

Canada's

BEST CITIES

A RANKING OF CANADA'S BEST SMALL CITIES

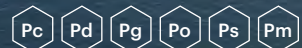
2022

Where to live, work,
invest and visit in
Canada right now

How We Ranked Canada's Best Small Cities: The Methodology — 05

Canada's Top 25 Small Cities Profiles — 07

Canada's Best Small Cities Performance by Category — 28



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WELCOME TO THE INAUGURAL RANKING OF CANADA'S BEST SMALL CITIES

Resonance Consultancy is building the most comprehensive city rankings on the planet. Here's why this matters to Canadians now more than ever.



Over the past seven years, Resonance has built the most comprehensive city rankings on the planet at a time when the performance and competitive identity of our cities matters more than ever.

As leading advisors in tourism, real estate and economic development for nearly two decades, our team has conducted extensive research on the rise of cities, the key trends propelling their growth and the factors that shape our perception of urban centres as desirable places to live, visit and invest.

The COVID-19 pandemic has, of course, changed everything about our businesses and our cities. It's caused us to rethink the ways we'll want to live, work and play in the future. If there's one thing that social distancing and working from home has taught us, it's that the shared spaces we were asked to close and avoid—from restaurants to sporting venues, museums to shops—are what we cherish most about the cities we live in or love to visit.

As our cities and borders reopen, it is clear that cities have been changed by the pandemic—and so have Canadians.

The headline-grabbing anecdotes about an urban exodus turned into tangible migration patterns (just not as dramatic as some dire warnings) and real estate appreciation (very dire in select markets).

The collective trauma of the past two-and-a-half years has Canadians following those who have already sought a change to their pre-pandemic status quo. Combined with record numbers of immigrants arriving in the country over the next few years, Canada's urban centres of all sizes will face opportunities—and challenges—like never before.

It's into this uncertainty that we present our top 25 ranking of Canada's Best Small Cities in 2022. To rank the livability, competitiveness and appeal of each city—we call it place equity—we applied the same methodology we've honed over the past seven years to rank US and global cities. The ranking has been lauded and utilized by global media for years, from National Geographic and Lonely Planet to AFAR.

Bloomberg calls Resonance Consultancy's Best Cities ranking "the most comprehensive study of its kind; it identifies cities that are most desirable for locals, visitors, and businesspeople alike, rather than simply looking at livability or tourism appeal."

We hope this ranking helps you appreciate the urban bounty that exists across Canada beyond the dozen large metros. And if it helps you choose your next hometown (either full or part time), all the better.

Our team at Resonance will be following these rankings closely, identifying Canada's Best Small Cities to live, work and visit now, and in the years to come.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Chris Fair'. The signature is stylized and fluid.

Chris Fair, President & CEO
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HOW WE RANKED CANADA'S BEST SMALL CITIES: THE METHODOLOGY

Resonance Consultancy ranked Canada's best small cities (municipalities with populations of less than 200,000) by using a combination of statistical performance and qualitative evaluations by locals and visitors in 32 areas grouped into six core categories.

THE SIX CORE CATEGORIES

Pc PLACE

Pd PRODUCT

Pg PROGRAMMING

Po PEOPLE

Ps PROSPERITY

Pm PROMOTION



Pc PLACE

Our most layered category quantifies a city's physical sense of place. To score a city within our Place category, we evaluate the perceived quality of its natural and built environments. From how often the sun shines to the safety of the streets, several readily measurable, oft-cited factors influence our perceptions.

Weather Average number of sunny days (Weatherbase, 2022)

Safety Overall Crime Severity Index (Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Uniform Crime Reporting Survey, 2020)

Traffic Share of the population taking less than 15 minutes to travel to and from their place of employment (Polaris Intelligence, 2021)

Air Quality Air Quality Index (IQAir, 2022)

Parks & Outdoors Number of quality parks and outdoor activities recommended by locals and visitors in a city (TripAdvisor, 2022)

Sights & Landmarks Number of quality sights and landmarks in a city (TripAdvisor, 2022)



Pd PRODUCT

This is a ranking of the "hardware" of a city—often the most difficult metric for cities to get right. Our Product category studies a city's key institutions, attractions and infrastructure. A city's infrastructure and institutions shape its identity via the quantity, quality and reputation of these "products." Expensive and difficult to develop and maintain, exceptional, recognizable products are often found only in well-developed, cosmopolitan cities.

Airport Connectivity Number of direct destinations served by the city's airports (Google Flights, 2022)

Education Share of residents employed in educational services (Polaris Intelligence, 2021)

Health Care Number of health-care practitioners per 100,000 residents (Polaris Intelligence, 2021)

Bike Paths Share of residents who cycle to work (Polaris Intelligence, 2021)

Museums Number of quality museums and arts institutions recommended by locals and visitors (TripAdvisor, 2022)



Pg PROGRAMMING

This category measures the experiential pillars of a great visit: food, shows, shopping and nightlife. If our Product category is the “hardware” of cities and destinations, the mosaic of cultural programming and lifestyle experiences they offer is the “software” that makes them run—including the subcategories of Shopping, Theatres, Restaurants and Nightlife. While such programming initiatives are individually insignificant, their sum fosters a community’s connection to place.

Family-friendly Activities Number of family-friendly recommended by locals and visitors (TripAdvisor, 2022)

Nightlife Number of quality nightlife experiences recommended by locals and visitors (TripAdvisor, 2022)

Restaurants Number of quality restaurants and culinary experiences recommended by locals and visitors (TripAdvisor, 2022)

Shopping Number of quality shopping experiences recommended by locals and visitors (TripAdvisor, 2022)



Po PEOPLE

Human capital is often a city’s most valuable resource. To evaluate the the relative strength of human capital from one city to the next, we consider the diversity and talent of the city’s population—something of proven importance when it comes to attracting talent.

Young Adults Share of residents between the ages of 15 and 29 in a city (Polaris Intelligence, 2021)

Educational Attainment Share of the population with a bachelor’s degree or higher (Polaris Intelligence, 2021)

Relocation Share of movers from other cities in Canada (Polaris Intelligence, 2021)

Creative Class Share of residents employed in knowledge-based occupations (Polaris Intelligence, 2021)

Population Growth Share of residents who have moved to their the current city of residence in the past five years (Statistics Canada, 2016 & 2021)



Ps PROSPERITY

A well-paid, economically secure citizenry facilitates stewardship and innovation. In general, beliefs about the wealth and prosperity of a city are shaped by statistics such as the income of citizens, the standard of living and the ability to own a home. And since startups and innovation increasingly drive a city’s development and economic growth, this overall category also measures the share of self-employed residents.

Household Income Median household income (Polaris Intelligence, 2021)

Employment Rate Employment rate of residents (Polaris Intelligence, 2021)

Income Equality City’s Gini Index, a simple measure of the distribution of income across income percentiles in a population (Statistics Canada, 2019)

Home Ownership Rate of home ownership among residents of a city (Polaris Intelligence, 2021)

Self-employment Rate of residents of a city who are self-employed (Polaris Intelligence, 2021)

Poverty Rate Rate of poverty among residents of a city (Polaris Intelligence, 2021)



Pm PROMOTION

A city’s ability to tell its story (and help others do the same) depends on how it incentivizes and rewards sharing of experiences by locals and visitors. The number and frequency of media stories, online articles, references and place-based recommendations influence our perception of cities, whether the news is good or bad. Today, residents, businesses and visitors promote a city to the world more than city marketers or chambers of commerce. Resonance ranks a city’s Promotion performance based on the number of stories, references and recommendations shared online about that city.

Facebook Check-ins Number of Facebook check-ins (Facebook, 2022)

Google Search Number of Google search results (Google, 2022)

TripAdvisor Reviews Number of TripAdvisor reviews (TripAdvisor, 2022)

Instagram Hashtags Number of Instagram hashtags (Instagram, 2022)

Google Trends Popularity on Google Trends in the past 12 months (Google, 2022)

Canada's

TOP 25 SMALL CITIES PROFILES

Canada has never been more urbanized, with almost 82 per cent of us living in cities. And that share of Canadian city dwellers will only rise over the next decade.

Cities are the engines of the Canadian economy and the badges of our ingenuity. They are emblematic of the opportunity that Canada provides to Canadians who have arrived from elsewhere or were born here.

Given the new rules of post-pandemic migration, the rise of remote work and the never-ending search for housing affordability, more Canadian cities are catching the imaginations of both urbanites living in Canada's metropolises, as much as the imaginations of the record number of immigrants arriving today and for the foreseeable future. The result? Urban wealth and vibrancy have been created in more places than ever before.

