

TRAVEL+ LEISURE

The 15 Best U.S. Small Towns for a Summer Vacation

By Perri Ormont Blumberg, Updated on March 27, 2024

There's just something about a small town in summer that hits a little differently. Perhaps it's the community festivals, the balmy evening strolls along Main Street, or an ice cream truck rumbling through a leafy neighborhood blaring that all too familiar tune. From picturesque lakeside villages and mountain hamlets to idyllic beachfront communities, these destinations offer plenty of outdoor recreation and simple, nostalgic pleasures. Here are the 15 best U.S. small towns for a summer vacation.

McCall, Idaho



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It's important to keep your mind open to the possibilities during a visit to McCall. That's because, in this small town of around 3,100 residents, you'll find Payette Lake, which is reportedly home to Sharlie, a lake monster, described as a creature "...at least 35 feet long, with a dinosaur-type head, pronounced jaw, humps like a camel, and shell-like skin."

Lake monsters aside, McCall is pretty welcoming. Located in the awe-inspiring West Central Mountains of Idaho, this is a place to bring your activewear, as you'll likely spend your days hiking and horseback riding or mountain biking and waterskiing until the sun goes down. Bird-watching, dinner cruises, whitewater rafting, and paddleboarding are all big draws, too. After working up a sweat, kick back at [Salmon River Brewery](#)'s rooftop beer garden, which offers the best view of Payette Lake from downtown. Have dinner at the Clubhouse Restaurant at [Jug Mountain Ranch](#), which has an ideal patio for sunset dining. Then, lay your head at the upmarket [Shore Lodge](#) or [Hotel McCall](#), both of which will keep you safe from lake monsters all night long.