As a grad student, you’ll need plenty of opportunity to relax and recharge your batteries, which is why we decided to highlight the institutions and locations in this list of the 30 most beautiful places to go to grad school. These schools and their gorgeous settings have been chosen based on a number of factors that contribute to the overall beauty and enjoyment of the campus and its surrounding area.

**Selection Process**

Points were given to each university based on the beauty of the surrounding natural environment, including access to natural areas and activities as well as notable natural features and climate. We also gave points based on the beauty of the built environment and evidence of awards related to historic preservation or architectural beauty.
30. Princeton University, Princeton, NJ

Built Environment: 8/10
Awards: 1
Other: 2
Total: 15.5/20

An Ivy League research facility with roots that go back to the late 1700s, Princeton University Graduate School in New Jersey was formally established in 1896. The campus itself deserves points for being named one of Travel + Leisure’s 2011 Most Beautiful College Campuses, and its close proximity to New York City and Philadelphia make it a favorite for those seeking natural beauty within close proximity to a thriving metropolis. Natural areas including Mercer County Park and historic sites like the Morven Museum and Garden contribute to the campus’ stunning natural setting, and a number of the town’s historic sites date back to the late 1600s. Rich in history and dedicated to sustainability initiative campus wide, Princeton University wins points for its tree lined streets and beautifully maintained historic architecture.
29. University of Colorado, Boulder

Located at the base of the Rocky Mountains and set against a backdrop of the stunning Flatiron rock formations, the University of Colorado at Boulder was established in 1876. With a dry, mostly sunny climate and nearly 160 miles of biking and hiking paths and trails, CU Boulder wins points for its location near more than 160,000 acres of open spaces as well as its 2008 ranking as the Top Green University in the Nation by Sierra Magazine. With ten historic districts and over 1300 designated historic properties, Boulder also gains points for having a well preserved built environment. The local farmer’s market runs from April through October near the popular Pearl Street Mall, and gives CU Boulder an extra point for student enjoyment.
28. Harvard University Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, Cambridge, MA

Website

![Image Source](image-source)

**Natural Environment**: 3/10  
**Built Environment**: 9/10  
**Awards**: 1  
**Other**: 3  
**Total**: 16/20

Rich in US history, Cambridge, MA was originally settled in 1630 and incorporated in 1636. Cobblestone streets and centuries-old buildings still stand alongside contemporary giants, and historic markers and points of interest greet visitors at every turn. The Harvard University graduate School of Arts and Sciences is one of the best in the nation, and it sits along the Charles River, across from Boston’s bustling downtown. With only a few green spaces, including Harvard Yard and MIT’s Great Lawn, the beauty of the historic built environment makes up for the city’s lack of natural open spaces. Cambridge is a place for graduate students to continue their education in a top rated university, seated within a well-preserved historic city.
27. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Website

Natural Environment: 6/10
Built Environment: 6/10
Awards: 1
Other: 3
Total: 16/20

Bustling with history, art and gourmet food, Chapel Hill, NC is located just southwest of Durham and is the home of the University of North Carolina. Founded in 1793, Chapel Hill receives accolades for its numerous historic buildings, exciting walking tours, and its warm climate. Graduate programs range in scope from studio art to chemistry and environmental science, and the historic campus houses the Coker Arboretum within the North Carolina Botanical Garden. UNC Chapel Hill also wins points for its sustainability initiatives, and all new building projects on campus are required to meet LEED Silver certification.
Pristine beaches and year 'round sunshine make Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles one of the nation’s most desirable places to live and visit. Overlooking Marina Del Rey and Playa Del Rey, the Loyola Marymount University wins points for its sunny climate and its location to many of greater Los Angeles’ favorite cultural gems like The Getty Museum and the Ballona Wetlands Ecological Reserve. Swimming, surfing and sunbathing are part of what make this university great, and it’s just a quick drive from Joshua Tree National Park and Disneyland.
25. Northern Arizona University, Flagstaff, AZ