As Canadians reconsider where they want to call home post-pandemic, dreaming about hometowns that are more affordable, calmer and closer to the outdoors, the 25 small cities that we profile over the next 18 pages are surely at the top of their list. We now just have a quantitative metric for all that fantasizing.



THE PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS AND INNER HARBOUR LIT UP AT NIGHT

POPULATION

CITY PROPER 94,890

HIGHLIGHTS

- 1 PROGRAMMING
- 2 EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

1 VICTORIA BC

With its mild year-round climate and an artisanal, independent spirit at play among rainforests and Pacific beaches, Victoria is the hometown you never knew you coveted. But you'd better bring cash. And (please!) some young kids.

Canada's best small city is fine with you thinking it's just for the "newly wed and nearly dead." Such out-of-date ignorance will keep the hiking trails empty, the traffic jams tolerable and the walk-in clinic wait times minimal. There's even a nostalgic re-embrace of a cheeky and unofficial local retro slogan: Keep Victoria Boring.

Of course, none of these clichés are accurate—at least not any more. And yet they persist. Because Canada's best small city is, for the most part, a cipher for the rest of the country, with more of

us having a better familiarity with Florida than with this provincial capital on the edge of a continent.

But when visitors do come—when anyone comes—they tend to fall hard for Victoria. This city is seemingly engineered for the post-pandemic, seize-the-day, work-from-home lifestyle sought by those privileged enough to appreciate such ease of mobility, while it genuinely pursues equality for its residents and an overdue collaboration with the 10 First Nations who've always called this region home.

Yes, Victoria is named after the British monarch and will always put out high tea for paying tourists and nostalgic (or irony-seeking) locals, but Little England has grown up to focus on its more worthwhile attributes.

The city is in the top five in our diverse Place category, including #2 for Parks & Outdoors—ranging from the sublime expanse of Beacon Hill to newly pedestrianized Clover Point, which highlights the city's mind-blowing, front-row elemental location: the towering, snowcapped Olympic mountain range of Washington State to the south, the Gulf Islands and San Juan Islands in the Salish Sea to the east and, to the northwest, the Strait of Juan de Fuca that separates Canada and the US.

Even though Victoria ranks #35 in our Weather subcategory (defined by sunny days per year), it possesses a temperate climate often described as “sub-Mediterranean,” with rainy (but not as rainy as Vancouver!) winters that average 9°C and very rarely dip below



VISITORS STROLL WADDINGTON ALLEY

freezing. Summers—oh, those Victoria summers—hover in the low 20s with little humidity. This is the mildest part of Canada in terms of annual average temperature, a fact that has always attracted the outdoorsy and health-conscious. (And Victoria has the local Olympians to prove it.) The pandemic has only pushed more people to discover a region where you can surf, mountain bike and put in eight hours at the office all in one day. This includes cycling to work, for which Victoria tops the country—the city is criss-crossed by expanding bike infrastructure that complements its crown jewel: the Galloping Goose Trail, a reclaimed former rail line that connects downtown to the booming Westshore region and its fast-growing cities like Langford and Colwood, and further out to the ancient rainforests of Metchosin and Sooke beyond. Oh, yeah: Greater Victoria is a quilt of 13 municipalities, many with their own police and fire departments and local councils. See Saanich at #23 for more on that.

This being the colonial capital tucked amidst a landscape and climate that is often described as Alaska-meets-Hawaii, tourism has driven the economy as much as provincial government jobs have. Pre-pandemic, the tourism industry—funnelled in by BC Ferries, two Washington State boats, an armada of



summer cruise ships and the #9-ranked airport among Canadian small cities—contributed annual revenues of around \$2 billion to the region. All those global tourists tell Victoria’s story far and wide, which is why the city is second only to Niagara Falls in our important Promotions category, including #2 in both Google Search and TripAdvisor Reviews, as well as #3 for Facebook Check-ins, Instagram Hashtags and Google Trends.

But as the pandemic shuttered tourism, it elevated the city’s stature as a hometown (or second hometown) for Canadians and wannabe Canadians. Snowbirds unable to fly from Toronto or Montreal to Florida or Arizona tried out southern Vancouver Island for some respite from the snow—and they liked what they found. So did entrepreneurs able to work from anywhere, attracted by the thriving tech ecosystem already in place, the second-most educated residents among small cities in the country and the three universities (the ascendant, diverse University of Victoria, Royal Roads University and Camosun College) that stock the local talent pipeline.

In fact, for all the attention that tourism wins for the city and region, Victoria’s leading industry is technology, with annual revenues that should approach \$3.5 billion this year. The city is the stealthy home—a reward of sorts—for influential tech leaders who’ve built

some of Canada’s most successful companies. Every time they host global colleagues (some with the means to relocate entire offices or teams), Victoria’s legend grows, as was the case with last year’s episode of the popular business podcast *My First Million*, in which the host, describing a recent visit, declared, “I don’t understand why I don’t live there.”

But the city’s strategic location is also launching up-and-coming industries like aquaculture, with companies like Cascadia Seaweed working with local Indigenous partners to become one of the largest providers of ocean-cultivated seaweed on the planet. The recently formed Centre for Ocean Applied Sustainable Technologies works with the City of Victoria and other local partners to help the region “realize its potential as a major driver of Canada’s Blue Economy.”

Attracting talent here will be crucial. Victoria has the lowest birth rate of any Canadian city and is at the bottom of

our 25 small cities in the Young Adults subcategory. Average house prices of well over a million dollars—combined with skyrocketing rents and resistance to rezoning—are kryptonite to sustainable population and talent growth.

Fortunately, Victoria’s lifestyle cred, if sustained and stewarded, has the potential to keep pulling talent in. The city ranks #1 in Canada in our vibrant Programming category, which includes top spot for Nightlife. This is where craft brewing in Canada was born, after all, with trailblazer Spinnakers still open and always a must-visit for beer aficionados. The city also has one of the highest number of breweries per capita in the country, with more than a dozen in town. Victoria’s ambitious restaurant scene also tops the country, with the most restaurants per capita in Canada, many relying on the increasingly bounteous local farms that, like new residents, have discovered just how generous southern Vancouver Island can be.



THE BUTCHART GARDENS



DOWNTOWN KELOWNA AND LAKE OKANAGAN

POPULATION

CITY PROPER 149,687

HIGHLIGHTS

2 SELF-EMPLOYED

2 SHOPPING

2 KELOWNA BC

A pursuit of the holy trinity of opportunity, lifestyle and (relative) post-pandemic affordability has Kelowna booming.

Kelowna comes by its bona fides honestly. Its inspiration as a town—at the heart of Western Canada’s bountiful, fertile agriculture industry—is still a coveted reality today. In fact, the surrounding orchards and

vineyards (oh those vineyards) have never been more prosperous and vital to the city’s sublime growth.

The traditional, ancestral and unceded territory of the Syilx people of the Okanagan Nation, who have lived on the shores of their 135-kilometre eponymous lake for 10,000 years, Kelowna today is the third-largest urban centre in BC (behind Vancouver and Greater Victoria). And while it was growing quickly before the pandemic, powered by a carousel of cashing-out downsizers and retirees from Vancouver

and Toronto, Alberta investors riding long oil spikes and outdoor lovers not afraid of commitment, its population has popped over the past two-and-a-half years. City boosters claim that the 14 per cent population growth rate makes Kelowna the fastest-growing metropolitan area in Canada. We have it ranked at a still very impressive #5.

Following a familiar pandemic migration script, new residents (and, with a #8 ranking for Relocation, the running joke locally is that everyone here was a recent arrival at some point) are coaxed by a lifestyle that seems algorithmically optimized. The city ranks #17 for Weather, but the summers get so dry and hot that the dozens of local lakes and swimming holes become public amenities as produce grows—powering a constantly evolving agriculture industry—and grapes ripen in the heat at the more than 40 local vineyards. As long as the forest fires are kept at bay, Kelowna gets all this done while deeply breathing top 10 air quality among Canada's small cities. If the #3-ranked

parks don't do it for you (many perched on the azure shores of Lake Okanagan), then a 25-minute stroll in any direction gets you climbing in solitude. Better yet, hop on your mountain bike and roll onto the single-track north of the city in Knox Mountain Park, or Myra-Bellevue Provincial Park on the south side. And ride in confidence. The city ranks in the top three for residents who commute by bike. Even the most egregiously sized trucks (and there are plenty here) tend to respect bike lanes and the city's growing cycling infrastructure. For those looking for a more subdued time outdoors, an incredible 19 golf courses are a short drive away: start by getting your swings in at the Kelowna Driving Range, or working with a PGA golf pro at the Harvest Golf Club, a resort-style course offering 18 holes through a picturesque working orchard.

