



LIFE

The 6 best cities in America for geeks

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I'm a true geek.

I binge watch entire seasons of HBO's "Game of Thrones" — more than once. I obsess over fun tech gadgets, like my **dog-cam that tosses treats** when I'm not home. I read comic books and even created my own teen superhero group in a novel I wrote. And I especially get excited about visiting cities where I know I'll be surrounded by my people.

The term "geek" has changed a lot since I was a kid in the 1980s. Now, for me, it's more of an affectionate term. I agree with the character Ben Wyatt on NBC's "Park and Recreation," who says: "Nerd culture is mainstream now. So when you use the word 'nerd' derogatorily, that means you're the one that's out of the Zeitgeist."

These days, the world of geekdom not only produces some of the world's most powerful and well-known people, from Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg to "Game of Thrones" author George R.R. Martin, it's also part of a multibillion-dollar industry.

Harry Potter is a **\$25 billion franchise**, and comic book movies are making a fortune at theaters. Last year, comic-book movies from the likes of Walt Disney's Marvel Studios and Warner Bros.'s DC Comics made more than **\$4 billion** in combined worldwide box office sales (led by "Spider-Man: Homecoming," \$880 million; "Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2," \$863 million; and "Wonder Woman," \$821 million). This year, Marvel's "Black Panther" has made \$1.34 billion alone **since** its release in February.

The success of these films fuels the **growth** of comic-cons — festivals celebrating various aspects of geek culture — all over the world. It's a geek trickle-down effect.

There are cities in America that are more geek-friendly than others. For instance, Chicago has nine comic book **conventions** a year, including the upcoming Wizard World in **August**.

Meanwhile, Washington D.C. has the **most** "Game of Thrones" viewers in the country (7.48 percent of the country, according to Nielsen) and is also one of the top 10 **tech cities** in America — another potential draw for geeks, who are at least **stereotypically drawn** to the tech industry.

After traveling to some of the geekiest cities in America and considering which have a high concentration of comic book shops and conventions, bookstores, geek-centric events and nerdy festivals, these six are the best cities to get your geek on — with free activities in each.

Not only is Chicago a magnet to architecture buffs and museum lovers, the Windy City has **nine** comic book conventions a year, including Wizard World and Anime Central. The mother lode of comic fans head to C2E2, the annual Chicago Comic & Entertainment Expo, which attracted 80,000 **attendees** last year and is the **fourth** biggest event in the city, according to Choose Chicago, the city's tourism board. Every year in May, Chicago has a "free comic book day," where local comic book stores **offer** free events, like Alleycat Comics doing giveaways.

You can still get your geek on at night, as the city is home to almost a dozen arcade bars that **feature** retro arcade games and pinball machines, the most for a major U.S. city. Other geeky and fun nightlife options include a **bar** with glow-in-the-dark ping pong tables and another, called WhirlyBall, **with** bumper cars. For a nighttime prowling around town, join the **Expecto Bar Crawl**, a Harry Potter-themed bar crawl where people dress as their favorite wizards and witches.

Rebel Force Radio, **one** of the most popular Star Wars podcasts, also often makes cameos at events in its hometown Chicago, which are free to attend.