

# Smithsonian

MAGAZINE

## The 15 Best Small Towns to Visit in 2022

Celebrating America's small towns has become one of *Smithsonian* magazine's favorite traditions: an opportunity to get lost in the slower pace of walkable streets, minor league baseball games and waters brimming with wildlife. These communities are gateways to vast national parks, Native American heritage and Underground Railroad history, where qualities such as preservation, pride and perseverance often go hand in hand.

Our picks for the 15 best small towns to visit this year all have a population of 25,000 or under, a high density of cultural offerings and natural beauty, and a compelling reason to visit in 2022. They include Africatown, Alabama, a community just outside of downtown Mobile with a new museum that finally gives its formerly enslaved founders and their descendants a place to tell their stories, and Winslow, Arizona, where people have now been "standin' on the corner" thanks to the Eagles' chart-topping hit for a solid 50 years. It's also said that 80 percent of all Native American jewelry sold worldwide comes from within 100 miles of Gallup, New Mexico, while Bemidji, Minnesota, surprised us with a series of fully immersive "language villages" where both adults and kids can learn Italian, Korean, Danish and more.

This year's 15 small towns inspire our hearts and minds, and encourage us to get out and explore. (All population figures are from the 2020 census.)

# Nautical Small Town: Newport, Rhode Island (pop. 25,163)



Appropriately known as the “City by the Sea,” Newport’s sailing history dates back centuries. The town’s waterfront location on Aquidneck Island, after all, makes it an ideal place for the maritime sport. This May even saw the opening of [the Sailing Museum](#), a long-awaited multimedia experience, with six thematic exhibits to appeal to everyone from experienced sailors to yachting newcomers. One in particular, “Legends of Sailing,” celebrates the many big names of the National Sailing Hall of Fame and the America’s Cup Hall of Fame—both housed in the museum. A world-renowned yachting race, the America’s Cup has been held in Newport’s waters more than a dozen times.

But Newport has much more going for it. Fans of HBO's "The Gilded Age" series, which is currently filming its second season, will recognize some of the splendid late-19th century Newport Mansions that appear in the show, including the Breakers—a 70-room property original constructed for the Vanderbilt family and now offering guided tours—and the Italianate-style Château-sur-Mer, open for self-guided tours on summer weekends. More than two dozen of these summertime homes, which once belonged to America's wealthiest families, have been meticulously preserved with help from the Preservation Society of Newport County. Much of the town's wealth came from Newport being a hub of New England's 18th-century slave trade, and its Bowen's Wharf was where many of the enslaved labored as barrelmakers, carpenters and dockworkers, and arrived and departed for other Atlantic ports. Today, a bronze medallion, embedded with a QR code linking to information on its role in slave history, marks the site. It's part of a larger statewide awareness program launched in 2019 to bring these lesser-known stories to light.

The town is also home to the country's oldest synagogue, its oldest tavern and its oldest-operating lending library, the Redwood Library and Athenaeum, which is celebrating its 275th birthday this year. The Newport Historical Society runs daily walking tours in the summer that cover the town's five centuries of history.

Whether it's crispy chicharrones and street tacos at La Vecina Taqueria, a pop-up restaurant turned brick-and-mortar, or made-from-scratch ramen and saki cocktails at Yagi Noodles, Newport is also home to a wide selection of delicious eats. Dine on fig and prosciutto pizzas and chicken Milanese sandwiches at the new chef-crafted Foodlove Market, or discover local flavors on a guided Newport Foodies Stroll.

It doesn't end there. Summer's other activities include the Newport Jazz Festival, a beloved four-stage music extravaganza with performers like Norah Jones and Digable Planets happening July 29-31; and Thursday tours of Newport's Blue Garden, a stunning display of blue, purple and white hues originally designed by leading landscape firm the Olmsted Bros. (the sons of famed landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted, whose 200th anniversary of his birth is this year), and restored in 2014 using original Olmsted plans, drawings and photographs.