

# The Best Cities in the World

by Katherine LaGrave ■ October 17, 2017  
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Condé Nast Traveler readers cast hundreds of thousands of votes for their favorite cities around the world in the 2017 Readers' Choice Awards survey—in fact, we got so much feedback, we had to divide our list in two. This roundup begins with your favorite Top 20 Large Cities, followed by Top 20 Small Cities, taking in Tokyo to Jerusalem, Cape Town to San Miguel de Allende, and places on almost every continent in between.

## 01. Tokyo, Japan

Tokyo is a mix of contradictions, from ultramodern, neon-lit skyscrapers to tranquil temples, historic shrines, and expansive forests. A center for innovation, this Japanese capital has more Michelin stars than any other place on earth, and is—no surprise—one of the world's best food destinations. For just a taste of what the city can offer, pull up a stool and dig deep into a bowl of inventive ramen at Kikanbo, or sample rare Japanese whiskey at Bar Ben Fiddich.



## 02. Vienna, Austria

Artistic, exquisite, and largely shaped by its musical and intellectual foundations, Austria's capital and largest city is packed with culture. Make time to get a figurative taste of royalty at Schönbrunn, the Habsburgs' former summer residence, and get an actual taste of Sachertorte, a chocolate cake that is one of the city's culinary specialties. Just be sure to ask for it *mit schlaag*—with cream.

### 03.Kyoto, Japan

Take a step back in time in Kyoto, Japan's imperial capital, where you can visit tenth-century temples, pass young geishas in the street, and stay in one of many renovated *machiyas*, which were once houses for craftsmen. One of the most well-preserved cities in Japan, Kyoto has approximately 1,600 Buddhist temples, 400 Shinto shrines, and nearly 100 Michelin-starred restaurants. Because it was once the imperial capital, Kyoto is also well known for *kaiseki*, the traditional multi-course meal that changes seasonally: For an authentic meal *without* Michelin prices, try 200-year-old ryokan Kinmata.



### 04.Barcelona, Spain

From the mountains to the beach, the historic to the contemporary, sunny Barcelona—lucky city that it is—has it all. Brush up on Catalan history at El Born Centre Cultural or take a street art tour of the trendy El Raval district. For dining, try a 40-course meal at Enigma, one of the newest restaurants from Ferran Adrià, or stay classic at Quimet y Quimet, a standing-room-only joint that's been operated by the same family for more than 100 years.



## **05.Paris, France**

Paris needs no introduction. Proper nouns will suffice: The Louvre, the Eiffel Tower, Notre-Dame, Sacre-Coeur, Musée Rodin, Centre Pompidou, Saint-Germain, the Seine (at dusk). The city is firmly established as one of the most beautiful in the world. Dine like the French near the Bastille at Chez Paul or stroll among the statues at the elegant Luxembourg Gardens. To stay, treat yourself to a room at the exquisite Hôtel Plaza Athénée or the remodeled Hôtel de Crillon, which reopened in September 2017 after a four-year renovation.



## **06.Sydney, Australia**

Australia's biggest city is an ideal getaway no matter the season. Dine alfresco, swim like a Sydneysider in rock pools, and head to Bondi and Redleaf beaches in the summer (remember, that's during our winter); in winter, explore the city's vibrant arts and culture calendar through Vivid Sydney and make time for Manly, Australia's answer to Montauk. Whatever the season, get spectacular views of the city from Sydney Tower's glass viewing platform.



## **07. Madrid, Spain**

The magic of Madrid is best captured on foot, strolling through the streets, stopping in a museum or sitting for a drink at La Alemana, a historic bar once frequented by Ava Gardner and Ernest Hemingway. For a taste of everyday Spanish life in this vibrant capital city, shop at El Corte Inglés, sample the market culture at Mercado San Antón and the Mercado de San Fernando, and bring your picnic to the ancient Egyptian Temple of Debod, which was donated to Spain in 1968 and can be found in the Parque del Oeste.



#### **08.Vancouver, B.C., Canada**

Seaport Vancouver has a competitive and creative arts scene, rugged natural beauty, and no shortage of things to do. As one of Canada's most ethnically diverse cities, it's also one of the country's best *food* cities: After you've taken a cable car up Grouse Mountain, return to the city for Indian fare at Vij's, a French bistro experience at Farmer's Apprentice, or tagine at Moroccan-inspired Medina.



## **09.Rome, Italy**

Experience *la dolce vita* in all of its forms in Rome. After requisite visits to the Pantheon and Colosseum, perk up with an espresso at Caffè Sant'Eustachio or try your luck at Settimio al Pellegrino: When you ring their doorbell, you'll be greeted and treated to whatever the owner's wife has prepared for the day.