**Website**

**Natural Environment**: 9/10  
**Built Environment**: 5/10  
**Awards**: 2  
**Other**: 1  
**Total**: 17/20

With its dry, semi-continental climate, numerous opportunities for outdoor enjoyment, and bustling nightlife, Flagstaff, AZ retains its small-town feel in the midst of the world’s largest ponderosa pine forest. Flagstaff’s Northern Arizona University wins points for its nearness to Grand Canyon National Park and the Colorado River, as well as its bicycle-friendly layout and its extensive trail system, the Flagstaff Urban Trail System. The Arboretum at Flagstaff showcases nearly 750 species of plants and the historically preserved Elden Pueblo Heritage Site offers a window into the area’s distant past. Northern Arizona University also receives accolades for its exciting nightlife including the Twin Arrows Casino Resort and the Flagstaff Symphony Orchestra.
Located on Lake Champlain just 45 miles south of the US/Canadian border, Burlington’s downtown waterfront offers 900 feet of shoreline, a boardwalk, and numerous sitting areas with stunning lakeside views. The University of Vermont Graduate College provides a unique interdisciplinary approach to education, and wins points for its dedication to environmental sciences and ecological programs. The city also has a bustling nightlife with famous musicians including James Kochalka and Phish to name a few. Burlington’s historic brick buildings and preservation program includes the famous Fletcher Free Library, which is on the National Register of Historic Places and is the state’s largest library of its kind.
23. University of Texas at Austin

With hot summers and mild winters, Austin is located in central Texas, just northwest of Houston and south of Dallas/Fort Worth. Known as the Live Music Capital of the World, Austin is an excellent destination for those seeking both indoor and outdoor music activities year ’round. The city gains points for its well-preserved historic districts like the Clarksville Historic District, bicycle friendly streets, and the warm climate and location along the Colorado River add to Austin’s small town charm. Austin boasts 184 properties on the National Register of Historic Places, and the Landmarks Public Art Program brings contemporary and modern art masterpieces to the UT campus. Graduate areas of study at UT Austin include architecture, business and pharmacy studies.
For those in search of a big, bold urban graduate experience, New York University in New York’s trendy and historically rich Greenwich Village offers opportunity and scholarship in a thriving multicultural setting. The world-renowned university was established in 1831 and is home to nearly 450 student organizations and 35 Nobel Prize winners stand among its faculty and alumni. With large skyscrapers towering overhead, restaurants on every corner, and enough nightlife to keep you up all year long, what this Lower Manhattan institution lacks in natural beauty, it makes up for in its stunning, historically significant built environment.
21. University of Washington, Seattle

Natural Environment: 7/10
Built Environment: 7/10
Awards: 1
Other: 2
Total: 17/20

What Seattle lacks in weather, it certainly makes up for in terms of culture, natural beauty and environmental initiatives. The University of Washington, Seattle is known as a Public Ivy and wins points for its excellent reputation as a science and medical school and for its numerous faculty awards including six Nobel Prize laureates. Located along Puget Sound and minutes from the San Juan Islands, the city has an oceanic climate with wet winters and mostly dry summers. Culturally, Seattle is rich in music, theater and the arts and is home to the Experience Music Project and the Seattle Art Museum, among others. Rated by WalkScore as the 6th most walkable city out of 50 in the United States, Seattle is also one of the most progressive cities for sustainable development. It also boasts some of the nation’s best coffee, a graduate school essential.
20. Brown University, Providence, RI

With its Colonial-era streets, unique shops and thriving arts scene, Providence, RI is home to Brown University. One of the country’s oldest cities, Providence sits along the Providence River and Narragansett Bay, and was originally a thriving textile and port city upon its founding. Brown University receives points for its stunning campus architecture and the university’s College Hill District has a vast collection of fully restored 17th and 18th century homes. Brown University also shares a degree program with the Rhode Island School of Design, one of the nation’s top art schools. Providence is filled with New England history and charm and is just a short drive from Boston and New York City.
19. University of Notre Dame, South Bend, IN

Recently named one of the most beautiful college campuses in the United States by Travel+Leisure, the University of Notre Dame is composed of original French Revival style buildings alongside newer construction projects with LEED certifications. The university gains points for its stunning Basilica of the Sacred Heart and its proximity to the St. Joseph River. South Bend is steeped in the history of the American Industrial Revolution and pays homage to its past with the Studebaker National Museum and the Northern Indiana Center for History. The University of Notre Dame’s position as a leader in sustainable development wins it additional points, as do its warm sunny summers and beautiful, snowy winters.
18. The University of Utah, Salt Lake City, UT

