



Lisa Des Camps, owner of [Lisa Des Camps Jewelry](#), on where to uncover your very own dazzling wares, from Tucson's turquoise mine to an eye-popping emerald mine in North Carolina.

Most people choose their domicile based on characteristics like access to schools, quality of life, cost of living, the arts and safety. But if you're a total gem nerd, your criteria for the best place to settle down is probably related to being near excellent mineral deposits. In honor of the Best Places to Live issue, I'm nominating these locations for those of us who love sparkly things.

Murfreesboro, Ark.: You can find quality diamonds at the nearby Crater of Diamonds State Park, along with several dozen other interesting rocks and minerals.

Philipsburg, Mont.: Gem Mountain is the best place in the United States to find sapphires. Many people report finding sapphires worthy of heat-treating and setting.

Herkimer, N.Y.: They call it the Herkimer Diamond Mine, but what you'll actually find here are double-terminated quartz crystals. They are crystal-clear and have a striking geometric shape.

Virgin Valley, Nev.: If you love black fire opals, the Royal Peacock Mine is the place to go. But because of the likelihood of finding something valuable, they charge \$180 per person per day to dig. Franklin, N.C.: At the Cherokee Ruby Mine, you can find rubies, sapphires, garnets and moonstones. It's also a very family-friendly operation.

Hiddenite, N.C.: The Emerald Hollow Mine is the only emerald mine in the country that's open to public mining. They bring out the gravel, and you dig through your buckets.

If you're more into gold than gems, you may want to consider Jamestown, Calif. I'm not sure how much is left more than a century after the California Gold Rush, but "gold-prospecting adventures" at least sounds like fun. Most of these locations rent tools and provide buckets, as well as let you go straight to the flume line to do your own sluicing (be prepared to get wet and dirty).

And now I've saved the best for last: Tucson. The international gem fair that takes place each year in February is a gem lover's paradise. Sure, you could take a day trip to the sleeping beauty turquoise mine near there, but you won't have to look for your own rough when every gem dealer in the world comes to you.