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## Best Value Cities 2011: 4. Colorado Springs, Colo.

*Smart people flock to this city with a diverse economy and spectacular setting.*

By Kathy Kristof

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Like so many Colorado Springs residents, Hayes Nash came for a visit but returned to stay. This burgeoning Western town is filled with transplants drawn by spectacular outdoor beauty, 300 days of sunshine a year, a relatively low cost of living and a vibrant business community that finds little conflict between economy and ecology. Now an eight-year native, Nash says that the cost of living is affordable here. That's especially true, he says, "when you compare Colorado Springs with other places that have as much to offer. Besides, this place has a happy vibe."

### [VIDEO: Take a virtual walking tour of Colorado Springs.](#)

Many residents first landed in town because they were members of the military or attended school here. The city is home to five military bases, which employ 10% of the workforce, and more than a dozen colleges.

To keep employment rising, the city woos companies with tax incentives and its highly educated workforce (nearly 36% of residents are college grads, compared with 28% nationwide).

Colorado Springs is home to dozens of national employers, including Hewlett-Packard, T-Mobile and Progressive Insurance. Until recently, Colorado Springs could brag that its unemployment rate trended at least one percentage point below the national average. The rate recently bumped up to 9.1%, mirroring the nationwide figure. But Mike Kazmierski, president of the Regional Economic Development Corp., believes that will be a short-lived blip. Several major corporations have promised to add staff and facilities in the coming months, he says. "Those numbers go up and down."

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## Why It's Affordable

Bikes and tennis shoes aren't free, of course, but many of the activities and attractions in Colorado Springs are, starting with the spectacular Garden of the Gods -- a 1,367-acre park filled with geologic wonders -- and moving on to the city-sponsored Pioneers Museum. Colorado Springs has 150 parks and 260 miles of trails. Camping, fly-fishing and biking are favorite activities. If you're really energetic, you can hike Pikes Peak, 14,115 feet above sea level. Rents and real estate are affordable, too. The average home sells for less than \$230,000; monthly rent on a two-bedroom apartment is less than \$800. Utilities run about \$222 per month for everything -- electricity, water and gas, and trash collection.

## Why It's Fun

Colorado Springs is all about the outdoors. The city is laced with biking and hiking trails and offers everything from camping and cross-country skiing to fly-fishing and hunting. You're as likely to see residents sprinting off on a mountain bike at lunch hour as eating. The atmosphere is laid-back and friendly. "If you notice somebody just walking their dogs, they'll usually stop to say hi," says Jeff Petersen, who was taking a break from house-hunting in early June after landing a job in Pueblo, some 45 miles south. Why move to Colorado Springs instead of Pueblo? "We love the outdoor lifestyle," says Jeff's wife, Esther. "And it's a great place to raise kids."

Need a little culture? TheatreWorks at the University of Colorado offers Shakespeare plays. Music? Stroll down Tejon Street and you'll find live bands at several local bars and clubs. Restaurants include many only-in-the-Springseateries, such as the charming cottage turned- hangout called Shugas, where you can get a delicious sandwich or a bowl of Brazilian coconut soup for \$7 to \$9. Even if you add a one-of-a-kind martini, you're still out less than \$20. Like the offbeat? If you're in town in October, you can join the Emma Crawford Coffin Races. There's a Fruitcake Toss in January.

## [SLIDE SHOW: See the Top 10 Best Value Cities](#)

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