Natural Environment: 8.5/10  
Built Environment: 5/10  
Awards: 1  
Other: 4  
Total: 18.5/20

With five national parks and numerous opportunities for year round outdoor recreation, Salt Lake City, Utah is located within one of the country’s most beautiful states. From pharmacy studies to music and engineering, the University of Utah gains points for its wide variety of graduate programs and for its close proximity to natural beauty. The city itself sits along the base of the Wasatch and Oquirrh mountain ranges and borders the Great Salt Lake. Known for its semi-arid climate with dry, warm summers and cool, wet winters, Salt Lake City has a rich history and diversity that extends far beyond its well-known religious heritage. Salt Lake City also gains accolades for having 336 properties and districts on the National Register of Historic Places.
17. University of North Carolina at Asheville

Website

Natural Environment: 8.5/10
Built Environment: 8/10
Awards: 1
Other: 1
Total: 18.5/20

Founded in 1927, the University of North Carolina at Asheville is located between the Great Smokey Mountains and the Blue Ridge Mountains at the junction of the Swannanoa River and the French Broad River. Known for its lively music scene and access to some of the country’s most beautiful wilderness areas, Asheville is steeped in history and was once the preeminent destination for America’s elite. Historic buildings dot the built landscape and include the Biltmore House, built by George Vanderbilt and the Thomas Wolfe Memorial. Rich in history, Asheville is a natural beauty, and the city’s humid, subtropical climate makes it a pleasant place to enjoy live music outdoors year round.
16. University of California, San Diego

Website

**Natural Environment**: 8/10  
**Built Environment**: 6.5/10  
**Awards**: 2  
**Other**: 2  
**Total**: 18.5/20

One of the nation’s top public research universities, UC San Diego is located in the affluent seaside neighborhood of La Jolla, California, just north of downtown San Diego. The warm climate and near 550 student organizations, make the UC San Diego and ideal graduate school for those looking for public ivy status coupled with stunning natural beauty. Shops and boutiques line the streets of San Diego and the area wins extra points for its location along the coast near the Torrey Pines State Reserve, 2,000 acres of wild coastline with over 8 miles of trails for outdoor enjoyment year round. The area is also a popular destination for marine biologists, and the school itself is frequently located at the top of US News and World Report’s Top Graduate Schools list.
Lush, tree-lined streets and charming brick buildings line the streets of Orono, Maine, the home of the University of Maine. Established in 1865, with over 70 areas of graduate study, the University of Maine sits at the confluence of the Stillwater River and the Penobscot River. Winning points for its pristine natural setting, Orono is just north of Bangor and Acadia National Park, and southwest of Sunkhaze Meadows National Wildlife Refuge. Orono’s small town charm and multiple outdoor recreation areas make it an exciting place to focus, study and enjoy the natural wonders of one of New England’s most beautiful states.
14. Dartmouth College, Hanover, NH

Website

Image Source

Natural Environment: 8/10
Built Environment: 8/10
Awards: 1
Other: 2
Total: 19/20

An extensive trail system for hiking, biking and snowmobiling are just part of what make Hanover, NH and Dartmouth College one of the nation’s most beautiful college campuses. Located along the Connecticut River, Dartmouth has a long history that dates back nearly 240 years. The Ivy League’s smallest university, Dartmouth wins points for its location near Lake Champlain, Montreal, and the White Mountain National Forest. Rural and untouched land surrounds the campus, and an extensive trail system runs throughout Hanover and along the river. Many of the buildings onsite date to the early 19th century, and the college recently received an A- rating from the Sustainable Endowments Institute for its environmentally conscientious campus initiatives.
Located south of San Francisco and southwest of Palo Alto, Stanford University is one of the most prestigious private research institutions in the country. Established in 1891, Stanford receives points for its warm, dry climate and its 650 student organizations. The campus also boasts the beautiful Arizona Cactus Garden, the Frank Lloyd Wright Hanna-Honeycomb House and the Stanford University Arboretum. The Stanford University community is the home of 21 Nobel Prize laureates and 5 Pulitzer Prize winners. Featuring proximity to San Francisco Bay and the Pacific Ocean, Stanford is also near the Rancho San Antonio Open Space Preserve, which offers 24 miles of hiking trails.
12. CalPoly, San Luis Obispo