And that's just the summer! Winter is equally epic, with three major ski resorts (Big White, Apex Mountain and SilverStar) an hour or less away.

While Kelowna's advantage has always been its natural attributes outside of town, the city's core has been catching up for years now, as seen by its #2 finish for small cities nationally in our overall Programming category.

Increasingly, people are coming to a hometown knowing that they won't just be able to buy anything they need, they'll also have plenty of new finds to explore, in hot retail clusters like Bernard Avenue, Pandosy Village and Tutt Street, lined with indie shops and boutiques. Kelowna ranks an impressive #2 in our Shopping subcategory. An evening out is also becoming an equally kinetic experience, with Kelowna ranked in the top three for theatres, which range from the daring, experimental productions of the 10-year-old New Vintage Theatre to the Rotary Centre, home to the Mary Irwin Theatre and the city's hub for arts, music, education and entertainment in the heart of Kelowna's Cultural District.



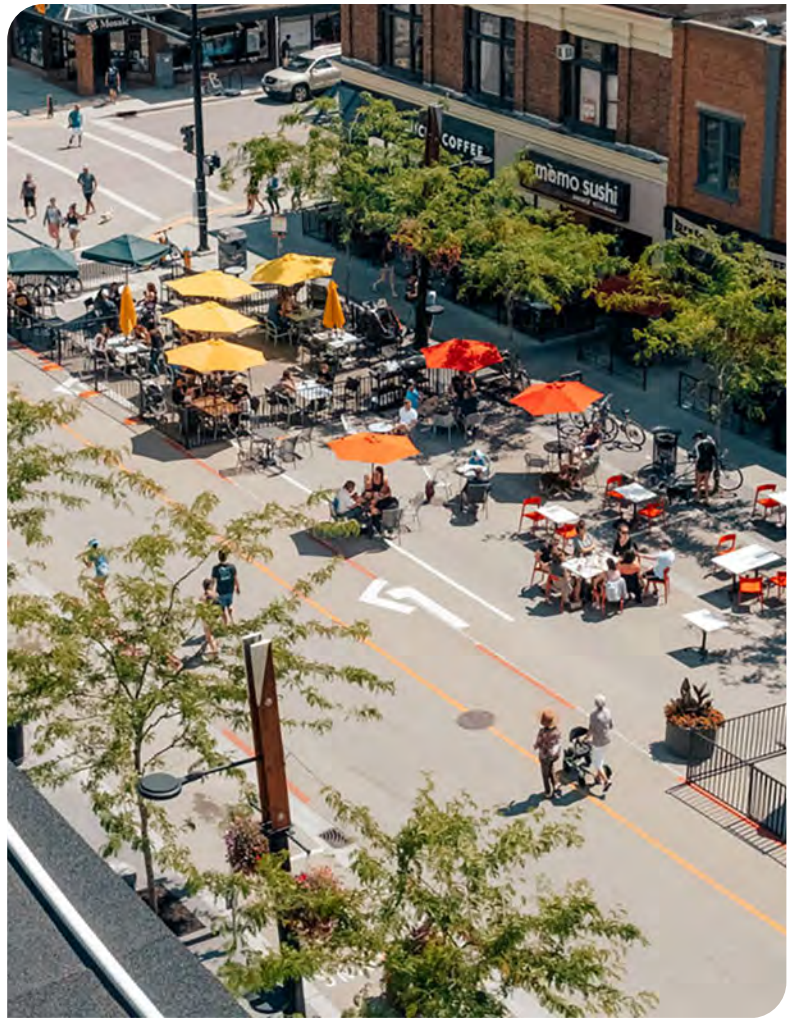
MISSION HILL FAMILY ESTATE

Kelowna's #6-ranked Restaurants have taken the pandemic slowdown as an opportunity to assess the city's culinary needs and plan for the long term. The bounty of places to eat in this city almost matches its outdoor pursuits. Winery restaurant icons like Old Vines at Quail's Gate Estate are being joined by new concepts, like the massive King Taps restaurant on Kelowna's waterfront, right next door to corporate cousin Cactus Club in the old Rose's Pub on Water Street.

The #4 Nightlife ranking will also improve in the coming years as locals and visitors fully experience the 10 local breweries, five cideries and five distilleries here, many of which launched with a mission to follow the wineries' lead in highlighting the terroir of this incredible land in their locally sourced ingredients.

Fortunately for patrons, torrid downtown development means they can increasingly walk to and from this action.

According to the City of Kelowna, there are nearly 4,000 residential units either under construction or in the permitting process in the downtown core alone, 650 of which will be in a three-tower development by Orchard Park Properties that broke ground earlier this year and will redefine the city's skyline with the tallest tower in BC's interior, at 442 feet. Proposals for



KELOWNA BOASTS OVER 40 WINERIES WITHIN A 20-MINUTE DRIVE

high-density towers continue to pour into city planning offices as new cranes rise weekly on approved projects.

As much as tourism has built this city—prior to the pandemic, the Central Okanagan's visitor economy generated \$2.1 billion annually and created almost 13,000 jobs—today, the story, like everywhere, is about tech.

Over the past decade or so, long-time tech and digital media anchors like QHR Technologies, Vineyard Networks and Disney Canada (which arrived in 2005 after purchasing local game manufacturer Club Penguin for \$350 million) seeded an ecosystem for startups that has since produced successful job engines like FreshGrade and Hyper Hippo. Local

economic development initiatives like the Accelerate Okanagan incubator have further provided air cover for a workforce that today ranks #2 for Self-employment.

The launch of UBC's Okanagan campus just over a decade ago keeps the young talent pipeline stocked—a vital factor in making sure Kelowna is not just growing but thriving all through the exciting years ahead. The latest phase of the university is happening right now downtown, at 550 Doyle Avenue, where a "vertical campus" is rising with 40,000 square metres that will include a much-needed medical clinic for Kelowna's blooming urban population.



VIEW DOWN HISTORICAL KING STREET EAST IN DOWNTOWN KINGSTON

POPULATION

CITY PROPER 135,169

HIGHLIGHTS

- 1 GOOGLE SEARCH
- 1 SHOPPING

3 KINGSTON ON

Few Canadian cities—large or small—have the soul, the influence and the sense of place of Kingston.

To those who've attended Queen's University, or St. Lawrence College, or the Royal Military College of Canada, the Limestone City has always felt especially... Canadian. Almost the same distance from Toronto as it is from Montréal. On Lake Ontario, surrounded by fresh water and born into this country's legacy for engineering that water as a way to carve urbanity into a wide, cold, bountiful land. Insane about hockey to the point of claiming to have invented it. And for millennia, the traditional home of the Haudenosaunee and Anishinabek First Nations, which were named the Katarokwi when English colonizers took the land and renamed it

King's Town as a tribute to King George III, shortening it to Kingston in 1788.

But the almost European walkability, the secret alleys and the grand public buildings and historic red-brick storefronts reminiscent of Cabbagetown or Gastown all have a good reason for being here. Kingston may be a small city today, but between 1841 and 1844 it was a fledgling nation's first capital, and underwent a decade of the type of torrid government infrastructure investment that such a title demands—and that hasn't slowed down much in more than 175 years.

That explains the "big city in a small town" feel that infuses a stroll through this landscape of labyrinths, limestone and brick nooks with urban discovery small (colourful Martello Alley and its galleries) and large (tours of Kingston Penitentiary, Canada's oldest and most



MACKINNON BROTHERS BREWING COMPANY



notorious maximum-security prison, which closed nine years ago and opened to the public in 2016).

Kingston ranks in the top five in the country among small cities in our Sights & Landmarks subcategory, replete with history lessons at places like Fort Henry, one of Ontario's only UNESCO World Heritage Sites, where you can experience 19th-century military and civilian life, musical performances and military demonstrations. There is also easy access to the fabled Thousand Islands National Park right from downtown through paddlewheel or riverboat cruises. Or, stay closer to shore and discover the history and heritage of Kingston's spectacular waterfront aboard the *Island Queen*. The city's parks rank in the top 10 nationally and are particularly stunning along the waterfront, as well as over the water by ferry to even more natural bounty at places like Wolfe, Amherst and Howe islands. Lake Ontario's playground is there for the taking, every year—and, after the past two-and-a-half claustrophobic years, there have never been more sailboats, canoes, kayaks, paddleboards and windsurfers skimming the historic shoreline and azure fresh waters.

The soul of the city is as much in its experiences—its Programming ranks in the top three in Canada—as it is in its built environment, and Kingston has its urban offerings finely tuned.

