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Best Places to Retire: Bozeman, Montana

By *Alison Go*

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The people of Bozeman, Mont., don't want this story to be published. They want the writers and photographers out, and they want the media to forget that their beautiful, once little town exists. "There's the idea that 'foreigners,' as we call them, are going to destroy old-time Montana," says Connie Lord, a longtime Bozeman resident and native of the state. When Lord returned to Big Sky Country after moving away for work, she discovered a transformed city. "What happened to my sleepy little town?" she wondered.



Partners Connie Lord and Shon Wedde try out salsa steps at Wild Joe's Organic Coffee & Tea House in Bozeman.

(Kevin Horan—Aurora for USN&WR)

Bozeman—an outdoorsy sanctuary tucked within the Rocky Mountains, just 93 miles north of Yellowstone National Park—anchors Montana's fastest-growing county. Bozeman is home to Montana State University, but it has also become a mecca to vacationers and tech-industry workers, along with retirees looking for peace, quiet, culture, community, and the great outdoors.

Winters in Bozeman offer excellent skiing at the nearby glitzy Big Sky Ski Resort and local favorite Bridger Bowl Ski Area. For the warmer months, hiking trails snake through the foothills and canyons in every direction, while the Gallatin, Yellowstone, and Madison rivers, less than an hour's drive away, are teeming with avid fly fishers (fish, too).

A historic downtown boasts cafes and boutiques and serves as the venue for a seemingly endless number of art fairs and music festivals. Opportunities abound for horseback riding, and dude ranches outside town attract tourists and sometimes even locals. The university, the Emerson Center for the Arts and Culture, and the Museum of the Rockies add their own energy, culture, and academic pedigree to the scene.

For Lord, who works at the university as a research technician, life revolves around ballroom dancing

and the active two-step scene in Bozeman. She meets with her partner and other dancers from all over the county several times a week to practice, a time when sprightly senior citizens can mambo with 14-year-olds.

Outsiders have found the area hard to resist, and fewer and fewer do. Bozeman has attracted plenty of wealthy retirees who gravitate toward pricey real estate on the outskirts of the city. And the influx of all those well-heeled seniors has made living in what some have jokingly renamed "Boz Angeles" nearly unaffordable. New, reasonably priced housing does exist—a three-bedroom house could go for \$275,000—but for natives whose wages have not increased to match, the transformation is often startling.

Change at the Bozeman Hot Springs mirrors the town's metamorphosis. The once dingy gathering spot has recently been transformed into a ritzy spa featuring nine pools filled with hot springs water, a fitness center, and a sauna.

Yet as corners of the town are upgraded and reimagined to the chagrin of some locals, Bozeman's core appeal remains the same: a sense of community that's obvious in the city's many groups and meetups dedicated to skiing, hiking, painting, and knitting, to name a few. And as long as newcomers respect Bozeman's natural beauty and small-town feel, they're sure to feel welcome. The locals are a very nice bunch, really. Just don't tell them you're a reporter.

ABOUT BOZEMAN, MONT.

Population: 33,535

Median home price: \$279,300

January average temperatures (high/low): 33/14

July temperatures: 82/52

Source: OnBoard LLC

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