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## Rocky Mountain High

by [G. Scott Thomas](#) Jun 30 2010

Boulder, Colorado, leads in our quality of life survey for midsize U.S. cities. And it's not the only mountain area to make the cut.

### **Top 10 Midsize U.S. Metro Areas**



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The top 10 cities with a population of up to 750,000, according to our Portfolio.com/bizjournals data. [See All Video & Multimedia](#)

### **Quality of Life, Mid-Size Markets: A Methodology**



Quality of Life, Midsize Markets: A Methodology [Read More](#)

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Step aside New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles. When it comes to living the good life, Raleigh has it all: from high-tech jobs to good education and economic stability. [Read More](#)



Boulder's a hub for high-tech industries and the home of the University of Colorado, two characteristics that have attracted a young, highly educated workforce.

Image: City of Boulder, Colorado

Raleigh, North Carolina, offers the best quality of life in America, [according to a recent Portfolio.com/bizjournals study](#).

But there's a point worth noting. Those ranked highest are not the largest markets that have more than 750,000 residents. What if you prefer to live somewhere smaller? Vanity Fair New Yorker Wired

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A companion study now provides the answer, proclaiming Boulder, Colorado, to be the quality-of-life leader among metropolitan areas with populations between 250,000 and 750,000.

Portfolio.com and bizjournals compared 109 medium-size markets in 20 statistical categories. The partners used the same formula as in their earlier study, giving the highest scores to areas with healthy economies, moderate costs of living, light traffic, impressive housing stocks, and high-powered educational systems.

Boulder, which is 25 miles northwest of Denver, has a metropolitan population of 300,000. It's a hub for high-tech industries and the home of the University of Colorado, two characteristics that have attracted a young, highly educated workforce.

Boulder earned high scores across the board in the quality-of-life study, placing among the 10 best markets in 13 of the 20 categories.

These are among its strengths:

- Fifty-six percent of Boulder's adults have bachelor's degrees, easily the strongest concentration in any midsize metro. Just eight other markets are above 35 percent.
- Slightly more than half of Boulder's workers hold management or professional jobs, the sector that pays the highest salaries. The only other market above 50 percent is Ann Arbor, Michigan.
- There is a generous inventory of large homes in Boulder. Eighteen percent of its houses have at least nine rooms, a figure that only a pair of Utah metros, Provo and Ogden, can top.
- Boulder is seventh out of 109 markets in two key financial categories. Its median household income of \$65,960 is the seventh-highest in the study group, and its poverty rate of 5.8 percent is the seventh-lowest.

Portfolio.com and bizjournals based their quality-of-life rankings on data from the [U.S. Census Bureau's 2006-2008 American Community Survey](#), which was released late last year. (See the details on the methodology.)

The rest of the top 10 among medium-size markets included four other cities in the western mountain states of Colorado (Fort Collins and Colorado Springs) and Utah (Provo and Ogden). Michigan had two cities in the list (Holland and Ann Arbor). And Wisconsin, Iowa, and New Hampshire each was represented with one market a piece (Madison, Des Moines, and Manchester, respectively).

[\(For a slideshow that goes into depth about the top 10, click here. And click here to download a PDF of the entire list of 109 markets.\)](#)

The Sunbelt dominates the opposite end of the quality-of-life scale, with medium-size markets from Alabama, California, Georgia, Louisiana, and Texas holding the nine lowest positions.

Last place belongs to Visalia, California, a metro with 422,000 residents. It's located roughly midway between Los Angeles and San Francisco.

Visalia has the lowest percentage of management and professional workers in the study, 23.9 percent, which is less than half of Boulder's 50.1 percent. Visalia is also dead last in the share of adults with college degrees, 12.7 percent.

[G. Scott Thomas is projects editor for Buffalo Business First.](#)


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1 person liked this.

 **D. Bish** 5 days ago  
 from Denver and live in Visalia don't ask and the study is absolutely accurate.

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**D Bish** 5 days ago

1 person liked this.

Pretty sure Visalia is only 130,000 people. This study is obviously not very reliable. Guessing that the mean Fresno, California.

4 people liked this.

Metropolitan AREA, not City of! You have shown the lack of education contributing to ranking!

Like Reply

Boulder's population is 94K. Visalia's population is 125K in population. Article does use 'Midsize US City' and 'Metropolitan Area' interchangeably. That being said, it is reasonable to question the merits of this entire study, as well as the funding sources. I would hope a modestly educated individual would not believe everything they read. Or, are surveys like just like religion and horoscopes, if you like them and they fit your agenda, you accept them as true?

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