal weekend getaway.

- “No other resort compares with the American Club for a weekend full of fine service, food and pampering.” – Virginia Jones, Dodgeville

Runner-up: **Kenosha**

# 12 Eagle River

## Best Up-North Town

Towering pines, pristine lakes and charming towns characterize Wisconsin’s Northwoods, and there’s no better representation of that than Eagle River, which just edged out Minocqua for Wisconsin’s best up-north town. Surrounded by the largest chain of inland lakes in the world and situated near the Northern Highland–American Legion State Forest, the town certainly has mastered the natural beauty part. Add cute shops and restaurants and Eagle River brims with charm.

- “Eagle River is the best of the up-north towns in Wisconsin while keeping that small-town atmosphere.” – Dave Goggin, Cedarburg
- “Nothing says “up north” better to our family than Eagle River. We have an historic lake house a few miles outside of town and we try to get there as often as we can. From the towering pines and sparkling lakes to the historic downtown and seasonal festivals, Eagle River has it all.” – Virginia Jones, Dodgeville

Runner-up: **Minocqua**