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Colorado named third most desirable state in U.S. for 2026



Sara B. Hansen

Colorado ranked No. 3 among the most desirable states to live in for 2026, according to a Clever Real Estate survey of 1,000 Americans—behind only Florida and California. Denver was named the nation's second most desirable city and earned the title of prettiest city overall.

Denver came within a hair of dethroning Nashville for the top overall city ranking, falling short by just 0.4 percentage points. The Mile High City's real strength, though, is its scenery: Americans crowned it the most beautiful city in the U.S., edging out Seattle by a mere 0.3 points.

The recognition isn't just about the mountains on the horizon — Denver's charm comes from walkable, historic neighborhoods, extensive public art, and weather that outperforms expectations.

According to the report, Denver gets more sunny days than Miami each year, giving residents plenty of chances to enjoy the scenery that earned the city its top ranking.

States With the Best Scenery

1 Hawaii	6 Montana
2 Alaska	7 Washington
3 Colorado	8 Vermont
4 California	9 Florida
5 Wyoming	10 Utah

Most Desirable Cities

1 Nashville, TN	6 Tampa, FL
2 Denver, CO	7 Raleigh, NC
3 San Diego, CA	8 Austin, TX
4 Charlotte, NC	9 Boston, MA
5 Seattle, WA	10 Orlando, FL

Denver also cracked the top 10 for having some of the nicest residents in the country, a category otherwise dominated by Southern cities like Charlotte and Nashville.

Colorado Springs, meanwhile, is emerging as a serious contender among the nation's midsize cities. It finished second on that list, trailing only Honolulu — and by just one percentage point.

Given that Honolulu's appeal has been fading as travelers balk at Hawaii's cost of living, Colorado Springs is positioning itself as an increasingly attractive alternative, offering much of the natural beauty associated with the West at a fraction of the price.

Colorado's broader appeal fits a pattern identified in the survey: six of the 10 most desirable midsize cities are in the West, offering many of the same draws as major hubs like Denver, Phoenix, and Seattle, but with more space and lower costs.

Colorado didn't just rank well for looks. The state ranked third nationally for best scenery, behind only Hawaii and Alaska, and fourth for being "most underrated"—a category topped by Wyoming, followed by Vermont and Tennessee.

Cities With the Nicest Residents

1 Charlotte, NC	6 Raleigh, NC
2 Nashville, TN	7 Tampa, FL
3 Austin, TX	8 San Diego, CA
4 Seattle, WA	9 Atlanta, GA
5 San Antonio, TX	10 Denver, CO

That underrated status suggests many Americans still associate Colorado primarily with mountains and skiing, without fully appreciating its broader lifestyle appeal.

Beyond its scenic outdoor spaces, Colorado offers year-round outdoor recreation like cycling, hiking, and paddleboarding, vibrant local food scenes in cities such as Denver and Boulder, and a robust calendar of cultural events and music festivals.

Residents enjoy everything from award-winning craft breweries and diverse dining options to live theater and art walks, making Colorado's lifestyle as dynamic as its landscapes.

Most Desirable States

1 Florida	6 North Carolina
2 California	7 Tennessee
3 Colorado	8 Arizona*
4 Texas	9 South Carolina*
5 Hawaii	10 Washington

*Duplication of list

Prettiest Cities

1 Denver, CO	6 Boston, MA
2 Seattle, WA	7 Nashville, TN
3 Charlotte, NC	8 Salt Lake City, UT
4 San Francisco, CA	9 Austin, TX
5 San Diego, CA	10 Raleigh, NC

The findings show that Americans nationally are prioritizing safety and affordability over the good weather that once topped their wish lists.

Denver and Colorado Springs both earned mid-range rankings for low crime rates among large and midsize cities, respectively, according to the survey.

While the state did not make the top tier for lowest crime, both cities are seen as safer than many major coastal counterparts, contributing to their overall desirability.

Sara B. Hansen has been an editor and writer for more than 20 years. Her professional background includes editing positions at The Denver Post, The Des Moines Register, The Fort Collins Coloradoan, and At Home with Century 21. She's also the founder and editor of DogsBestLife.com and the author of "The Complete Guide to Cocker Spaniels."