Its top 10 finish in our Nightlife subcategory is a result of the big-city diversity that draws so many to Kingston. From a half-dozen local breweries (and counting) to clubs that launched local scions like The Tragically Hip, Sarah Harmer and Dan Akroyd to superstardom, there is an expectation here that a night out will become unforgettable. It could be sipping on one of the MacKinnon Brothers Brewing Company's wildly ambitious, fully local and farm-to-glass beers. Or follow the throngs of Queen's students to the Mansion for a buzzy band. Or catch a local legend playing to an eager hometown audience at the Grand Theatre. And oh those Kingston theatres! Finishing in the top three in the country among small cities, the stages here go a long way toward explaining the pipeline of creativity fostered in the area. There are the intimate indie productions by Theatre Kingston and the Domino, but also newly opened venues or planned spots like the Isabel, designed for Queen's University by

Ottawa-based architects N45 and Oslo's Snøhetta. The Norwegian firm is well known for designing a number of significant buildings worldwide, among them the Library at Alexandria in Egypt.

The city also ranks #1 in Canada in our Shopping subcategory, with all the generic selections you'd expect in far larger cities, but also plenty of fiercely independent boutiques and retailers, ranging from daring jewellers to some of the best-stocked thrift stores you'll find in Canada. Powering Kingston's creativity and commerce is, of course, its proud citizenry. Local talent is very much connected to the city's three largest post-secondary schools, ranking Kingston #2 in our Employment in Education subcategory. Despite the winters, locals are top five nationally for cycling to work. And everyone here benefits from a top five ranking for Health-care Practitioners.

A city like this will only continue to draw new residents—it already ranks #6 among small cities in Canada in our Creative Class subcategory and #1 for Google Search. The aggregate price of a home in Kingston increased 38.1 per cent year-over-year, reaching \$722,100 in the fourth quarter of 2021. The median price of a single-family detached home increased 44.3 per cent to \$780,600 over that same time. According to Royal LePage, Kingston's housing prices have jumped higher than any other city in the country. Any city. Big or small.



A REGATTA OF SAILBOATS
RACE ON LAKE ONTARIO

POPULATION

CITY PROPER 96,206

HIGHLIGHTS



PROMOTION



FAMILY-FRIENDLY
ACTIVITIES

A tourist mecca delivers a waterfall of cultural and civic investment.

It turns out that the honeymoon capital of the world is a pretty sweet place to put down roots and raise a family. Of course the city is and will always be a tourist destination, both for regional families and for Canadaphiles who need to check Clifton Hill and Lundy's Lane off their bucket lists every few years. Not surprisingly, it ranks #1 among small cities in Canada for Family-friendly Activities, #2 for Theatres and #3 for Sights & Landmarks. After two-and-a-half years of pandemic devastation to its vital tourism industry, the city is on the comeback trail, with investments in tourism and community not seen in decades. With many on both sides of the border still tentative about flying, Niagara Falls is positioning itself to once again be the jewel in the North American road trip crown.

New attractions and hotels are opening around the city, with none larger than the Tailrace Tunnel at Niagara Parks Power Station. By day, visitors can explore the preserved interior of the historic power station, transformed with new exhibits and guest amenities, and descend 60-plus metres below the main floor via a glass-enclosed elevator to reach the tailrace tunnel that connects the plant to the Niagara River. At night, CURRENTS, an immersive sound and light experience, brings the enormous century-old tunnel to life through state-of-the-art projection mapping technology.

But the investment isn't all tourist-obsessed. Opening later this summer, the new Niagara Falls Cultural Hub &

4 NIAGARA FALLS ON

BUSTLING NIAGARA FALLS ON A CRISP FALL DAY



Market (also known as Niagara Falls Exchange, or NFX) will become a vibrant cultural and social centre of activity by providing shared spaces where artists, musicians, food vendors, patrons and local businesses can come together and create. Located in the historic Main and Ferry district, it includes a large culture and market hall, café, artist studios and creative workshops surrounded by two multifunctional civic plazas that interconnect the flanking streets. This much-needed public space will feature a farmers' market, public concerts and lectures, and will finally give the city a piazza folk can gravitate to without a wristband or paid ticket.

Talk to most locals, and they're just as likely to rave about the area's urban and natural bounties as they are about the visitor economy. Rivers flow everywhere, and the proximity to a very prominent and prosperous wine region blends a satisfying reward at the end of a long hike—sweet validation of the city's #4 ranking in our Parks & Outdoors subcategory. The Niagara Falls story is being told loud and proud, with the most Instagram hashtags and TripAdvisor reviews of any small Canadian city, ranking #1 in our overall Promotion category. Rest assured that future residents are taking note.

POPULATION

CITY PROPER 123,991

HIGHLIGHTS

1 PEOPLE

3 GOOGLE SEARCH

Canada's Silicon Valley is empowering the future globally. And locally.

Every country claims to have its own Silicon Valley, but when it comes to Canada, Waterloo walks the talk. The region—and more specifically the innovation rocket-launcher that is the University of Waterloo—has produced dozens of globally dominant companies, including BlackBerry and OpenText. More recently, the city has nurtured future high-fliers like ApplyBoard, Vidyard and Auvik Networks, with recent unicorns including Faire and Arctic Wolf, both with major offices in Waterloo and the United States. An astonishing 1,000-plus companies have been founded by UWaterloo grads, and, according to industry trackers, 18 per cent of all founders in Canada come from that school. Is it any wonder then that the city's residents are the smartest in Canada (ranking #1 for Educational Attainment), as well as the tops in our Employment in Educational Pursuits subcategory? Waterloo isn't the only driver of all those education jobs. Nearby Wilfred Laurier University and Conestoga College (consistently rated as one of the best technical colleges in Ontario) keep the city's household income ranked #23 among Canada's small cities, which is an impressive finish in a town full of students, as is the #50 Employment Rate ranking. Waterloo, in fact, leads Canada's small cities in our Young Adults subcategory. This is music to the ears of HR managers at large local employers like Sun Life Financial, Manulife Financial, Sandvine and the universities and colleges, as well as at the city's three well-known think tanks: the Perimeter Institute for

5 WATERLOO ON

Theoretical Physics, the Institute for Quantum Computing and the Centre for International Governance Innovation.

The organization known as Canada's Technology Triangle, a joint economic development initiative that markets the region internationally, has joined other city leaders in spotlighting the livability of the area that transcends tech employment. The region has always had plentiful green spaces (it ranks #16 for Parks & Outdoors) and an ongoing light rail and transit investment that Waterloo (which ranks #7 among small

cities nationally for people who bike to work) continues to embrace and push for. Less reliance on a car means better access to the university town nightlife (ranked #13), which is fuelled by nearby Kitchener's annual Oktoberfest—the largest celebration of its kind outside of Germany and a draw for over 700,000 people (pre-COVID, anyway). Given its penchant for all things Bavarian, it's no wonder that Ontario's craft beer craze got its start here: Brick Brewing (now Waterloo Brewing) was the province's first craft brewer, opening in 1984.



WATERLOO'S CITY CENTRE

POPULATION

CITY PROPER 59,576

HIGHLIGHTS

1 AIR QUALITY (TIE)

1 SELF-EMPLOYED

The gateway into Vancouver's North Shore is as naturally epic as it is coveted globally.

The city with the smallest population in our top 25 has some of the biggest natural attributes of any city—large or small—in Canada. And, increasingly, urban ones, too.

6 NORTH VANCOUVER BC

Start at the urban gateway to the city, in Lower Lonsdale, North Van's downtown—today a magnetic gathering place that has absolutely blossomed over the past decade, with some of Metro Vancouver's most open, accessible and walkable public spaces forged from and woven into a historic and authentic working waterfront. The five-year-old Polygon Gallery—a new incarnation of a 40-year-old mainstay—is the largest non-profit photography gallery in Western Canada, and the recently opened Museum of North Vancouver (or MONOVA) finally gives a home to the region's rich but underreported history, with a much-needed focus on the Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) and Səlilwətaʔ (Tsleil-Waututh) First Nations peoples, stories

and knowledge—as well as on the future ahead.

The scenery is immersive and enveloping as you stand on the public pier jutting out into Burrard Inlet. To the south is one of the best big-city views in Canada, with Vancouver's glassy spires flanked by Stanley Park to the west and the orange cranes of the Port of Vancouver to the east. Wheel around and, past the new residential towers and two hotels, you'll see verdant mountains—snow-capped more often than not—looming to the north.

The proximity of this edge-of-the-wilderness location to the vast built environment cannot be overstated: downtown Vancouver is a mere 15 minutes by one of the most spectacular modes of public transit on the planet—the Seabus. Actually, there are three Seabuses, which sail from first light to midnight and allow commuters who depend on the big city for the #6-ranked Household Income in the country among small cities to avoid the two vehicle bridges that, should there be an accident, turn a 25-minute jaunt into a half-day affair. No wonder North Van commuters rank #4 for cycling to work.