## 10. Munich, Germany

Munich may draw its largest crowds for Oktoberfest, but year round, the Bavarian metropolis buzzes along just fine *without* all of the lederhosen and drunken revelry, *thankyouverymuch*—or at least, much less of it. In addition to its extremely walkable historic center, the city continues to draw travelers for its palatial parks, internationally lauded fine dining, and budding art scene.



## 11. Budapest, Hungary

With some of the best Art Nouveau architecture in Europe, scenic Budapest has no bad angles. Explore the Hungarian capital's spa culture with thermal baths built in the 16th and 17th century, and make sure to pay a visit to the ornate New York Kávéház for coffee and a pastry. Walk the Széchenyi Chain Bridge at night over the Danube River for magnificent views, and eat a bowl of traditional *gulyás* at the three-level Central Market before turning in for the night.



## **12. Amsterdam, Netherlands**

Windmills, cycling, Van Gogh, and canals are all part of Amsterdam's storied charm, but there's more to the Dutch capital than its most apparent associations. For a taste of the "new" Amsterdam, grab a drink at Droog, a renovated 17th-century hotel with just one room; float in a weightless state in the saltwater pods at Koan Float; or try innovative takes on seasonal fruits and vegetables at De Kas, a restaurant housed in the former Amsterdam City Greenery. Sleeping here just got more stylish, too: Kimpton opened its first European outpost here in spring 2017.



### **13.Singapore**

Once one of the most important commercial centers of the British Empire, Singapore today is a bustling metropolis with a growing contemporary-art scene, new hotels, and a feast of flavors. Head over to Tiong Bahru or Haji Lane to shop like a local, choose from 1,000 types of gin at Atlas bar, or take a ten-minute boat ride from Changi Village to Pulau Ubin and explore the small island by bike. Come evening, dig into the city's food-hawker culture at Maxwell Food Centre.



#### **14. Melbourne, Australia**

At once sophisticated, stylish, and seemingly free-spirited, Melbourne has all of the traits you'd want in a friend—and an incredible arts scene. Visit Gertrude Contemporary for eye-popping installations by emerging Australian artists; take an Urban Scrawl street tour; and drive 20 minutes to the world-renowned Heide Museum of Modern Art. In this city, each morning should start with a flat white.



## **15.London, England**

Though its double-decker buses, iconic red phone booths, and pub culture remain, London has seen many a change in recent years. After checking out the classics, book a table at Brawn in Bethnal Green; catch a show at Almeida, a performance venue housed in a former train station in Islington; do Westminster like a local; and see how many of the city's best cocktail bars you can tick off your list.



## **16. Istanbul, Turkey**

Once known as Constantinople and Byzantium, Istanbul—Turkey's most populous city—is also one of the most significant in history. Despite a string of recent attacks, it remains an attractive draw: Byzantine and Ottoman architecture, the Grand Bazaar and Spice Market, and historic taverns. Looking to escape the crowds? Head up Galata's hill and down into Karaköy, exploring the shops and restaurants along the way.



## **17. Bangkok, Thailand**

Thailand's non-stop capital is a feast for all five senses in the best possible way. Seek solitude—or at least a moment of (relative) quiet and reflection—at Wat Arun, Wat Saket, and Wat Phra Kaew; explore hidden markets; stroll the picture-perfect Banglamphu neighborhood, and if you're lucky, catch an impromptu performance in Chinatown. The street food? Don't even get us started.



## **18.Hong Kong**

One of Asia's most cosmopolitan cities, Hong Kong has an itinerary for every sort of traveler. Hike up to the Peak for sweeping views of Victoria Harbour, or get out of the city altogether and take the ferry to a nearby island—Lamma, a favorite, is a nesting site for green sea turtles. Whatever you do, make sure to chow down: Savory, inexpensive bites like siu mai and egg balls are some of the hallmarks of the city.



## **19.Cape Town, South Africa**

South Africa's capital is famous for many things: white-sand beaches, design influencers, and breathtaking Table Mountain among them. To get a sense of what's new in the city, make for nearby wine country; shop Bree Street—Cape Town's "Hippest Block"—for novel gifts; or spend a day at the newly opened Zeitz MOCAA, Africa's most important museum opening in a century. Looking for quintessential Cape Town fare? Try fish-and-chips at Kalky's in nearby Kalk Bay.



## **20. Mexico City, Mexico**

Back-to-back earthquakes struck Mexico in September 2017, and areas across the country, including Mexico City, are still rebuilding. But that doesn't mean it's unsafe—or unethical—to visit now. On the contrary, it's a way to help: The economy thrives on tourism (which makes up 8.6 percent of the national GDP). One of the world's largest cities in terms of area and population, sprawling Mexico City can be overwhelming—even after a week-long visit, you'll have only tapped the surface of all Ciudad de México has to offer—so if time is short, don't miss the Palacio Nacional, Templo Mayor, Palacio de Bellas Artes, or the Museo Frida Kahlo. When the sun sets, park yourself in the Plaza Garibaldi: Every night without fail, mariachi bands belt out ballads here. Eat on the street as much as you can, but if you're able to, spring for a table at Enrique Olvera's Pujol.



