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Best Cities 2010: Boulder, Colo.

Science meets scenery in our number-four pick for Best Cities for the Next Decade.

By Marc A. Wojno

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It's a city of crunchy environmentalists, early adopters and entrepreneurs, meandering bike paths, public-transit buses named Dash, Stampede and Bolt, and restaurants powered by wind energy. You'll find scores of art galleries, performing-arts venues, chic boutiques -- even a Tesla Motors electric-car dealership. Boulder is a wealthy, intellectual hot spot where environmental and scientific ideas blossom into businesses.

Three economic drivers power Boulder: the University of Colorado, federal research laboratories and more than 6,600 small businesses and corporations, all woven into an entrepreneurial fabric. For example, Ball

Aerospace, responsible for instrumentation and repairs for the Hubble Space Telescope, develops businesses with the university's aerospace engineering sciences program and federally funded labs, including the National Institute of Standards and Technology. Green Garage, a small auto-services shop that turns old cars into hybrids, works with the National Renewable Energy Laboratory and the university's Renewable and Sustainable Energy Institute.

Sun Microsystems, Xcel Energy and Siemens have set up offices to tap into this type of collaboration. IBM, which came to Boulder in 1965, recently opened a 110,000-square-foot, energy-efficient data center. And the plan is to add even more data-center space in Boulder, says James Butcher, manager of data center hardware planning at IBM, which recently added 500 jobs in the city.

The solar industry is also a major driver of Boulder's economy. Namasté Solar, which installs solar systems atop houses and offices, is emblematic of Boulder's newer, employee-owned small businesses, which have experienced a meteoric rise. "We're just over five years old, and we've grown from three people to about 70," says CEO Blake Jones.

But Boulder is more than just aerospace, data centers and solar panels. The city is a mecca for those seeking healthy, active lifestyles. Outdoors enthusiasts can grab a lunch-hour workout on the city's 150

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miles of hiking and biking trails located throughout the 45,000 acres of open-space land surrounding the city. This undeveloped land, purchased by the city over the past several decades, underscores Boulder's commitment to preserving the environment.

People in Boulder also know how to eat well, buying locally grown and organic produce at Boulder's many farmer's markets. Organic-themed companies based in Boulder include Celestial Seasonings, Silk Soymilk and Pangea Organics.

Boulder is not without its issues. Housing prices are steep -- the median price is \$530,000, which forces many to look outside the city for affordable housing, venturing as far south as Denver, 30 miles away. "The big challenge for us is how we'll manage growth and maintain our quality of life without seeing our housing prices shoot through the roof," says David Driskell, executive director of community planning and sustainability for the city.

[VIDEO: Take a Guided Tour of Boulder](#)



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