But biking here transcends traffic jams. This is the birthplace of North Shore mountain biking, after all, forged in the 1980s when a group of conservation-minded trail builders were given tools and lumber and left alone in the mountains to build boardwalks, bridges and other rideable terrain. Their work has spawned the global North Shore riding movement, replicated from Dubai to Denver but all rooted here, in a place tied for the best air quality among Canada's top small cities. And also a place where, even if two-wheeled daredevilry isn't your thing, skiing and snowboarding at Grouse Mountain, Seymour or Cypress are also never more than 30 minutes away. No wonder locals rank #1 in our Self-employed subcategory. Who could stick to a 9-to-5 with the great outdoors calling daily?



NORTH VANCOUVER AND THE NORTH SHORE MOUNTAINS

POPULATION

CITY PROPER 193,533

HIGHLIGHTS

1 SAFETY (TIE)

2 RESTAURANTS (TIE)

Small-town charm and safety in a strategic location in the heart of a booming megaregion.

Tucked between the cities of Oakville and Hamilton—and also between the cliffs of the Niagara Escarpment and the shores of Lake Ontario—Burlington carries the elegance and authenticity of each of its neighbours. The city's distinct livability is no secret, considering the recent accolades that have been heaped upon its municipal borders: from "Best Community in Canada" by *Maclean's* in 2019 to topping MoneySense's annual rankings of the best mid-sized cities in Canada. The leading metric in our own most recent favourable ranking of the city is Safety: few spots in Canada can top the serenity of Burlington, which is a bonus, given the many opportunities to be out and about in a place that has some of the most sprawling green spaces of any city in the province (1,436 acres of parkland, to be exact). From Spencer Smith Park's pristine waterfront minutes from downtown to the striking, undulating hiking and biking trails of the Niagara Escarpment, Burlington ranks #19 for Parks & Outdoors. What makes all these public green spaces even more magnetic is the clear and sunny days that so often seem to grace one of Canada's southernmost cities, with the lake effect softening the edges of the sometimes harsh Ontario winters. Burlington ranks #15 in our Weather subcategory. The city's Royal Botanical Gardens are a manifestation of the area's distinct climate and of the local appreciation for stopping to smell the flowers—in this case, more than 180,000 plants representing 2,300 plant species that are an ode to Canada's vast and

7 BURLINGTON ON

BURLINGTON'S VIBRANT WATERFRONT REFLECTING ON LAKE ONTARIO



varied flora. These are the country's largest botanical gardens—designated as a national historic site—and the 27 kilometres of walking trails on the grounds let locals and visitors explore independently.

It's hard to imagine that this bucolic serenity and safety is still technically part of the Greater Toronto Area, with the big city just an hour away by car or via three GO Transit stations. The

wineries and tourist attractions—perfect outings for when friends and family come to visit—are an hour the other direction, in Niagara. But the city is far from a bedroom community. Industry and infrastructure have long been supported and built here, with the recent remodelling of Joseph Brant Hospital, the first in Canada to create a pandemic response unit in 2020, being just the latest example.

POPULATION

CITY PROPER 146,600

HIGHLIGHTS

4 EMPLOYMENT IN EDUCATION

4 INSTAGRAM HASHTAGS

Historic, smart and increasingly coveted, the Royal City is growing quickly.

If you live in the Greater Toronto Area, there's one place you've probably heard described with quiet reverence the likes of which few Southern Ontario towns receive. Those who know speak of the love of the land, its agriculture and the nutritious bounty of its produce, to say nothing about its employment prospects—especially if you're a teacher or academic professional. They speak of Guelph. An hour southwest of Toronto, the city is home to one of the most specialized universities in Canada, where seven colleges conduct leading-edge teaching and research in the physical and life sciences, business, arts, social sciences, and agricultural and veterinary sciences. Guelph has always attracted young, brilliant talent, and today it ranks #13 among Canada's small cities for Young Adults. The citizenry is also well-educated, ranking #12 in Educational Attainment—no surprise, given the scholarly fabric of the community and the ubiquity of the university in its programming, from concerts to placemaking.

But where a decade ago students would finish their degree and leave, today more and more are staying. Or, moving back to settle down in the bucolic, smart and special place they remember from school. The city is among the fastest-growing in Ontario (which means in Canada, too), with a five-year growth rate approaching 10 per cent—and so ranking in the top 20 in the country. Not surprisingly, over that same period house prices have nearly doubled, and even a humble detached

8 GUELPH ON

BASILICA OF OUR LADY IMMACULATE



house these days exceeds \$800,000.

New and long-time residents come for the region, in the middle of some of the best farming country in Ontario and near the stunning Rockwood Conservation Area along the Eramosa River, surrounded by towering limestone cliffs, caves and glacial potholes, one of which is the largest in the world.

But it's the city's distinct urban identity that attracts and keeps people here. A sense of indie and DIY pervades everything from the booming craft beer scene to the United Nations of independent eateries and local festivals, which, finally, mercifully, are coming back after two-and-a-half years of the pandemic silenced the Royal City's gregarious spirit.

Guelph ranks #6 among Canadian small cities in our Sights & Landmarks subcategory, anchored by its regal Victorian-era limestone buildings and the more than 20 churches in or around downtown, none more spectacular than the Basilica of Our Lady Immaculate, opened in 1883 in a Gothic Revival style and one of the finest works of famed architect Joseph Connolly. Framing the built environment is the confluence of the Speed and Eramosa rivers, whose aesthetic magic explains the city's #4 ranking for Instagram Hashtags. That, together with top five Google Search and Google Trends finishes, elevates its overall Promotion category ranking to #5 in the country among small cities.

POPULATION

CITY PROPER 64,812

HIGHLIGHTS

1 CREATIVE CLASS

1 INCOME EQUALITY (TIE)

A small but mighty economic powerhouse belies its historic provincial capital reputation.

Be honest: when you think of the term “Startup Capital of Canada,” you probably don’t think of the tidy capital of New Brunswick, an hour’s drive from the Maine border.

But take a closer look, past the 19th-century streetscape, galleries and glassy Saint John River and you’ll find an economic ambition poised to welcome the urban exodus with talent that ranks #6 in our Educational Attainment subcategory (as well as tops among Canadian small cities in our Creative Class subcategory). Given the high talent level in Fredericton companies, it’s heartening to see the city also tie for tops in our Income Equality subcategory—a key metric for new residents who can rest assured that fair opportunities and compensation exist for employees.

The city’s tireless economic development organization, Ignite Fredericton, is keen to point out that this is a place that values new talent and residents from everywhere, citing that “over 6.8 per cent of the City’s population are immigrants who have moved to Fredericton from more than 50 countries from around the world.” Newcomers are supported by a network of community organizations that arrange language training, settlement services, employment services, business support and family-oriented programs. With that kind of welcome mat, is it any wonder that Fredericton ranks #4 in the country in our Relocation subcategory?

9 FREDERICTON NB

But there’s infrastructure for eager entrepreneurs as well. Local leadership likes to point out that the city was the first in Canada to offer free public Wi-Fi, but this is also a place with low lease costs, corporate tax rates and utility prices. This special blend has authoritative sources like KPMG’s Competitive Alternatives report declaring the city the most cost-competitive for business in Canada and one of the best value jurisdictions in North America. UK-based fDI Intelligence magazine is the source of the “start-up capital of Canada” title, declaring that the advantage “makes it a choice destination for talented immigrants, and the #1 micro-city in North America for business.” That’s some high praise for its economic clout. Fortunately, Fredericton also delivers in livability and as a great place to grow up for the kids of all those ambitious parents.

Let’s start with house prices. According to the Canadian Real

Estate Association, the benchmark for single-family homes was \$294,400 as of April 2022, up 30.6 per cent year-over-year, and the benchmark apartment price was \$244,400, up by virtually the same percentage.

What you get is a walkable, colonial gem, rich in culture (it’s ranked #8 for Museums and #9 for Theatres among Canadian small cities). The street grid radiates out from the banks of the beautiful Saint John, which flows through the centre of the city. A network of over 90 kilometres of wooded paths traces that flow, perfect for cycling, walking, running or cross-country skiing.

Urban investment over the pandemic has been extensive, led by a multi-million-dollar makeover to the Historic Garrison District that will open early next year, complete with a Great Lawn, performance stage and new children’s play area.



THE NEW BRUNSWICK LEGISLATIVE BUILDING

POPULATION

CITY PROPER 101,799

HIGHLIGHTS

3 PLACE

6 HEALTH-CARE PRACTITIONERS

Winds of history cradle this Southern Alberta prairie powerhouse.