## **21.San Miguel de Allende, Mexico**

Many consider colonial-era San Miguel de Allende one of Mexico's prettiest cities, and it's no wonder. Here, you'll find leafy courtyards, narrow cobblestone streets, and a historic town center from which the Gothic Parroquia de San Miguel Arcángel's pink towers rise high above the main plaza, El Jardín. Located 165 miles northeast of Mexico City in the country's hilly central highlands, San Miguel has no international airport, but is worth the trek: In 2008, UNESCO recognized San Miguel de Allende and neighboring Sanctuary of Jesús Nazareno de Atotonilco as World Heritage of Humanity sites.



## **22. Victoria, B.C., Canada**

As a former British colony, Victoria retains stately mansions and manicured gardens that are perfect for walking and gazing. Its mild climate and location on the southern end of Vancouver Island also make it an excellent location for outdoor activities: Take a kayak tour of Victoria Harbour, or walk a half-mile over the sea on the Ogden Point Breakwater. For excellent traditional fish-and-chips on the docks, try the aptly named Red Fish Blue Fish.



### **23.Florence, Italy**

Though Rome is Italy's much beloved capital and Milan has serious cosmopolitan clout, Florence remains unrivaled in history, art, and architecture (its beauty and cuisine don't hurt, either). In addition to being the birthplace of the Renaissance, the Firenze of recent years has had a modern makeover: Study Tuscan classics with celebrity chef Arturo Dori at Desinare, one of the city's hottest cooking school/design store hybrids, or take in modern art at La Strozgina, Florence's center for contemporary culture. Wherever the day takes you, save room for a *panino al lampredotto*—this stewed tripe sandwich is a Florence must.



## 24.Bruges, Belgium

Characterized by cobblestone streets and canals, much of Bruges's immaculately preserved old city was built between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries: As a result, it's not hard to feel like you're in a medieval fairy-tale here. Visit the Church of Our Lady for a viewing of Michelangelo's *Madonna and Child*, or sit at a café and take in the views of the Markt, a historic square in the city center. Make sure to indulge in a waffle (or four) from Chez Albert.



## 25. Lucerne, Switzerland

With its covered bridges, turreted buildings, and colorful Old Town, Lucerne is storybook Swiss. Settled on the shores of Lake Lucerne, the city is also a popular departure point for the Swiss Alps, which are visible from the town. Walk the city's famed Kapellbrücke, the oldest covered bridge in Europe, and grab a home-brewed beer nearby at Rathaus Brauerei when finished. To sample traditional Lucerne dishes like veal with cream sauce and *rösti*, head to Wirtshaus Galliker, which the Galliker family has run for more than four generations.



## **26.Salzburg, Austria**

Made famous by Mozart (and the Von Trapps), classic Salzburg sits divided by the Salzach River: Its pedestrian Old City lines its left bank, and the nineteenth-century comprises the right. To drink like a local, head to Bräustübl zu Mülln, Austria's largest beer hall, where beer is drawn directly from wooden barrels and can be enjoyed alongside traditional and regional specialties from the Schmankerlgang, an Old World food court of sorts.



## **27.Nuremberg, Germany**

Germany has no shortage of picturesque cities, but Nuremberg stands out for its distinct blend of old and new. Once the “unofficial” capital of the Holy Roman Empire and an early capital of science and invention, Nuremberg today is *best* known for its Christkindlesmarkt, museums, and...bratwurst.



## **28. Quebec City, Canada**

Hilltop Quebec City is a town for all seasons. Explore Quebec City's UNESCO World Heritage-listed Old Town, brush up on your military history at the citadel atop Cap Diamant, and head to the Quartier Petit-Champlain for pedestrian-only streets and artisan boutiques. Reserve a room at the historic Fairmont Le Château Frontenac, and dine in the hotel at the property's 1608 Wine and Cheese Bar, which specializes in Quebec cheeses.



## **29.Cologne, Germany**

Cologne is often overshadowed by Berlin and Munich, but the 2,000-year-old city on the banks of the Rhine River has its devotees for a reason: Think High Gothic architecture, 12 Romanesque churches, annual literary festivals, and the Museum Ludwig, one of the most important collections of modern art in Europe. (Kölsch beer, specially brewed here, probably helps, too.)



### 30. Lisbon, Portugal

Lisbon has long been one of the most underrated cities in Europe, but it looks like the secret is now—finally—starting to get out: "In the next few years, the city will welcome a major art, architecture, and technology museum, dozens of restored and landscaped public squares, several high-rises, a sprawling new cruise terminal, and countless additional shops, studios, and cultural spaces," *Traveler* contributor Julia Cooke reports.



