



REGION
Midwest

TOWN
IOWA CITY

STATE
{iowa}

{by the numbers}

POPULATION 62,887	AVERAGE COMMUTE 18 minutes	MEDIAN AGE 25	MEDIAN INCOME \$44,000	MEDIAN HOME PRICE \$174,000
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BIGGEST EMPLOYERS University of Iowa (17,993), University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics (7,683), American College Testing Program (1,426)	TELLING STATISTIC Iowa City's 11-block downtown is home to 28 bars
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Local author Thisbe Nissen at Iowa City's Englert Theatre

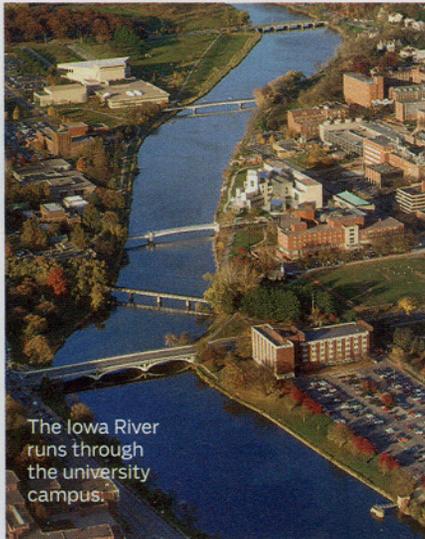
WHEN THE PRESIDENTIAL hopefuls flock to Iowa City this fall, they'll find more than political rallies. Surrounded by hills and bisected by the Iowa River, the liberal college town is or has been home to notable writers like 1978 Pulitzer Prize winner James Alan McPherson and the late Kurt Vonnegut, who penned part of the seminal *Slaughterhouse-Five* here. The University of Iowa's nearly 30,000 students keep this oak-lined Pleasantville real, with six yoga studios, the famed Prairie Lights independent bookstore, and everything from Ethiopian cafés to grilled-cheese stands. Developer Marc Moen is giving the town's squat red-brick buildings an injection of minimalism with his latest creation, Plaza Towers, 14-story glass high-rises occupied by businesses, hotel rooms, and loft condos. The town's buzzword is "alternative energy," and investors are pouring in millions

to build ethanol refineries across Iowa in hopes of making the corn-fed Midwest a kind of sustainable Middle East. Athletes pride themselves on their ingenuity: Climbers pilgrimage northwest to Cedar Falls in the winter to ascend ice-covered grain silos, and mountain bikers have built singletrack networks through prairie lands in 200-acre Sugar Bottom Recreation Area. That wins our vote.

THE PERFECT {48 hours}

From subscriber Aaron Howard, 31, a security analyst for the University of Iowa: Start with a trail run through Hickory Hill Park, then chow on sweet-potato cakes at the Hamburg Inn (hamburginn.com). Grab trail mix at the New Pioneer Co-Op (newpi.com), then drive to Pictured Rocks to climb Bird in Hand, a 5.11b route on a limestone cliff

best towns 2007



The Iowa River runs through the university campus.

along the sleepy Maquoketa River. Head back to town for tapas and sangria at the eclectic Devotay (devotay.net). Early the next day, have French toast at Lou Henri (319-351-3637), then gear up at World of Bikes (worldofbikes.com) for an 11-mile mountain-bike ride in the Sugar Bottom Recreation Area. After refueling at Oasis Falafel (oasisfalafel.com), take a kayak on Lake MacBride (rent from Lake

{YOU ARE HERE}

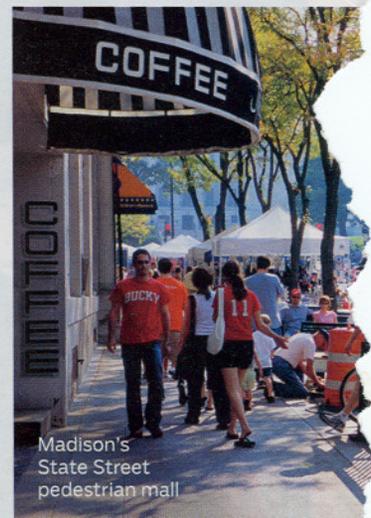
Some 40 percent of *Outside's* nearly 600,000 domestic subscribers live in these 15 cities and their metro areas:

1. **New York:** 31,127 subscribers (1 in 241 households)
2. **Los Angeles:** 27,867 (1 in 196)
3. **Denver:** 20,992 (1 in 68)
4. **San Francisco-Oakland-San Jose:** 21,428 (1 in 117)
5. **Chicago:** 20,539 (1 in 167)
6. **Boston:** 15,618 (1 in 154)
7. **Seattle-Tacoma:** 15,700 (1 in 110)
8. **Philadelphia:** 15,927 (1 in 182)
9. **Washington, D.C.:** 15,714 (1 in 142)
10. **Minneapolis-St. Paul:** 14,097 (1 in 116)
11. **Atlanta:** 9,880 (1 in 205)
12. **Dallas-Fort Worth:** 9,213 (1 in 244)
13. **Detroit:** 8,668 (1 in 223)
14. **Sacramento-Stockton-Modesto:** 8,298 (1 in 155)
15. **Portland, OR:** 8,350 (1 in 132)

MacBride Boat Rental; lakemacbrideboatrental.com), then check out an indie band at the Picador (thepicador.com). —CHRISTINA ERB

READERS' CHOICE

{decorah, ia}
"One of the Midwest's outdoor-sports meccas."
Jason Heaton



Madison's State Street pedestrian mall

SUPERSIZE ME {madison, wi}

pop. 221,551
Want more urbanity? Head across the Mississippi River to Madison. The city has more than 100 miles of on- and off-road bike lanes, vast glacial lakes, and the Midwest's most popular climbing spot, Devil's Lake State Park, just 45 minutes away. Madison's progressive flavor—with its thriving farmers' market, Laotian restaurants, and more than a dozen fair-trade-coffee shops—is like a small-town Iowa City with a more metro vibe.

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