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The 50 best places to live in America, ranked

Tanza Loudenback, Mark Abadi, and Erin McDowell Jun 30, 2020, 11:02 AM



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Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. ESB Professional/Shutterstock

Pittsburgh is taking steps to rehabilitate its industrial reputation with increasing amounts of green spaces and state parks.

Local expert Cheryl Werber also explains that more and more companies are also migrating to the Steel City, bringing exciting job opportunities to the area. Housing in Pittsburgh is also more affordable than other major cities, despite rates slowly beginning to rise.

Population: 300,286



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Kansas City, Missouri. f11photo/Shutterstock

Kansas City, Missouri, is a major metropolis with more than 2 million residents. Those living in the Midwestern city have access to a number of community-building activities that make the city a nice place to live.

According to local expert Tonya Goth Simmons, locals can play cards by the river at a riverboat casino, take in a show at the Kansas City Symphony, learn a little bit about the country's rich jazz history at the [American Jazz Museum](#), or enjoy some delicious barbecue.

Population: 495,327

Average annual salary: \$49,460

Quality of life: 6.2

Value: 7.7



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48. Lancaster, Pennsylvania



Lancaster, Pennsylvania. Christian Hinkle/Shutterstock

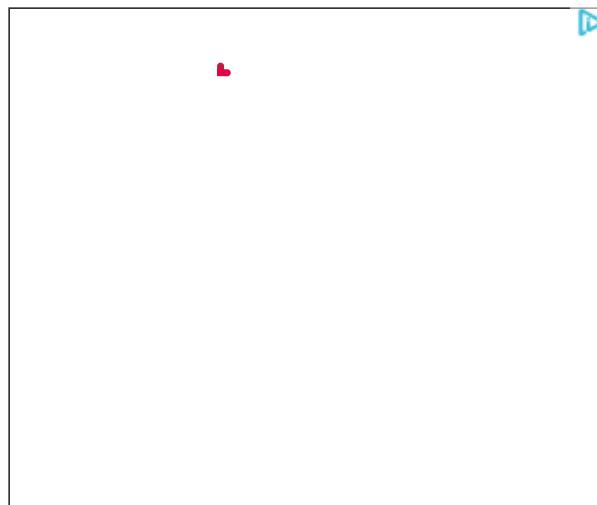
In [Lancaster](#), residents can breeze through numerous environments in the course of a day, from rolling farmland to busy city streets to quiet suburbs. Though dairy farming rules the economy here, major companies, including Kellogg's and Mars, also call the area home.

Lancaster might be famous for its Amish and Mennonite population, but the town is

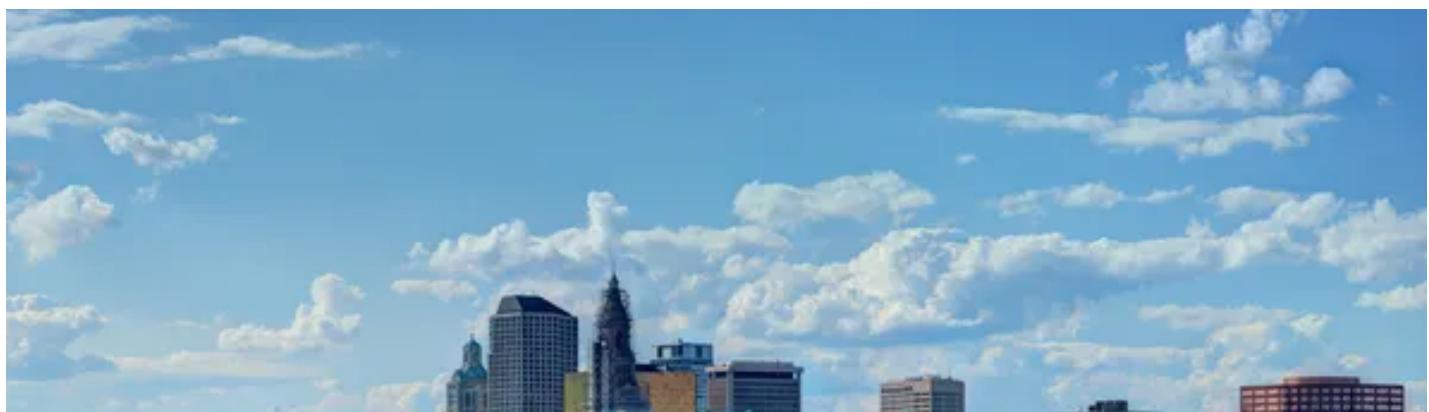


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[◀ HOMEPAGE](#)[Subscribe](#)~~Average annual salary: \$40,700~~**Quality of life:** 7.7**Value:** 6.7

47. Hartford, Connecticut

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Hartford, Connecticut. Sean Pavone/Shutterstock

Located in the Connecticut River Valley, [Hartford](#) was once the home to notable historic figures, including Mark Twain and Harriet Beecher Stowe. Among the city's historic attractions, today it offers nearby entertainment venues, ski slopes, state parks.

The aerospace, healthcare, and financial services industries dominate the job market in Hartford, which is home to Aetna Inc., United Technologies Corp., and Hartford Hospital.

Population: 122,105

Average annual salary: \$60,040

Quality of life: 7.2

Value index: 6.4



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46. Knoxville, Tennessee

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Knoxville, Tennessee. iStock / Sean Pavone

For sports enthusiasts and outdoor enthusiasts alike, [Knoxville, Tennessee](#), is a great place to call home. Close to the nearby Great Smoky Mountains National Park and Ijams Nature Center, getting outdoors and enjoying nature is a breeze in this Southern city.

Population: 187,603

Average annual salary: \$43,840

Quality of life: 6.2

Value index: 7.4

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- Its 2019 ranking for the best places to live looked at five metrics: **job market, value, quality of life, desirability, and net migration.**
- The best place to live in America is **Austin, Texas**, followed by **Denver, Colorado**.
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Other aspects are coveted by nearly everybody: affordable housing, access to well-paying jobs, a low cost of living, good schools, and quality healthcare. In its ranking of

the [best places to live](#) in America for 2019, U.S. News & World Report gathered data on these crucial components for more than 100 US cities.