### **31.Copenhagen, Denmark**

A burgeoning beer culture, some of the world's best restaurants, royal history, and dedicated pedestrian- and cycle-friendly zones all help make Copenhagen a capital of Nordic cool. The city is routinely ranked one of the world's most expensive, but some of the capital's best activities—marveling at Christiansborg Palace, walking harborside in Nyhavn—cost nothing at all.



### **32. Edinburgh, Scotland**

Edinburgh is a unique capital in Western Europe. Where else can you find a medieval Old Town, extinct volcano, regal castle, and "New Town" from the 1800s in one city? Check out the newly revamped National Museum of Scotland (particularly its Art, Fashion, and Design wing); grab dinner at Timberyard; and test out the city's growing independent brewing scene at Hanging Bat.



### 33. Bergen, Norway

Norway's second-largest city, Bergen is known for its pretty harbor, colorful Bryggen quarter, and "seven mountains," which surround the town. The city is a hotbed for culture: One of Norway's biggest events, the Bergen International Festival, has been held here every year since 1953, and showcases international and Norwegian music, dance, literature, visual arts, folklore, and more over the course of two weeks every spring. Ten percent of Bergen residents are students, which means—*shh*—the city often feels livelier and more vibrant than big sibling (and capital) Oslo.



### **34. Stockholm, Sweden**

One of the world's most beautiful capitals, Stockholm isn't just scenic: It's also the cultural, political, media, and economic center of Sweden. Make like a local and stroll narrow cobblestone streets, hang by the city's colorful waterfront, and take advantage of the country's *fika* culture. Though many travelers spend most of their time in the medieval center, Stockholm actually comprises 14 islands of an archipelago, which makes it a perfect jumping off point for island hopping—Fjäderholmarna, one of the closest, is a mere 20 minutes by boat.



### 35. Seville, Spain

The capital of southern Spain's Andalusia region, sultry Seville is packed with history: Moorish influences can be seen all over the city, but the UNESCO-listed Alcazar of Seville is one of its best known landmarks—and not just because it's used as the royal palace of the House Martell in *Game of Thrones*. Also on our must-do list? Check out the intricate tilework at Plaza de España, squeeze in for tapas at the Bodega Santa Cruz, and when the sun sets, head to the Triana neighborhood for some flamenco, which originated in the city in the eighteenth century.



### **36. Prague, Czech Republic**

Historic Prague beats with a bohemian heart: Get off the beaten path at any number of historic pubs around the city (try U Zlatého Tygra or U Jelínků) or head up to Petřín Hill for incredible views of the city. Come Christmastime, the city's Wenceslas Square transforms into a scene straight from a postcard.



### 37.Venice

There's nothing like Venice: Its canals, labyrinth of car-free cobblestone streets, and hidden passageways are perfect for wandering—even getting lost here is magical. Head to Al Muro for authentic Venetian cuisine, or for a more adventurous itinerary, get out of the well-trod historic center and take a boat to nearby islands Sant'Erasmo or Giudecca. Want to avoid the crowds? Try La Serenissima in January.



### **38. Puerto Vallarta, Mexico**

Beaches. Water sports. Nightlife. What more could you want? If you're in Puerto Vallarta, probably not much. Occupying prime real estate on Mexico's Pacific coast, this sandy, LGBT-friendly resort town is backed by palm-covered mountains and has nary a bad angle. Sunbathe on Yelapa Beach, stroll along the *malecón*, or get offshore for snorkeling at the uninhabited Islas Marietas National Park. Looking for love, or at least a romantic meal? Make a reservation at Café des Artistes, which fuses French and Mexican cuisine for standouts including lobster chilaquiles, a butter tamale and ratatouille, duck leg with mole, and more.



### **39.Dublin, Ireland**

Sitting on the mouth of the River Liffey, the capital of Ireland is renowned for its medieval buildings, live music, stately churches, and of course, Guinness. Underneath it all hums a modern heart: Get a sense of what's new in the capital by seeking out its edgiest artists at Temple Bar Gallery and Studios, trying the fish of the day at Catch-22 or sampling the wares of Teeling, the first whiskey distillery to open in Dublin in 125 years.



#### **40. Jerusalem, Israel**

Long a place of religious pilgrimage for Christians, Jews and Muslims, Jerusalem is now drawing a different sort of pilgrim: the global traveler. In addition to its significant sacred and religious sights, the city draws visitors with its cutting-edge art scene and a growing number of notable restaurants. Head to the Israel Museum for an exploration of the country's culture, and stop for a bite at Machneyuda for authentic Mediterranean cuisine.