

The 10 Best Places to Live Now

Carbondale, Colorado



Credit: Photograph by Morgan Rachel Levy

The Roaring Fork Valley is Colorado's latest too-good-to-be-true Rocky Mountain oasis, a 50-mile-long sagebrush basin bookended by the glitz of Aspen above and the decidedly blue-collar enclave of Glenwood Springs, on the banks of the Colorado River. In the middle, both geographically and culturally, sits Carbondale. The town's just-right location has helped it avoid the over-the-top mansions and development fights seen in Aspen, and has kept home prices on a reasonable-enough level to make buying one possible without an IPO on your résumé. Working ranches and farms dot the landscape, blue-ribbon trout streams course through the valley, and dramatic peaks hover above a Main Street with a down-home attitude more common in an Iowa farm town than a Colorado ski destination. "There's a real sense of community here," says award-winning brewer Chase Engel, who started Carbondale's [Roaring Fork Beer Company](#) in 2013. "Everyone is from someplace else, so you make friends fast."

That welcoming spirit derives, in part, from a populace that is almost single-minded when it comes to its downtime passion: outdoor recreation. And Carbondale has it all, including mountain biking on Red Hill, just outside of town, weekday trail runs on the high-country plateau of 12,966-foot Mount Sopris, which dominates the town's skyline, weekend rafting trips on the Class IV Roaring Fork River, and skiing at one of the four mountains that make up Aspen/Snowmass. Lunchtime bike rides on Red Hill are a regular part of the workday, says Ian Anderson, a partner at [Backbone Media](#), a Carbondale-based PR firm. "We still work hard, but no one who's living here has the goal of climbing a corporate ladder," he says.

Residents primarily work in Aspen or Glenwood Springs, but there is an increasing number of white-collar outfits like Backbone opening shop directly in town, as have a half-dozen farm-to-table restaurants. Local chef Mark Fischer, the talent behind [Town](#) and [Phat Thai](#) in Carbondale, has been in the valley for more than 20 years now, and he's watched Carbondale come into its own. "A lot of us ended up here because of Aspen, but made a life down valley in Carbondale over the years," he says. "It's where people who are going to put down roots end up."

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