While [some US cities have been more affected by the coronavirus pandemic than others](#), this ranking looks at data collected prior to the pandemic.

U.S. News categorized the data into five indexes for each city — job market, value, quality of life, desirability, and net migration — to definitively rank these major metro areas. You can read U.S. News' full methodology [here](#).



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45. Charleston, South Carolina



Charleston, South Carolina. Shutterstock

Charleston's charming, historic, and sophisticated ambiance is exemplary of southern culture. "Not only is the area overflowing with entertainment and good food, but this low country locale is also gorgeous," said a local expert.



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Scores for "value," a blend of annual household income and cost of living, and "quality of life," which accounts for crime, college readiness, commute, and other factors, are included below on a 10-point scale, as well as the city's population and average annual salary.

Austin, Texas, came out on top for the [third consecutive year](#), while Denver, Colorado, moved back up to No. 2 after being topped by Colorado Springs in the previous year.

A handful of cities entered the top 50 list, including Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; Knoxville, Tennessee; Lansing, Michigan; Kansas City, Missouri; Pensacola, Florida; and Indianapolis, Indiana.

Keep reading to discover the 50 best places to live in America.

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[◀ HOMEPAGE](#)[Subscribe](#)**Population:** 137,566**Average annual salary:** \$44,970**Quality of life:** 6.5**Value index:** 6.2

44. Harrisburg, Pennsylvania

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Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. Shutterstock/Jon Bilous

Located on the banks of the Susquehanna River and the foothills of the Appalachian Trail, [Harrisburg](#) offers residents unlimited access to the outdoors.

Many are employed by the state and federal government in Harrisburg, but there's also [several large private-sector companies](#) that are top employers, including Hershey's, Rite Aid, and D&H Distributing.

Population: 49,271

Average annual salary: \$48,270

Quality of life: 6.9

Value index: 7.4



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43. Manchester, New Hampshire



Manchester, New Hampshire. Sean Pavone/Shutterstock



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NEW ORLEANS THE STARGAZING SKIES young and educated thanks to the various colleges that call it home.

Population: 112,673

Average annual salary: \$52,640

Quality of life: 7.1

Value index: 6.4



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42. Jacksonville, Florida



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[◀ HOMEPAGE](#)[Subscribe](#)**Value: 8.2****49. Kansas City, Missouri**[**≡**](#) [**○**](#)**BUSINESS
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Jacksonville, Florida. Shutterstock

Jacksonville's beach-adjacent location makes it ideal for outdoor activities. In addition to spending lazy days in the sand, residents can also visit the area's prime golf courses or go hiking, camping, and kayaking in the nearby parks. Jacksonville also continues to grow, with burgeoning art and music scenes, as well as new business development, according to a local expert.

Population: 911,507

Average annual salary: \$45,760

Quality of life: 6.6

Value index: 6.3



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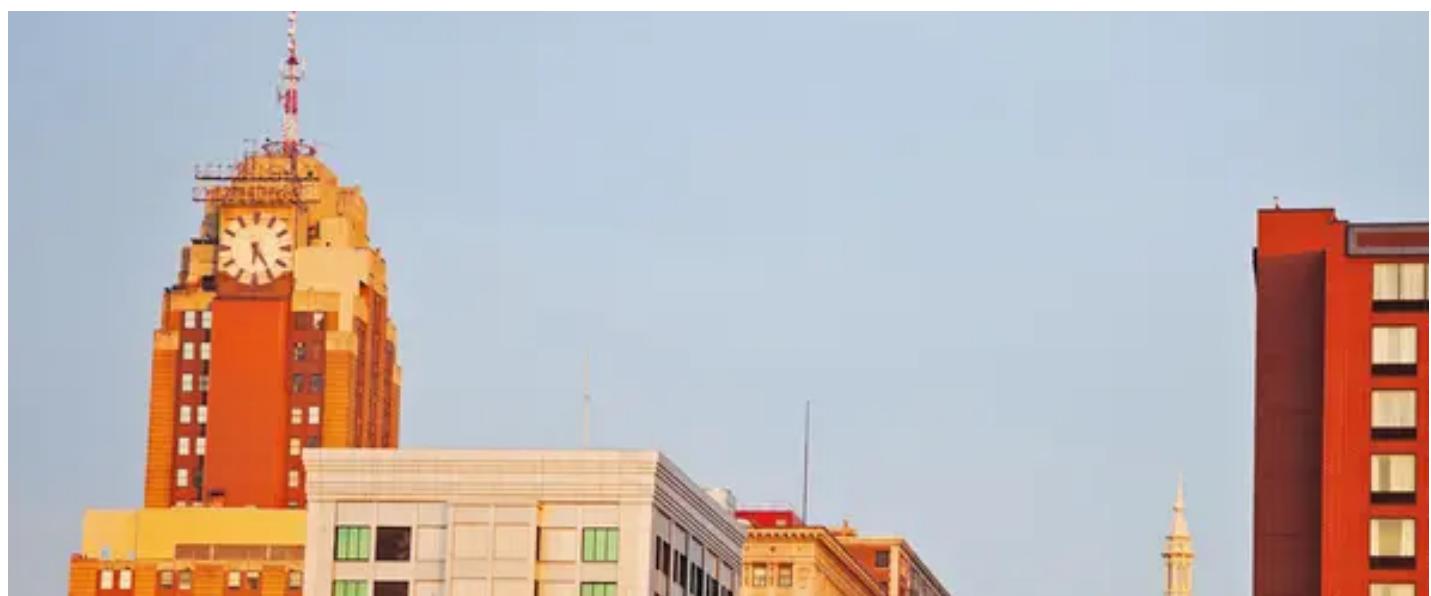
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41. Lansing, Michigan

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Lansing, Michigan. Henryk Sadura/Shutterstock

Many residents of [Lansing, Michigan](#), are employed by nearby Michigan State University, one of the area's several large hospitals, insurance companies, and General Motors.