Of all Alberta's second cities—the oil and gas engines of industry like Red Deer or Fort Mac, or the pockets of urbanity among natural wonders like Banff, Canmore or Drumheller—none are Wild Rose Country distilled as much as Lethbridge.

Your first peek of the city—two hours south of Calgary through postcard prairie towns and with arid foothills rising into jagged peaks on the west horizon—is from the top of the Oldman River valley and one you'll never forget. The High Level Bridge, iconic in the town and province, rises tall and stark against the valley walls (called coulees) as the river flows slowly below. Sure, there are no towering Rocky Mountains (more on that in a bit) but the distinct, enigmatic and approachable topography fits with Lethbridge like a hand in (ski) glove.

Descend and you'll find a walkable core with plenty of independent boutiques and (at last count) three breweries: 10-year-old, obsessively perfectionist Theoretically Brewing Co., Coulee Brew Co. (home to one of the city's best patios) and newcomer Spectrum Ale Works. Century-old buildings are everywhere downtown, preserving—and in many ways confronting—little-known Canadian and Albertan history. The town's first public library today houses the Southern Alberta Art Gallery (SAAG), and two prominent buildings (the Oliver Block and the old Catholic Charities building) have either been renoed or are in the process of being so.

10 LETHBRIDGE AB

The Nikka Yuko Garden is a beautiful example of a traditional Japanese green space nestled beside the equally beautiful Henderson Lake, but it's also a reminder of the local internment camps that held Japanese Canadians and German POWs during the Second World War. After the war, many stayed and helped build the city, along with the Ukrainian and Dutch immigrants already here, and the more recent Mormon and Hutterite settlers. The fact that the city is located on Treaty 7 territory and the traditional lands of the Niitsitapi (Blackfoot), Nakoda (Stoney) and Tsuut'ina First Nations is also more evident here than elsewhere in Alberta. Year-round Indigenous festivals educate and celebrate this millennia-long legacy. The SAAG also goes by its Blackfoot name, Maansiksikaitsitapiitsinikssin, meaning "the new making of images, related to the telling of our Blackfoot peoples' stories."

The city ranks #3 among small cities in our deep Place category, including

second for number of sunny days.

The chinook winds here are known to occasionally spike a January day up to +15°C. Lethbridge's short commute times (ranked #12 in that subcategory) also give residents a chance to breathe the fourth-best air quality among small Canadian cities. The city also boasts an impressive #6 ranking in our Health-Care Practitioners subcategory, with two hospitals within a 30-minute drive. In a province with a chronic medical services problem, this matters.

But as much as Lethbridge has going for it within city limits, it's what's just a 90-minute drive away that is staggering: Castle Mountain Resort, Waterton Lakes National Park, Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump and Writing-on-Stone Provincial Park—global tourism destinations and UNESCO heritage sites...all within a quick day trip. No wonder the Lethbridge Airport was just renovated in anticipation of a post-pandemic tourism boom. And with house prices averaging \$370,000, likely a new resident boom, too.



DOWNTOWN LETHBRIDGE AT SUNRISE



11 MILTON ONTARIO

POPULATION CITY PROPER 138,495

HIGHLIGHTS

- 1 SAFETY
- 2 PEOPLE

The safest small city in Canada is also one of the fastest growing. Must be all those outdoor pursuits so close to Toronto.

For decades, Milton was a familiar day trip for Toronto-area families seeking elevation gain on the Niagara Escarpment, scenic picnics in the Kelso Conservation Area or a dip in its eponymous lake. The nearby Rattlesnake Point Conservation Area's trail network continues to be one of the Greater Toronto Area's favourite mountain bike and climbing hubs. Winter beckons with gentle ski lessons at Glen Eden or snowshoe solitude among some of Southern Ontario's last remaining old-growth forests. But it's what's in town that ranks Milton #2 in our Population Growth subcategory (the city projects a doubling of the population—to almost 235,000—by 2031). Residents are the fourth-most educated in Canada, and score #4 for both Creative Class and Employment Rate. The impressive performance helped bring Milton to a #2 ranking in our People category, bested only by Waterloo. Milton is also the safest small city in Canada, with locals preferring to apply their excess energy to world-class infrastructure, like the globally recognized Mattamy National Cycling Centre or the other four recreation centres in this 200-year-old small town gem.



12 LÉVIS QUEBEC

POPULATION CITY PROPER 152,058

HIGHLIGHTS

- 4 SAFETY
- 5 INCOME EQUALITY

Safe, affordable and almost European in its stewardship of people and industry, Lévis is building for the future while embracing its past.

Like Brooklyn with its view of Manhattan, the location of Lévis, Quebec, on the far side of the St. Lawrence River, serves up breathtaking panoramas of Canada's most historic city. Of course, that proximity means this quaint (and historic in its own right) suburb also benefits from capital city benefits without the hassles of urban life. Access to Quebec City is less than 25 minutes by road along the Pierre Laporte Bridge, or, more scenically, a 10-minute crossing via hourly ferries. The economic benefits to Lévis are plentiful. The city ranks #11 for Employment Rate among Canada's small cities and #5 for Income Equality. But not all economic activity is reliant on big-city jobs. Lévis is the main urban, business and manufacturing centre of the Chaudière-Appalaches region, and the city has always invested in ensuring its resident (and talent) pool is healthy and happy—starting with the fact that this is the fourth-safest small city in Canada, surrounded by more than 250 parks and green spaces and hundreds of kilometres of bike lanes. The dozen outdoor and indoor pools were further enhanced with the unveiling of a multifunctional aquatic complex in 2019.



13 ST. JOHN'S NEWFOUNDLAND & LABRADOR

POPULATION CITY PROPER 112,063

HIGHLIGHTS

- 2 NIGHTLIFE
- 4 SIGHTS & LANDMARKS

Deep history and urban affordability have Canada's mobile talent looking east.

Few Canadian cities of any size hold a fiddle to this distilled shot of urbanity on the far-flung eastern edge of the country. Newfoundland & Labrador's capital features a storied street grid that weaves up its hillsides, providing spectacular views of one of the world's most coveted natural harbours, in use today as it has been since the early 1500s when the oldest European city in North America became a strategic maritime port. The sense of place hits you instantly. The air is clean (ranked #5), with the country's #6-ranked park spaces surrounding the historic city, from the four-kilometre Quidi Vidi Lake Trail—which sends you out right from downtown and back in time for lunch—to Middle Cove, 15 minutes from town and an ideal perch for bonfire-heated picnics as 10,000-year-old icebergs float by. Back in town, cultural icons like The Rooms power the city to a #5 Museums ranking. Equally culturally vital is the nightlife of St. John's, ranked #2 in the country among small cities, where the highest density of bars per capita of anywhere in North America anchors on George Street. With such magnetism, the region is experiencing the biggest inward migration in half a century, inspired by remote work and rare, affordable urban real estate.



14 ST. ALBERT

ALBERTA

POPULATION CITY PROPER 69,789

HIGHLIGHTS

- 4 PROSPERITY
- 6 AIR QUALITY

Wealthy, healthy and keeping it in Alberta.

For years now, St. Albert has provided a secret key to living in the Alberta Capital Region—aka Edmonton and its surrounding areas. Its location just minutes away from northwest Edmonton (and its Costco) means big-city incomes (St. Albert ranks #3 among small cities for Household Income), relative ease of home ownership (#10) and few of the urban trade-offs (which explains the town’s impressive #3 ranking in our Prevalence of Income Equality subcategory). All told, St. Albert’s #4 Prosperity ranking is the highest in our top 20. But the reliance on Edmonton isn’t absolute and St. Albert is very much its own place—it’s one of the only bedroom communities surrounding Edmonton that has its own hospital, for one. The Sturgeon Community Hospital offers emergency, women’s health, cardiac care, surgery, medicine, pediatrics and rehabilitation care in modern, clean facilities. In a province with a crippling doctor exodus, St. Albert claims more than 2.5 doctors per 1,000 residents—good for #18 among Canada’s small cities. But health and wealth are just a part of the good life here. It has its own provincial park—Lois Hole Centennial (which includes Big Lake, an ecologically significant bird habitat)—and boasts Western Canada’s largest outdoor farmers’ market.



15 MONCTON

NEW BRUNSWICK

POPULATION CITY PROPER 81,140

HIGHLIGHTS

- 1 INCOME EQUALITY
- 2 NIGHTLIFE

An affordable urban playground makes its case as a magnetic hometown.