Website

Image Source

**Natural Environment:** 8.5/10  
**Built Environment:** 7/10  
**Awards:** 2  
**Other:** 2  
**Total:** 19.5/20

Midway between Los Angeles and San Francisco sits CalPoly, San Luis Obispo. Known as the “Happiest Place in North America,” and located just eleven miles west of the California coast, CalPoly, San Luis Obispo receives points for its pleasant Mediterranean climate and its location just west of the Santa Lucia Mountains. Recently SaveOnEnergy.com named the San Luis Obispo Farmer’s Market the Top Farmer’s Market, and the city’s historic buildings include the Carnegie Library (the current home of the San Luis Obispo Historical Museum) as well as one of Frank Lloyd Wright’s rare commercial buildings, the Kundert Medical Clinic. CalPoy, San Luis Obispo also wins kudos for the Morro Street Bicycle Boulevard, a street dedicated primarily to bicycle traffic.
Near Bellingham Bay and nestled in the foothills of Mt. Baker, Western Washington University offers graduate education in a number of fields including the arts, sciences and teaching. The city of Bellingham has a rainy, oceanic climate and is within short distance to Vancouver, British Columbia and Seattle. Winning points for its lush green foliage and winter sports, the city also boasts a stellar farmer’s market that runs from April through December. Bellingham’s famous historic district, Fairhaven is the home of the Fairhaven Carnegie Library, founded in 1904 by Andrew Carnegie. The city’s Amtrak Cascade line runs regular routes to Seattle, Portland and Vancouver.
10. University of Texas, San Antonio

Website

Natural Environment: 7/10
Built Environment: 8/10
Awards: 1
Other: 3
Total: 19/20

A warm subtropical climate with an exciting nightlife makes the University of Texas, San Antonio an excellent choice for those looking to expand their education in a contemporary city with deep historic roots. Home to The Alamo and the popular Riverwalk, UT San Antonio was recently awarded the Carnegie Foundation Elective Community Engagement Classification for community service. Near to the Japanese Tea Gardens, the San Antonio Missions National Park and the Natural Bridge Caverns, UT San Antonio wins big points for its historic preservation efforts, its location on the San Antonio River, and its numerous outdoor activities that include music, hiking and exploring.
9. University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA

Website

Natural Environment: 7/10
Built Environment: 10/10
Awards: 2
Other: 1
Total: 20/20

Designed by Thomas Jefferson and established in 1819, the University of Virginia in Charlottesville receives points for its stunning historical significance within the shadow of Shenandoah National Park and the Blue Ridge Parkway. The University itself is a designated UNESCO World Heritage Site and the charming Rivanna River runs through the eastern portion of the city. Cobblestone streets, shops and historic buildings line the downtown city streets, and recreational activities like hiking and mountain biking make Charlottesville a highly desirable place for students and visitors alike.
8. Lewis and Clark College, Portland, OR

For the expedition that documented the western portion of the United States in the early 19th century, Lewis and Clark College was founded in 1867 in southwest Portland. Currently one of the most popular cities on the West coast, Portland wins points for its lush green spaces, stunning mountain views, and access to outdoor activities, delicious food and some of the world’s best coffee all year long. Situated south of the Willamette and Columbia Rivers, and located in the Southwest portion of the city, Lewis and Clark College is known for its whimsical architecture and its commitment to green initiatives. One hundred percent of the college’s electricity runs on hydropower, and all new building projects must meet LEED certification.
7. University of Montana, Missoula, MT