Lansing has served as a hub for Michigan's government since the late 19th century, and many residents of the city also find themselves working in state government offices.

Population: 118,210

Average annual salary: \$47,990

Quality of life: 7.1

Value index: 7.4



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40. Fort Wayne, Indiana

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The Rust Belt hub of [Fort Wayne](#), Indiana, is being revitalized as of late. Manufacturers including General Motors and BAE Systems have brought jobs to the area, while its economy is seeing a spike from young people eager to move downtown from the suburbs.

"With its low cost of living and quiet neighborhoods, Fort Wayne, Indiana, is an excellent place to buy a house, start a career, launch a business and raise children," a local expert said.

Population: 270,402

Average annual salary: \$43,590

Quality of life: 6.2

Value index: 8.7

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We asked Yo-Yo Ma, John Williams and Andrew Lloyd Webber to share their top cello pieces.

39. Cincinnati, Ohio



Cincinnati, Ohio. Checubus/Shutterstock

Cincinnati is a city that loves its food, sports, and culture. There's something for everyone in the Midwest's Queen City, from a strong job market to a busy event calendar filled with museums, baseball, and local heritage events.



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[◀ HOMEPAGE](#)[Subscribe](#)**Average annual salary:** \$48,890**Quality of life:** 6.5**Value:** 7.9

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38. Indianapolis, Indiana

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Indianapolis, Indiana. Photo by Scott Dunn/Getty Images

With a lively downtown area home to shops, restaurants, and bars, [Indianapolis](#) provides the perfect balance between big-city living and community values. The home of one of the world's largest children's museums, the metro area also holds strong regard for sports, car racing, and great local schools.

Indianapolis is also often referred to as the Racing Capital of the World because of the nearby Indianapolis Motor Speedway, which hosts the annual Indianapolis 500.

Population: 876,384

Average annual salary: \$48,030

Quality of life: 6.1



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37. Pensacola, Florida

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This diverse area is home to a 10-day fiesta, gorgeous beaches facing the Gulf of Mexico, and great areas for fishing. [Pensacola](#) received high marks for desirability and net migration, meaning more and more people are interested in moving to this beautiful part of the country.

Population: 52,975

Average annual salary: \$41,200

Quality of life: 6.5

Value index: 6.5

36. San Diego, California



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San Diego, California. Steve Heap/Shutterstock

With year-round sunshine and beautiful beaches to boot, it's easy to enjoy living in [San Diego](#). According to U.S. News, this Southern California gem "offers world-class dining, professional sports, and entertainment options" for college students, young professionals, and families alike.

Tourism is a huge industry in San Diego — which sees more than 30 million visitors annually — but the city's seaside location is more than just eye-candy. Some of the [area's largest](#) employers include the US Navy and the Marine Corps.

Population: 1,423,851

Average annual salary: \$56,410



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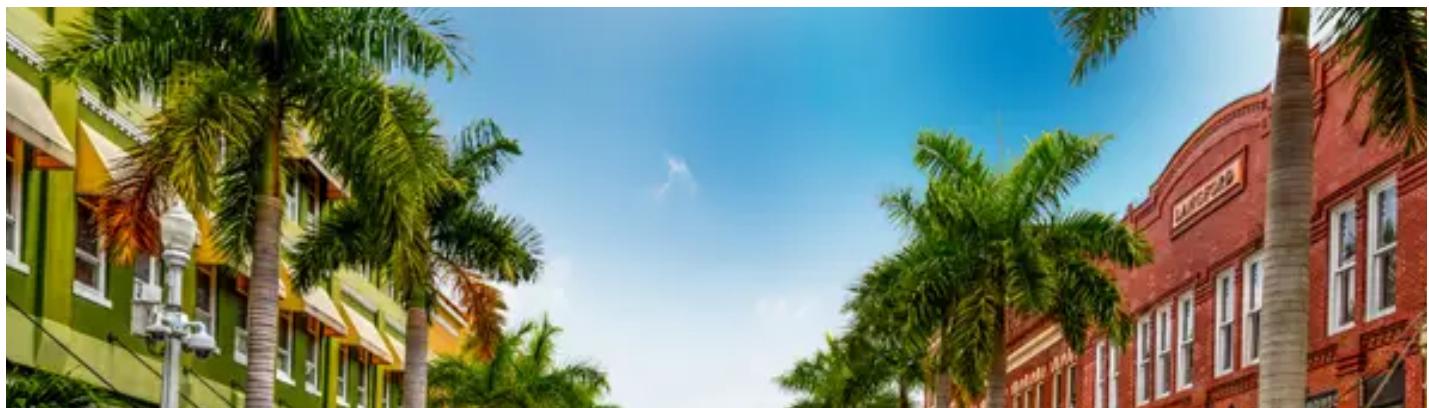
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Why We Miss Dining Out



Seven renowned writers recount some of their most memorable dining out experiences.

35. Fort Myers, Florida

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Fort Myers, Florida. Gabriele Maltinti/Shutterstock

The charming streets of [Fort Myers](#) attract people of all ages, even if the southwestern Florida city is better known as a retirement destination. More than a third of the rapidly growing population is under 34 years old.

Residents take advantage of Fort Myers' vibrant downtown, and the city's convenient location on Florida's Gulf Coast lends itself to water activities like boating and fishing. People in Fort Myers tend to pay a little extra for real estate and transportation, but they save thanks to Florida's lack of state income taxes.

Population: 87,103

Average annual salary: \$41,380

Quality of life: 6.5

Value index: 5.2



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34. San Antonio, Texas

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there are so many major events and festivals throughout the year, a number of which honor the area's Spanish heritage, said a local expert. San Antonio is home to four military and air force bases and camps, collectively known as Joint Base San Antonio.