This year marks the 20th anniversary of Moncton citizens voting to become Canada’s first officially bilingual city. That distinction is a good starting point to understand this thriving, industrious city in the heart of a province packed with wilderness and beaches. Moncton performs well in our lifestyle metrics, tied for #2 in the country for its nightlife, fuelled by the youthful energy of Université de Moncton. No fewer than 30 restaurants are within a five-minute saunter of Moncton’s highly walkable downtown, with new arrivals like Euston Park Social, a shipping container craft beer garden, keeping things fresh and buzzing. The city is also packed with family activities to keep locals and visitors busy, from its #8 ranking in Museums (led by the 130-year-old Musée acadien) to its #9 in Family-friendly Activities (the Magnetic Hill Zoo!). But it’s more than a great lifestyle that’s attracting new residents to Moncton: local boosters like to point out that home ownership here costs just 37 per cent of the national average. Moncton also leads the country in our Income Equality subcategory, and the Conference Board of Canada projects that the city’s GDP will grow at 1.9 per cent through 2024, helping improve its #42-ranked Employment Rate.



16 SHERBROOKE

QUEBEC

POPULATION CITY PROPER 172,713

HIGHLIGHTS

- 4 HEALTH-CARE PRACTITIONERS
- 5 INCOME EQUALITY

French Canadian history and culture less than 30 minutes to Vermont, with ski resorts for days.

The city’s idyllic Eastern Townships location makes it an outdoor playground, with skiing and snowboarding in Mont Bellevue minutes away (complete with epic views of the streets below) and four (four!) larger ski resorts within an hour’s drive. The historic streets here are equally exciting. Between September and May, almost 25 per cent of the city’s inhabitants are students attending the seven post-secondary schools in the region, including the University of Sherbrooke and Bishop’s University. The seventh-ranked city in our Nightlife subcategory is lubricated by icons of revelry that ply their trade with obsessive devotion. Student favourite Le King Hall, for example, has reigned for three decades as the city’s English pub of choice, with dozens of cask beers, 280 cellared beers and 350 spirits. The Boquébère microbrewery keeps it real by pouring right from the cask, as per tradition. The academic infrastructure ranks Sherbrooke #5 in our Educational Attainment subcategory. The city also boasts an impressive #4 ranking for Health-care Practitioners (calculated per capita), meaning that, unlike in many other small cities, professionals are staying put.



17 BARRIE ONTARIO

POPULATION CITY PROPER 153,169

HIGHLIGHTS

- 2 RESTAURANTS
- 5 PROGRAMMING

The gateway to Toronto’s Cottage Country is now a coveted hometown with proximity to the big city.

Being an hour (traffic willing) from the fourth-largest (and fastest-growing) urban mega-region in North America has its benefits. Especially since 2020, when cashing-out Torontonians seeking more room to breathe amidst pandemic anxiety started looking north. What they found, and continue to find, are ample parks (Barrie ranks #12 in our Parks & Outdoors subcategory), Lake Simcoe beaches and, in the case of urban green spaces like Centennial Park, both. Award-winning public squares provide a link between the waterfront and the historic downtown core and, like you’ll find at Meridian Place, bring locals and visitors together for yoga classes and movie nights or to big-name festivals and live entertainment. Of course bigger and wilder country is just an hour away, from the warm waters of Georgian Bay and the Blue Mountain ski resort in Collingwood to the regal wilderness of Muskoka. But it’s what’s in town that has people talking: with the #2-ranked restaurants in the country among small cities, Barrie is a culinary treasure trove, with award-winning breweries like Flying Monkeys and Dunlop Street’s restaurant row anchored by North Country and all manner of Italian joints.



18 KAMLOOPS BRITISH COLUMBIA

POPULATION CITY PROPER 101,603

HIGHLIGHTS

- 5 GOOGLE TRENDS
- 4 WEATHER

An outdoor bounty and plenty of sun rewards the adventurous in BC’s central interior.

What used to be a secret outdoor playground for locals and enlightened tourists is today a thriving hometown of wineries, luxury guest ranches, fly-fishing retreats (more than 100 lakes stocked with rainbow trout lakes are within an hour’s drive) and the most golf courses per capita in Canada. To say nothing of world-class skiing at Sun Peaks Resort. The vast, surreal topography—bulbous mountains, rolling grasslands, hoodoos and the mighty confluence of the South and North Thompson Rivers—has not only driven the #24-ranked Population Growth, but attracted film productions ranging from The X-Files to Lost in Space. Kamloops also ranks #12 in our Relocation subcategory, meaning those who have arrived recently have stayed. But it’s not just for the free-flowing adrenaline. Thompson Rivers University provides a steady flow of new talent to a city that’s firmly established itself as the transportation hub of BC’s central and southern interior regions, serviced by highways, national railways and the #21-ranked Kamloops Airport. The city also performs well in our Health-care Practitioners subcategory, ranking #7 courtesy of the Royal Inland Hospital.



19 TROIS-RIVIÈRES QUEBEC

POPULATION CITY PROPER 141,417

HIGHLIGHTS

- 5 INCOME EQUALITY
- 6 THEATRES

With such affordability and walkable history, you’d be celebrating, too.

With a gorgeous St. Lawrence perch equidistant—90 minutes—from Montréal and Québec City, Trois-Rivières is a stealth cauldron of history and modern francophone culture. North America’s second-oldest French-speaking city is a walkable feast, its historic district revealing parks and green space that reward a bit of stair climbing with epic vistas over both the St. Lawrence and the *trois* Saint-Maurice rivers. With green gems like Harbourfront Park and Le Platon, you’ll be asking yourself how Trois-Rivières is only ranked #32 for Parks & Outdoors. But it’s the three centuries of city building that really captivates visitors and proud locals—along with its modern activation. Places like the Galerie d’art du Parc art exhibition centre are housed in stately colonial architecture, while the Musée des Ursulines calls an old monastery home. Small wonder that the city ranks #13 in the country for Museums and #16 for Sights & Landmarks, made all the more accessible with the new \$45 museums pass. But it’s the city’s #11 finish in our Programming category—from its #19 Restaurants ranking to #6 for Theatres—where the local *joie de vivre* is evident. Living in a place with top five Income Equality (with single-family homes under \$175,000) would cheer anyone up.



20 NANAIMO BRITISH COLUMBIA

POPULATION CITY PROPER 101,987

HIGHLIGHTS

- 1 RELOCATION
- 2 PLACE

An authentic West Coast lifestyle inspires a population boom.

Vancouver Island’s second city (behind Greater Victoria) has always put in the work—zoning convenient giant retail outlets, allowing ferries to dock right in town and providing affordable house prices—while leaving the spotlight to BC’s capital in the south. But a funny thing happened on the way to under-the-radar livability: Nanaimo became a coveted hometown. It’s long had fresh air and wilderness, with the best air quality among Canada’s small cities (tied with North Vancouver), and top five for Parks & Outdoors, with massive city green spaces like the 90-acre Bowen Park right downtown and mystical mountain lakes a short drive, bike or transit ride away. As such, it tops Canada’s small cities in our vital Place category. The city’s population has grown by 35 per cent from 2001, resulting in the #1 spot for Relocation and #13 in Population Growth. New residents can’t help bragging how they can surf and ski in the same weekend just by getting in their car. (Tofino, Canada’s surf capital, is three hours away, while Mount Washington is half that.) The rise of work from home, combined with relatively affordable coastal real estate (compared with Victoria and Vancouver), bodes well. As does the proximity to Vancouver: just a ferry ride away.



21 THUNDER BAY ONTARIO

POPULATION CITY PROPER 110,790

HIGHLIGHTS

- 2 HEALTH-CARE PRACTITIONERS
- 6 PARKS & OUTDOORS

The great outdoors and great health care come together in a northern Ontario special blend.

It may be the largest city in northwestern Ontario, but the fact that Thunder Bay is tucked on the shores of the world’s largest freshwater lake and nestled within boreal forest and the Canadian Shield is all you need to know about this place like no other. Ranked #6 for Parks & Outdoors among small cities in Canada and surrounded by more wilderness than you’d find in some whole countries, it’s easy to see why so many professional hockey players and Olympic athletes are from here. These days, new residents come for the mountain biking, rock climbing, kayaking, angling and sailing within minutes of downtown. But also for the improving infrastructure and social services. For museums that rank #8 in the country. For an airport with connectivity that ranks #18. And, most importantly, for the second-most health-care practitioners per capita among small cities in Canada. There are over 20 primary care clinics, two hospitals and Lakehead University’s Northern Ontario School of Medicine—Canada’s newest medical school. Health care remains the city’s leading employment sector, and that growing talent pool, buoyed by remote work, continues to feast on (still) affordable housing, with single-family homes averaging \$350,000.



22 AIRDRIE ALBERTA

POPULATION CITY PROPER 77,027

HIGHLIGHTS

- 3 PROSPERITY
- 3 POPULATION GROWTH

A bedroom community wakes up to its potential.