With plenty of opportunities for outdoor recreation, Rolling Stone Magazine named The University of Montana “the most scenic campus in America.” Nestled between Lolo National Forest and Flathead National Forest, Missoula is located along the western edge of the state and was founded as an early trading post in the late 1800s. The University of Montana wins points for its breathtaking natural setting and its proximity to Missoula’s Natural History Center, Historical Museum and numerous public art projects throughout the town. The city also has a vast trail system that reaches over 20 miles, and houses a historic district known as the Higgins Block downtown.
Pepperdine University sits along the sunny Southern California coastline in the seaside town of Malibu, part of Los Angeles County. The university offers graduate education in a number of fields including business, education and psychology, and has six graduate campuses located throughout greater Los Angeles as well as international programs overseas. Pepperdine is awarded extra points for its pristine location along the coast and for its breathtaking views of the Pacific Ocean. The warm, dry climate and nearness to the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area lends itself to many outdoor activities including hiking, surfing and whale watching. Pepperdine ranked at the top of the Princeton Review's Most Beautiful Campus list in 2007.
5. Fort Lewis College, Durango, CO

Website

Located south of the San Juan National Forest and east of Mesa Verde National Park, Durango, CO retains all of its historic “Wild West” charm alongside tasty restaurants and ample outdoor activities. Fort Lewis College offers graduate education in teacher leadership, and wins extra points for offering tuition-free education to Native Americans. Durango is steeped in mining and railroad history and has numerous historically preserved buildings, including the Strater Hotel and the Newman Building. The area is also a popular mountain biking destination for professionals and amateurs alike. Main Avenue is one of Durango’s primary tourist attractions, receiving points for its quaint shops, restaurants and nightlife.
4. Florida Southern College, Lakeland, FL

Website

Located east of Tampa in the northern Florida panhandle, Florida Southern College in Lakeland is frequently named one of the nation’s most beautiful campuses. The small college, established in 1883, is known for its Child of the Sun building project that contains 9 structures including a chapel, water feature and planetarium, designed by world-renowned American architect Frank Lloyd Wright. The project gains accolades for its designation as a National Historic Landmark. Lakeland, FL also wins points for its year round warm, subtropical climate and its location near 38 lakes, for which the town is aptly named.

Natural Environment: 8/10
Built Environment: 9/10
Awards: 3
Other: 1
Total: 21/20
3. University of Hawaii at Manoa, Honolulu, HI

Located in the lush rainforests near the southern coast of the island of Oahu, the University of Hawaii at Manoa offers graduate degree programs within one of the world’s most beautiful settings. With master’s degree programs ranging from botany to early childhood education, UH Manoa wins points for its proximity to a range of outdoor activities, including some of the world’s best surfing, paddling and hiking. Founded in 1907, the university is only three miles from downtown Honolulu and Waikiki Beach, which offer ample opportunity for shopping, dining and experiencing Hawaiian nightlife. The university also wins points for being ranked in the top 17% of graduate education programs for its College of Education by US News and World Report.
2. Savannah State University, Savannah, GA

Website

Image Source

Natural Environment: 10/10
Built Environment: 9/10
Awards: 2
Other: 2
Total: 23/20

Originally built on agriculture and cotton, Savannah, Georgia is the oldest city in the state, established in 1733. Rich in history, culture and the natural beauty and charm of the Old South, Savannah State University sits on over 200 acres and is surrounded by historic architecture and a generations-old southern landscape. Savannah State University wins points for its proximity to one of the United States’ largest National Historic Landmark Districts and the Central Georgia Railway Complex, the nation’s oldest standing pre-Civil War era rail facility. A warm, subtropical climate makes Savannah pleasant year round, and the city’s location along the Savannah River and nearness to Tybee Island offer ample opportunity for outdoor enjoyments like boating, swimming and fishing.
1. Cranbrook Academy of Art, Bloomfield Hills, MI

Natural Environment: 9.5/10
Built Environment: 9.5/10
Awards: 3
Other: 2
Total: 24/20

Covering over 300 acres just north of Detroit, MI, Cranbrook Academy of Art was designed in the early 20th century by world-renowned architects Albert Kahn and Eliel Saarinen as part of the larger Cranbrook Educational Community. The fine arts graduate program is frequently ranked as one of the best in the country, and its sprawling green spaces, fountains and Arts and Crafts era buildings make the campus a hidden gem within Detroit’s northern suburbs. Comprised of outdoor theaters, reflecting pools and gardens, the facility is also the home of the Cranbrook Art Museum and the Cranbrook Academy of Art Library, which houses over 27,000 volumes of visual arts resources.