Population: 1,547,253

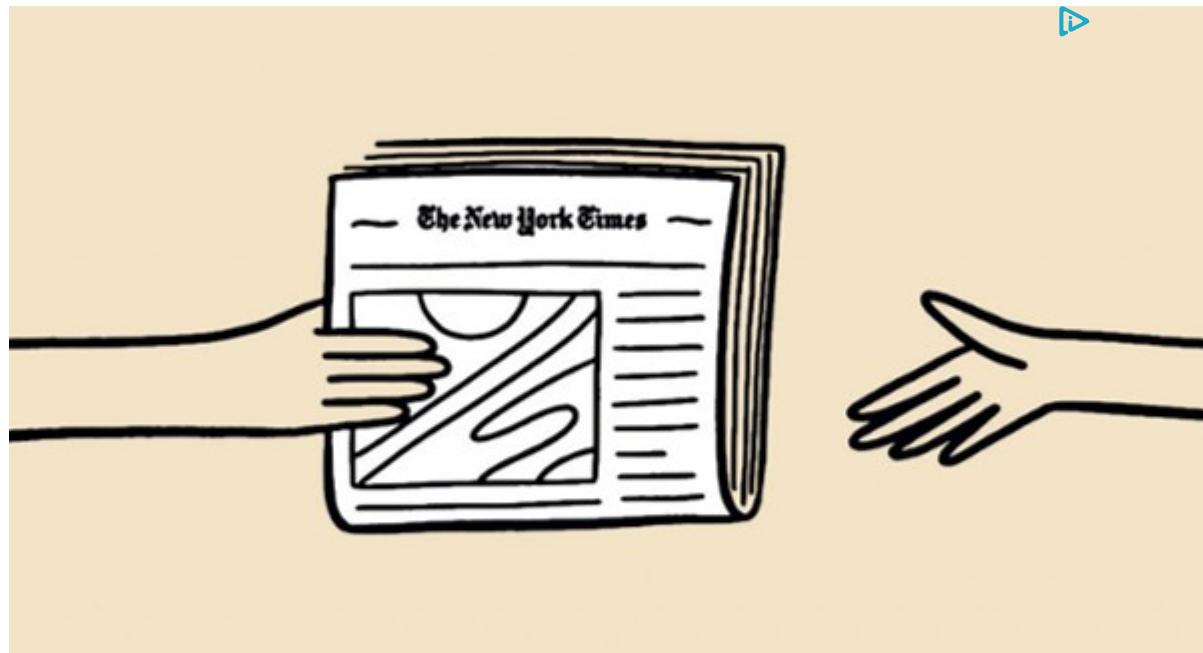
Average annual salary: \$46,200

Quality of life: 6.5

Value index: 6.8

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Reno, Nevada. Andrew Zarivny/Shutterstock

[Reno](#), Nevada, is much more than a tourist town. "America's Biggest Little City" may have been built on the gambling industry, but today offers opportunities in a number of fields including technology and education.

The city offers plenty of family-friendly outdoor activities, and people of all ages are drawn there for its strong economy and job opportunities.

Population: 255,601



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Omaha, Nebraska. Esme/Shutterstock

Due to a combination of [Omaha's](#) history of cattle ranching and its current landscape of bustling tech startups, the city has earned the nickname "[Silicon Prairie](#)." Plus, eight Fortune 500 companies are headquartered in Omaha, including Berkshire Hathaway, Union Pacific Railroad, and Mutual of Omaha.

Young professionals and families [are attracted to the city](#) primarily for its affordability, safety, and strong economy.

Population: 478,192

Average annual salary: \$47,660

Quality of life: 6.7

Value index: 7.8



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31. Winston-Salem, North Carolina



Winston-Salem, North Carolina. Shutterstock

The cost of living in [Winston-Salem](#) is a bargain. The city's average housing costs remain well below the national average — renters pay about \$300 less per month for a



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Population: 247,945

Average annual salary: \$44,910

Quality of life: 6.5

Value index: 7.3

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30. Houston, Texas



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Houston, Texas. Shutterstock

Houston is a major player in the oil and gas, manufacturing, aerospace, and healthcare industries — it's also home to [26 Fortune 500 companies](#). According to one local expert, "a paycheck goes further in Houston than it does in other major cities, with affordable housing and free or cheap attractions."

Plus, the city has an affinity for food, counting some [10,000 restaurants](#) within its boundaries.

Population: 2,320,268

Average annual salary: \$53,820

Quality of life: 6.5



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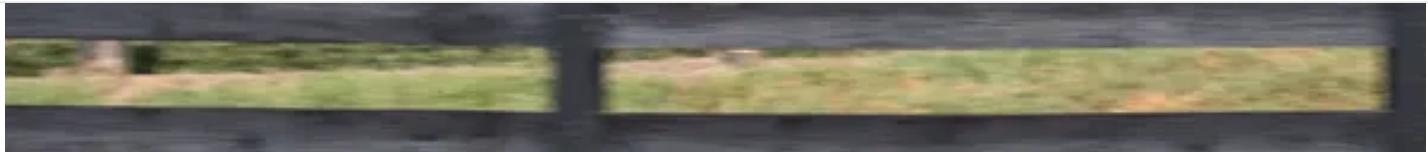
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29. Lexington-Fayette, Kentucky

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Lexington, Kentucky. Katie Warren/Business Insider

Lexington, Kentucky, is known as the horse capital of the world, and residents are especially proud of their city's reputation for equestrian. On top of world-famous horse parks and racecourses, the area has more than 1,000 horse farms, not to mention streets named after Triple Crown winners and a bevy of horse statues in parks around the city. But love of equestrian activities isn't the only thing Lexington offers.

Younger residents move there for its college-town feel and appreciation for local sports and music. And the area is a haven for fans of the outdoors — the nearby Red River Gorge and Cumberland Falls are scenic places for residents to explore their surroundings.

Population: 323,152

Average annual salary: \$43,720

Quality of life: 6.9

Value index: 7.7



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28. Albany, New York

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Despite the snowy winters, living in [Albany](#) comes with several advantages. Albany offers a cost of living lower than the national average and the cost of housing sits well below the rest of the US as a whole. In terms of jobs, the city's state government and health care companies are Albany's primary industries for residents there.

Albany's downtown is lined with art galleries, wine shops, and churches for visitors to peruse. In keeping with the city's cold climate, hockey is the sport of choice for residents.

