

[America's 50 Best Cities to Live](#)

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Americans take into account different factors when choosing where to live. For some, the quality of schools is important. For others, the strength of the local economy or personal safety takes priority.

To determine America's best cities to live in, 24/7 Wall St. reviewed data on the 550 cities with populations of 65,000 or more as measured by the U.S. Census Bureau. Based on a range of variables, including crime rates, employment growth, educational attainment, and housing affordability, 24/7 Wall St. identified America's 50 Best Cities to Live.

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[Click here to read our methodology.](#)

Because of its importance, the labor market was one of the key measures we used to identify the best cities. In order to be considered, a city needed positive employment growth between 2011 and 2013. Seventy cities did not meet this standard. Cities scored well if employment growth was high. Olathe, Kansas, one of the best cities to live in, received considerable marks because it had 14.4% employment growth — one of the best during that time.

In the U.S., the national unemployment rate was 7.4% in 2013, high by historical standards. And in many cities it was much worse. Because unemployment is such an important factor, we also eliminated cities from consideration if their unemployment rates were more than 33% above the 2013 national rate — our cutoff rate was 9.8%. This alone excluded more than 100 cities from consideration.

Of course, the availability of jobs is not enough to make a city worth moving to. For many Americans, safety is also important. According to Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) data, violent crime rates were far higher in metropolitan areas — where the vast majority of Americans live — than in smaller cities and other parts of the country. Roughly half of all cities were excluded because they reported property or violent crime rates that were at least 25% higher than the 2012 national rates.

The vast majority of the nation's best cities to live in had especially low violent crime rates. In fact, the violent crime rate in 35 of the 50 cities was less than half the national rate of 387 incidents per 100,000 residents in 2012.

For parents, a strong school system also influences the decision of where to live. According to Daren Blomquist, vice president of RealtyTrac, a housing market data site, "quality of education is the number one issue home buyers ask about most."

In order to compare educational outcomes in each city, we ranked math, language arts and science scores tabulated by Homefacts, a RealtyTrac subsidiary. Seven of the top 10 cities on our list were among the top 10% of large cities nationwide for math achievement and eight were among the top 10% for language arts.

We also measured the availability of amenities, such as restaurants, theaters and fitness clubs. While such factors might seem like an afterthought, Americans spend an average of more than five hours each day on leisure activities, according to the Census Bureau.

“There is still romance in buying a house,” said Blomquist. Features such as access to outdoor activities, beautiful parks and gyms “are the type of amenities that often will set apart certain communities from others.”

Some cities score well because of the number of dining options, as is the case with Evanston, Illinois. The city is part of Cook County, which also includes Chicago. This provides Evanston residents with easy access to nearly 9,000 restaurants and more than 900 bars.

Sports teams can also be a big draw. Bellevue, Washington, which ranked as the second best city to live in, is located near Seattle — home to Major League Baseball’s Seattle Mariners, Major League Soccer’s Seattle Sounders, and the Super Bowl Champion Seattle Seahawks.

Commuting times can also influence where people live. Proximity to larger metro areas makes getting to work faster. In 34 of the best cities, the average commute time was below the national average of 26 minutes. Additionally, in 10 of these cities, residents both walk and take public transportation in greater proportions than the national average rates, both of which reduce traffic and have the potential to make commuting more pleasant.

Most Americans have to make tradeoffs when choosing where they live. Many of the best cities are expensive when judged by the national cost of living, an index that compares the cost of a basket of consumer goods in cities across the U.S. However, cost of living varies widely by region. When the best cities are compared to their state, a majority are no more than 20% more expensive than the state’s average cost of living.

Many of the best cities are located near major cities, as this proximity provides residents with access to good schools while living in safe neighborhoods. It also allows them to enjoy the amenities available in the nearby larger cities.

Perhaps surprisingly, none of America’s largest cities are on this list. There is no New York, Los Angeles, or Houston among the best places to live. Nearly all of the biggest cities in the country by population had crime rates that automatically excluded them from consideration. Additionally, more than half of these cities had poverty rates above 21.1%, or 33% above the national rate, making them ineligible.

14. Edmond, Oklahoma

- > **Median household income:** \$70,199
- > **Unemployment rate, 2013:** 3.90%
- > **Median home value:** \$197,700
- > **Violent crime per 100,000 residents:** 101.8
- > **Average commuter travel time:** 20.0 minutes

Edmond is a suburb 14.5 miles outside of Oklahoma City, and is home to nearly 85,000 people. The city scored well in all categories. One of Edmond's most attractive features is a strong job market. Only 3.9% of Edmond's workforce was unemployed in 2013, one of lowest unemployment rate among cities reviewed. Between 2011 and 2013, total employment rose by over 5%, more than most cities.

To the city's east is Arcadia Lake, a reservoir created in 1984 to limit flooding and provide a stable source of water for the city. Residents can also enjoy the lake's beauty and recreation opportunities, even in an urban setting. The lake and surrounding area offer activities like camping, swimming, water skiing, boating, and equestrian trails.

Edmond, Oklahoma

Category Scores

Economy	90.6
Crime	95.1
Education	80.5
Environment	74.0
Housing	80.5
Leisure	60.5
Infrastructure	56.0