In a province known for wild swings in fortune tied to the price of fossil fuels, one small city has been trucking steadily for decades. Just 30 minutes north of Calgary and a few minutes away from its well-connected airport, things are looking sunny in Airdrie (and not just because it ranks in the top five for the most days of sunshine). The city has enjoyed a population increase of 20 per cent since 2016, at a time of supposed Albertan exodus by skilled workers. In fact, Airdrie ranks #3 in the country among small cities in our Population Growth subcategory, and #6 for Relocation (which tracks resident in-migration). Local leadership, well aware that many residents commute to Cowtown for work, are lowering property taxes and eliminating the city’s business tax to coax homegrown innovation. It’s working. Airdrie scores in the top three nationally in our overall Prosperity category, including #2 for Employment Rate and #4 for Household Income. Over the next few years, as more Canadians and immigrants seek housing affordability and job prospects—and with the energy industry ascendant once more—Airdrie’s sub-\$500,000 single-family homes will get attention. As will planned amenities like the new 85,000-square-foot, \$63-million library and community space, expected to open in 2025.



23 SAANICH BRITISH COLUMBIA

POPULATION CITY PROPER 124,639

HIGHLIGHTS

- 2 CYCLE COMMUTERS
- 5 SELF-EMPLOYED

The beat of Vancouver Island’s urban heart is smart, sustainable and self-sufficient.

For such a small metropolitan area (less than 500,000 people), Greater Victoria is comprised of 13 municipalities. Wait, there’s more: three of these have the word “Saanich” in them. For our purposes, let’s focus on the District of Saanich (the most populous of the 13 municipalities) and one of the most coveted hometowns in Canada. Incredibly economically diverse, Saanich is home to luxe shopping (ranked #21 among Canada’s small cities, anchored by Uptown Mall). Self-employed residents rank #5 in Canada. The area just north of downtown Victoria is quickly being built out as a secondary urban core for locals—accessed more easily and without the tourist traffic. It is just part of Saanich’s record capital construction for active transportation projects in 2022. The #2 national ranking among small cities (behind only Victoria) for number of residents who bike to work here is only one sign that sustainability is paramount, stewarded by the academic leadership of both the University of Victoria and both campuses of Camosun College. Both schools drive Saanich’s #11 ranking for Employment in Educational Pursuits, as well as its #8 spot in our Educational Attainment subcategory.



24 AURORA ONTARIO

POPULATION CITY PROPER 63,981

HIGHLIGHTS

- 3 PEOPLE
- 9 HOME OWNERSHIP

Small-town livability and big-time ambition just an hour north of Toronto.

Established in the 1880s as a sawmill and manufacturing centre and later finding its place as an agricultural town, Aurora has always been an understated contributor of materials, food and talent to Toronto. The 170-year-old rail connection to the heart of the big smoke (today serviced by GO every three hours) means Aurora residents are never more than an hour from big-city action (it’s also just an hour by car). But that’s not to say that Aurora (named for the Roman goddess of the dawn), is a staid bedroom community. Sure, it’s safe (ranked #13 nationally) and family-friendly (ranked #4 for residents aged 15 to 29), but the economic aspirations of the city’s founders are stronger than ever. There are more than 2,200 businesses here and Aurora continues to attract major companies, including Magna International, Desjardins and Bulk Barn. The city ranks #12 nationally in our Self-employment subcategory, with 84 per cent of local small businesses employing less than 20 people, according to local economic development numbers.



25 ST. CATHARINES ONTARIO

POPULATION CITY PROPER 141,397

HIGHLIGHTS

- 4 RESTAURANTS
- 10 WEATHER

Urban investment and bountiful green space (and the wines and golf that come with it) in the urban heart of the Niagara region.

For a small city, there’s something about St. Catharines that just feels more sophisticated, more ambitious. It is the largest city in Ontario’s booming Niagara region, and the sixth-largest urban area in Canada’s most populous province, just 90 minutes from Toronto and 30 to Niagara Falls and the US border. The historic downtown (it’s held a farmers’ market since the 1860s) and impressive housing stock can take a lot of the credit. Recent investment have created a nerve centre for events, music and the #4-ranked restaurants among Canada’s small cities, powered by the dozens of award-winning vineyards around town. Anchored by the eight-year-old Meridian Centre (a \$50-million performance venue with 5,000 seats), the FirstOntario Performing Arts Centre and the new Warehouse Concert Hall, this stealth creative hub ranks #8 in Canada in our overall Programming category. All this creativity, foodie culture and some of the province’s most impressive breweries has people who missed out on affordability in Hamilton looking further west. House prices have been climbing rapidly as a result, and more is being built, including a 28-storey condo development that will be the city’s tallest residential building.

Canada's

BEST SMALL CITIES PERFORMANCE BY CATEGORY

CHUTES-DE-LA-CHAUNDIERE IN LEVIS, QUEBEC



RANK	CITY	PROVINCE	PLACE	PRODUCT	PROGRAMMING	PEOPLE	PROSPERITY	PROMOTION
1	Victoria	British Columbia	5	1	1	10	67	2
2	Kelowna	British Columbia	4	7	2	21	28	3
3	Kingston	Ontario	30	2	3	6	69	4
4	Niagara Falls	Ontario	8	30	4	64	64	1
5	Waterloo	Ontario	54	9	16	1	53	7
6	North Vancouver	British Columbia	7	34	38	5	9	11
7	Burlington	Ontario	11	18	7	25	27	9
8	Guelph	Ontario	48	14	6	13	47	5
9	Fredericton	New Brunswick	38	13	26	4	35	26
10	Lethbridge	Alberta	3	16	21	27	39	21
11	Milton	Ontario	14	71	33	2	16	27
12	Lévis	Quebec	20	6	34	39	19	36
13	St. John's	Newfoundland & Labrador	17	11	12	20	71	13
14	St. Albert	Alberta	24	29	60	22	4	48
15	Moncton	New Brunswick	26	26	13	28	40	15
16	Sherbrooke	Quebec	45	12	9	15	59	17
17	Barrie	Ontario	49	40	5	37	46	6
18	Kamloops	British Columbia	15	25	20	31	34	16
19	Trois-Rivières	Quebec	21	3	11	51	57	30
20	Nanaimo	British Columbia	2	37	35	14	60	19
21	Thunder Bay	Ontario	13	10	24	43	68	12
22	Airdrie	Alberta	34	73	59	11	3	55
23	Saanich	British Columbia	36	5	74	8	37	75
24	Aurora	Ontario	71	52	42	3	13	58
25	St. Catharines	Ontario	16	15	8	53	70	20

As leading advisors in tourism, real estate and economic development, Resonance helps places realize their full economic potential. We take a uniquely future-focused approach to research, strategy, branding and marketing, and help our clients understand market trends, assess strengths and weaknesses, engage local communities, create strategies, envision the future and produce branding and communications that influence their audiences.



RESEARCH

Resonance tracks the sentiments of the most influential consumers and travellers today, and our original benchmarking and assessment methodology offers new ways to understand the way people truly perceive and “consume” communities, cities and destinations. This Canada’s Best Small Cities report is an example of our expertise in providing destinations and developers with new tools and perspectives on the key factors that shape a city’s competitive identity, community wellbeing and future prosperity. Our research is used by National Geographic, and Bloomberg has called our city rankings “the most comprehensive study of its kind.”

Consumer Research

Destination Assessments

Performance Benchmarking

Economic Analysis



DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

Resonance has extensive experience creating strategies for destinations from cities to mixed-use urban developments and resort communities. Our destination development strategies are the product of custom benchmarking and consumer research, stakeholder engagement and the crafting of a clear vision for the future. The result is a strategic roadmap that prioritizes the actions required to realize the full economic potential of place.

Real Estate Development

Tourism Development

Economic Development



BRANDING & MARKETING

We approach the branding and marketing of places by thoroughly understanding market trends, uncovering the aspirations of consumers and vividly articulating sense of place in a manner that resonates with target audiences, be they prospective residents, visitors, tenants or investors. Brands are then propelled by marketing strategies that guide the journey of building audiences, credibility and meaningful connection. The goal isn't merely to bring more attention, awareness and people to the brand, but to elevate the quality, value and loyalty of specific audiences in order to achieve targeted objectives.

Brand Strategy

Brand Identity

Advertising

Digital

Activation

Environment



PLACEMAKING

Placemaking is a way to design underused spaces to be more enjoyable and engaging for the communities around them. Resonance placemaking strategies leverage the power of art, culture and experiential retail to help animate public, private and under-utilized spaces, test alternative uses and create gathering places and unique points of interest that draw both locals and visitors.

Art

Culture

Experience



EVERYTHING THE LIGHT TOUCHES, KELOWNA, BC



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