Population: 96,460

Average annual salary: \$52,770

Quality of life: 7.2

Value index: 7.1

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27. Boston, Massachusetts



Boston, Massachusetts. Sean Pavone/Shutterstock

Boston attracts a diverse group of residents, including everyone from recent college graduates to retirees and musicians to engineers. The historical city — often referred



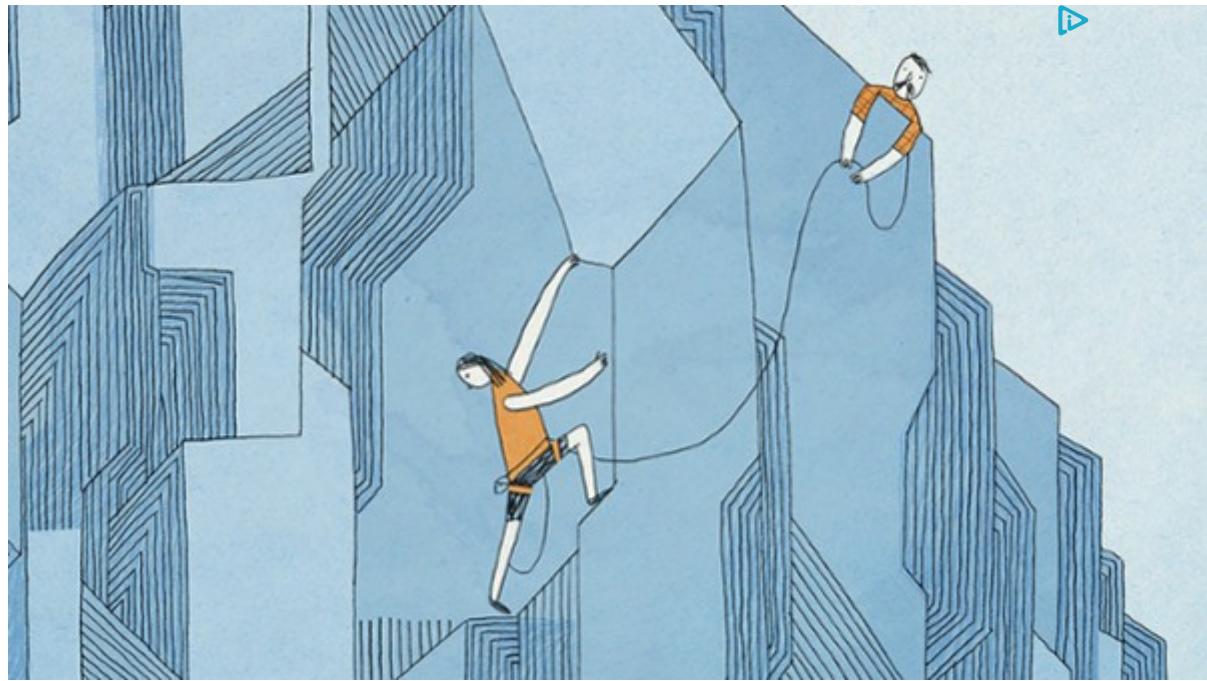
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[◀ HOMEPAGE](#)[Subscribe](#)**Average annual salary:** \$65,420**Quality of life:** 7.0**Value index:** 5.7

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A long divorced writer wanted to connect with someone new, but without the usual cost.

26. Phoenix, Arizona

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Phoenix, Arizona. Sean Pavone/Shutterstock

Come for the weather, stay for the city: [Phoenix](#) boasts [more sunny days per year](#) than any other city in the US, according to a local expert. But it's the thriving job market, variety of shops and restaurants, and easy access to numerous outdoor activities — think everything from hiking to paddleboarding — that keep residents happy long-term.

Population: 1,680,992

Average annual salary: \$49,500

Quality of life: 6.4



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25. Melbourne, Florida

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[◀ HOMEPAGE](#)[Subscribe](#)**Melbourne, Florida.** Jesse Kunerth/Shutterstock

Between fishing, boating, and a plethora of bars and restaurants, there's never a shortage of things to do in the [Melbourne](#) area. The city's ripe with retirees and

"snowbirds" — people who split their time between colder climates in the summer and Florida in the winter — who can enjoy days on one of the many nearby golf courses and nights out exploring the local shops and art galleries.

Population: 83,029

Average annual salary: \$48,240

Quality of life: 7.4

Value index: 6.1

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24. Salt Lake City, Utah



Salt Lake City, Utah. Maciej Bledowski/Shutterstock

Salt Lake City might experience some of the snowiest weather in the country, but residents make the most of it through the multitude of ski resorts perched in the city's



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Average annual salary: \$47,272

Quality of life: 6.9

Value index: 7.4

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23. Portland, Maine



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Portland, Maine. Sean Pavone/Shutterstock

Located right on the water at Casco Bay and lined with cobblestone streets, [Portland](#) immediately evokes the quaintness of a much smaller town. Between fishing, sailing, cross-country skiing, and exploring the city's buzzing nightlife, there's no shortage of things to do. Seafood lovers can nosh on fresh catches at the city's modern oyster bars and or grab one of Maine's signature lobster rolls.

Population: 66,215

Average annual salary: \$48,970

Quality of life: 7.6

Value index: 6.4



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22. Greenville, South Carolina

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Greenville, South Carolina. Shutterstock/Sean Pavone

Once a sleepy small town, Greenville has witnessed a cultural revival in recent years, complete with an influx of new restaurants and businesses. Though the summers can get hot, the city's typically mild weather makes it possible to explore downtown on foot any time of the year.

An influx of manufacturing jobs has also boosted Greenville's economy, with brand-name companies, such as GE and Michelin, setting up shop in town.

Population: 70,635

Average annual salary: \$43,230

Quality of life: 6.8

Value index: 7.7



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21. Dallas-Fort Worth, Texas



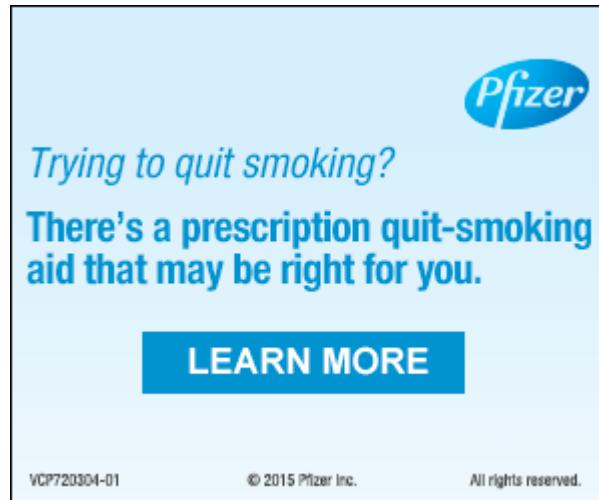
Dallas-Fort Worth, Texas. Philip Lange/Shutterstock

A healthy balance of urban and rural, [Dallas](#) offers residents "big-city excitement and quiet, suburban living," shared one local expert. There's local bars, retail shops, and plenty of sports spirit to satisfy the huge population. The city — with large [employers](#) in business, finance, and education — is teeming with young professionals.

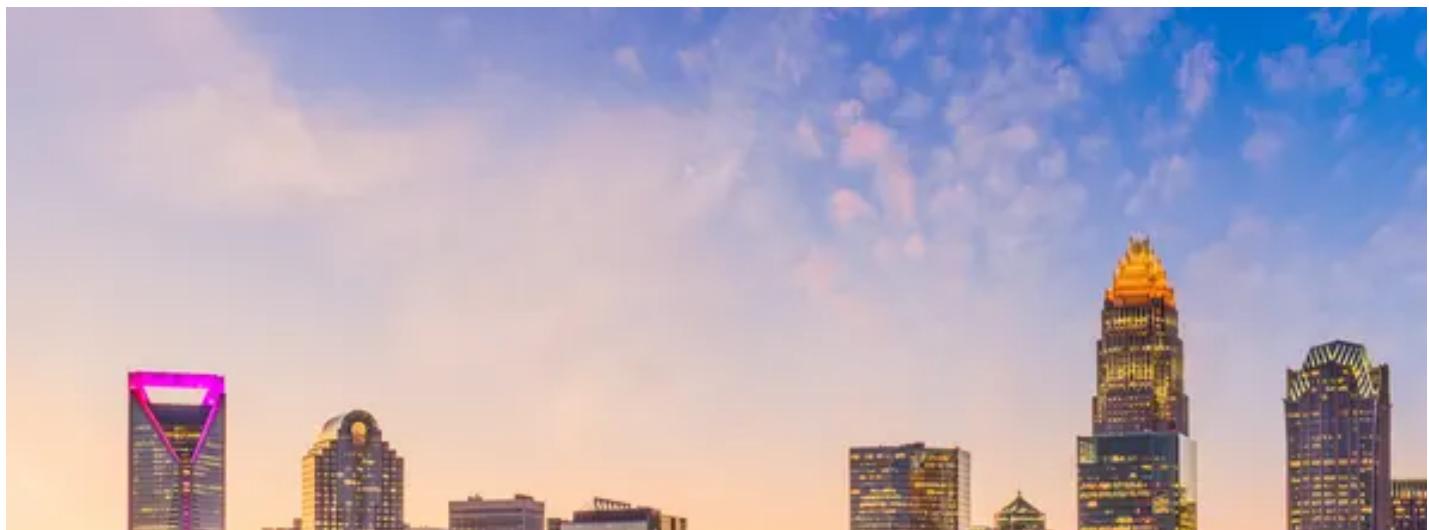


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20. Charlotte, North Carolina

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Charlotte, North Carolina. Sean Pavone/Shutterstock

A "melting pot effect" draws all types of people to [Charlotte](#), a place with "equal parts old-fashioned southern charm and high-energy cosmopolitan bustle," touted one local expert. NASCAR and motorsports are a cultural cornerstone of Charlotte.

The Queen City houses Bank of America's headquarters and major offices for Wells Fargo, making it [one of the largest financial hubs in the country](#).

Population: 885,708

Average annual salary: \$50,150

Quality of life: 6.5

Value index: 7.5



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19. Washington, DC



Washington, DC. Sean Pavone/Shutterstock

The District's neighborhoods each give off their own vibe, but across the city residents often "gather for block parties, mingle at dog parks, and converse at coffee shops,"



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[◀ HOMEPAGE](#)[Subscribe](#)**Average annual salary:** \$69,210**Quality of life:** 6.6**Value index:** 6.3

18. Sarasota, Florida

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Sarasota, Florida. Sean Pavone/Shutterstock

Sarasota boasts "warm temperatures year-round, award-winning beaches, and a thriving arts and cultural scene," said a local expert. The [biggest employers in Sarasota](#) are in education, trade, and transportation, and the leisure and hospitality sector touts a low unemployment rate powered by a recent increase in tourism and a flood of new residents.

Population: 58,285

Average annual salary: \$42,680

Quality of life: 7.4

Value index: 5.7



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17. Boise, Idaho

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Idaho's capital city is "a recreationalist's paradise," according to one local expert, who also said Boise sits "squarely on the boundary of urban and rural, civilized and wild,

refined and raw." The region is home to [more than 25,000](#) Boise State University students and [provides jobs](#) at government agencies as well as in tech and healthcare.

Population: 228,959

Average annual salary: \$43,880

Quality of life: 7.2

Value index: 7.1



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Asheville, North Carolina. Milesbeforelsleep / Shutterstock.com

It's no surprise why the mountain town of [Asheville](#), North Carolina, is beloved by tourists and residents alike. Nestled in between the Blue Ridge and Appalachian mountains, Asheville is a magnet for outdoor lovers as well as fans of music, art, and craft beer.

Population: 92,870

Average annual salary: \$41,210



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15. Nashville, Tennessee

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Nashville, Tennessee. Scott Heaney/Shutterstock

Honky-tonk culture and an entrepreneurial spirit define [Nashville](#).

"A blossoming job market and an exploding entertainment scene [are] fueling an appetite (and thirst) for all things locally sourced and artisanal in craft," a local expert said. Thousands of residents [work in healthcare](#) at the area's large hospitals and research centers, small startups, and business accelerator programs.

Population: 670,820

Average annual salary: \$47,110

Quality of life: 6.1

Value index: 7.1



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14. San Jose, California



San Jose, California. [stellamc / Shutterstock](#)

The sprawling city of [San Jose](#) is "as much defined by its suburban neighborhoods and large tech campuses as it is by the high-rises in its business district," said a local expert. Young residents and recent graduates of nearby Stanford and UC Berkeley have no trouble finding jobs in the area, which touts Facebook, Google, and Apple as [its largest private-sector employers](#).

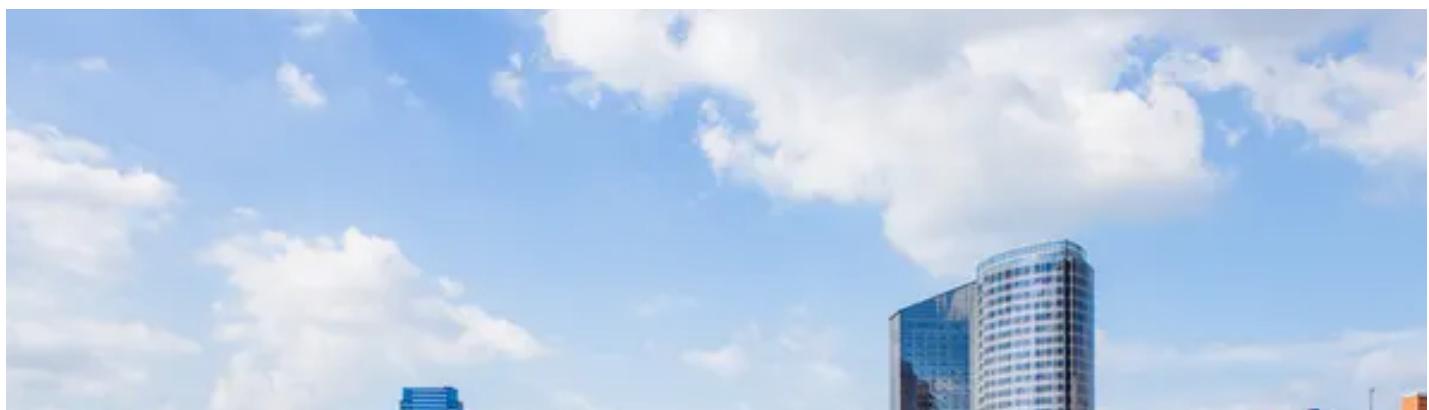


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[◀ HOMEPAGE](#)[Subscribe](#)**Quality of life: 7.0****Value index: 5.4**

13. Grand Rapids, Michigan

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Grand Rapids, Michigan. Suzanne Tucker/Shutterstock

Grand Rapids attracts "college students and young families with its healthy job market, affordable housing, and outdoor recreational activities," said a local expert. The self-proclaimed "Beer City USA" has [more than 80 breweries](#) as well as dynamic public art and music scenes.

Once a hub for furniture production, Grand Rapids' job market is now [dominated](#) by education and healthcare, with many opportunities for workers without a college degree.

Population: 201,013

Average annual salary: \$44,770

Quality of life: 7.6

Value index: 8.1



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12. Madison, Wisconsin

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of Wisconsin at Madison, providing hundreds of jobs in education.

Madison has a unique food culture that's a blend of fine dining and farmer's markets catering to the city's college students, young professionals, and families.

Population: 259,680

Average annual salary: \$52,190

Quality of life: 7.5

Value index: 6.9



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Huntsville, Alabama. [Shutterstock](#)

The once-sleepy town of [Huntsville](#), Alabama, gained fame in the 1960s when it became a hub for NASA. Now Huntsville is undergoing another renaissance, with tech companies, craft breweries, and artists all flocking to the town in recent years.

Huntsville is the fastest-growing city in Alabama, and residents are enjoying an emerging downtown shopping and dining scene even as the city maintains a low cost of living. If you can handle the heat and humidity, you might find yourself at home there.

Population: 200,574



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Raleigh, North Carolina. Sharkshock/Shutterstock

Raleigh, Durham, and Chapel Hill are collectively known as the Triangle, an area anchored by its foundation in research and tech. The Triangle employs [nearly 40,000 residents](#) at companies like IBM, SAS Institute Inc., and Cisco Systems as well as surrounding colleges Duke, North Carolina State, and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

A strong job market coupled with a burgeoning microbrewery and dining scene draws new residents every day, said a local expert.

Population: 474,069

Average annual salary: \$53,788

Quality of life: 6.9

Value index: 7.7



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9. Seattle, Washington

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Seattle is sandwiched between water and mountains and doesn't get as much rain as you'd think, said one local expert. The city's residents are drawn to the area for its atmosphere of "calm and patience" and its close proximity to nature.

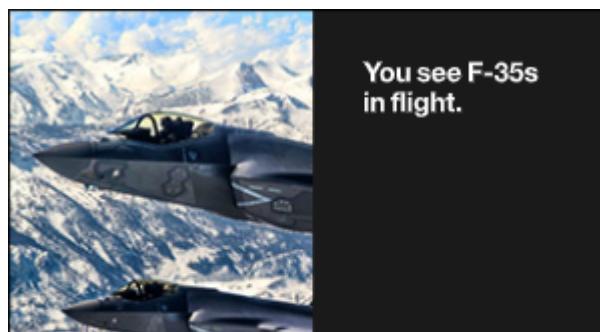
Jobs in Seattle are concentrated in tech, healthcare, and maritime industries, but the city is also a huge manufacturing center for companies like Boeing.

Population: 753,675

Average annual salary: \$63,120

Quality of life: 6.6

Value index: 5.9



You see F-35s
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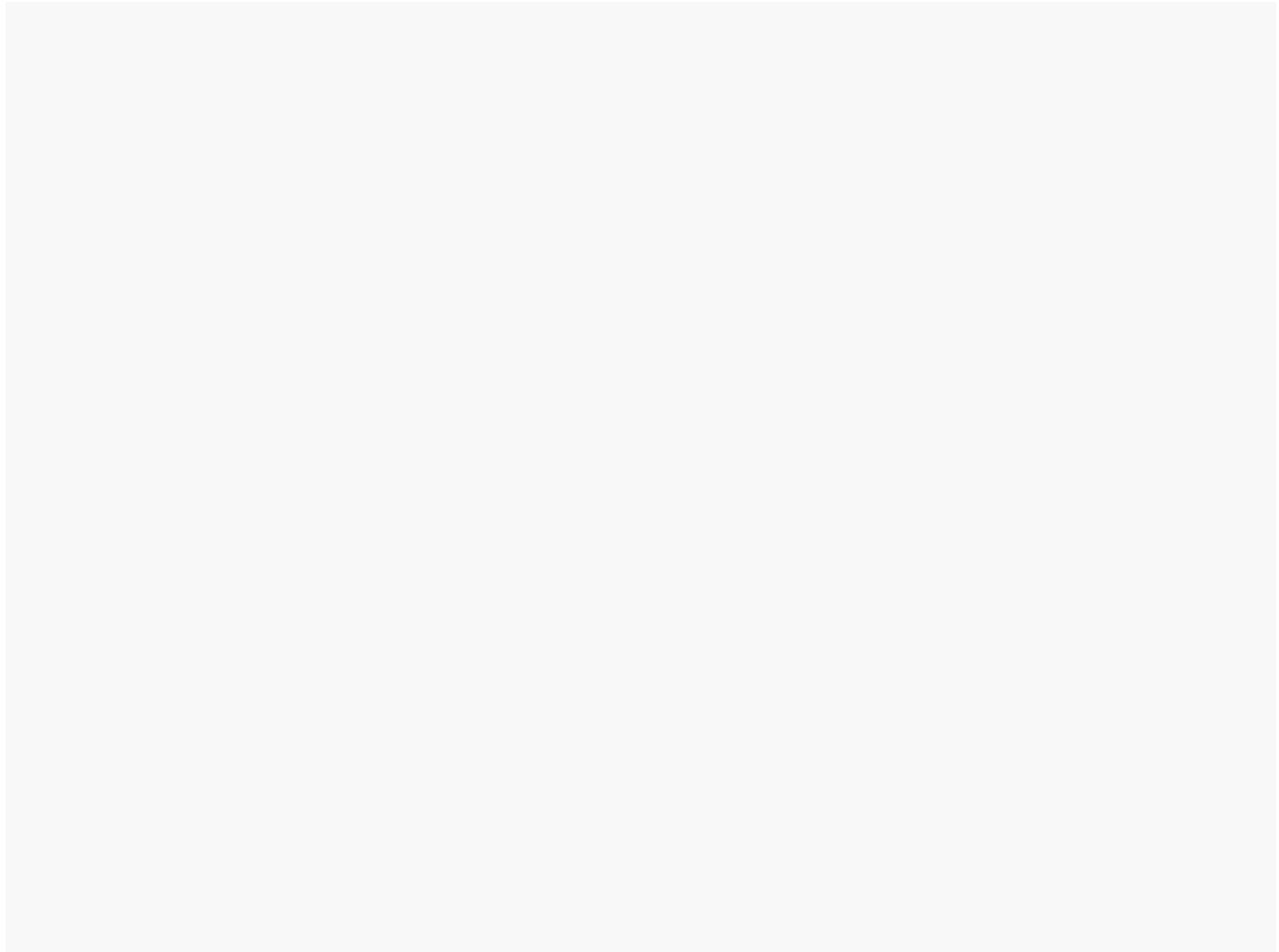
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8. Portland, Oregon



Portland, Oregon. Nadia Yong/Shutterstock

Portland isn't for everybody — its slogan is "Keep Portland Weird," after all. But one local expert asserts that it's a "well-rounded city with more than just the offbeat shops and events" and a population that has "more academic degrees than the national average."

Major employer Intel Corporation calls Portland home, as well as the headquarters for

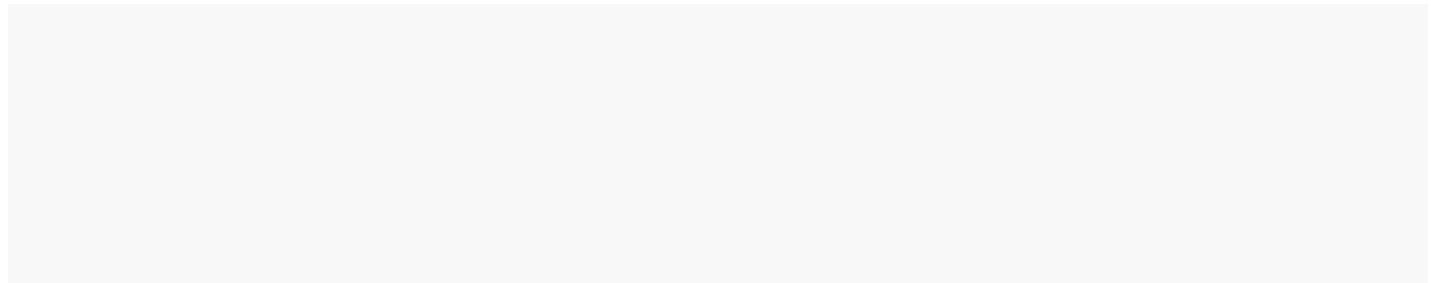


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7. San Francisco, California

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San Francisco, California. Travel Stock/Shutterstock

A local expert described [San Francisco](#) as "the heart of the bohemian lifestyle, the epicenter of the LGBT rights movement, and the launching point of the technology era." In the last decade, thousands of tech companies have raced to set up shop in the Bay Area, sending the cost of living through the roof.

But despite all the focus on the tech and startup scene, the city also has plenty of business jobs available with [more than 30 international finance](#) headquarters.

Population: 881,549

Average annual salary: \$69,700

Quality of life: 6.8

Value index: 4.9

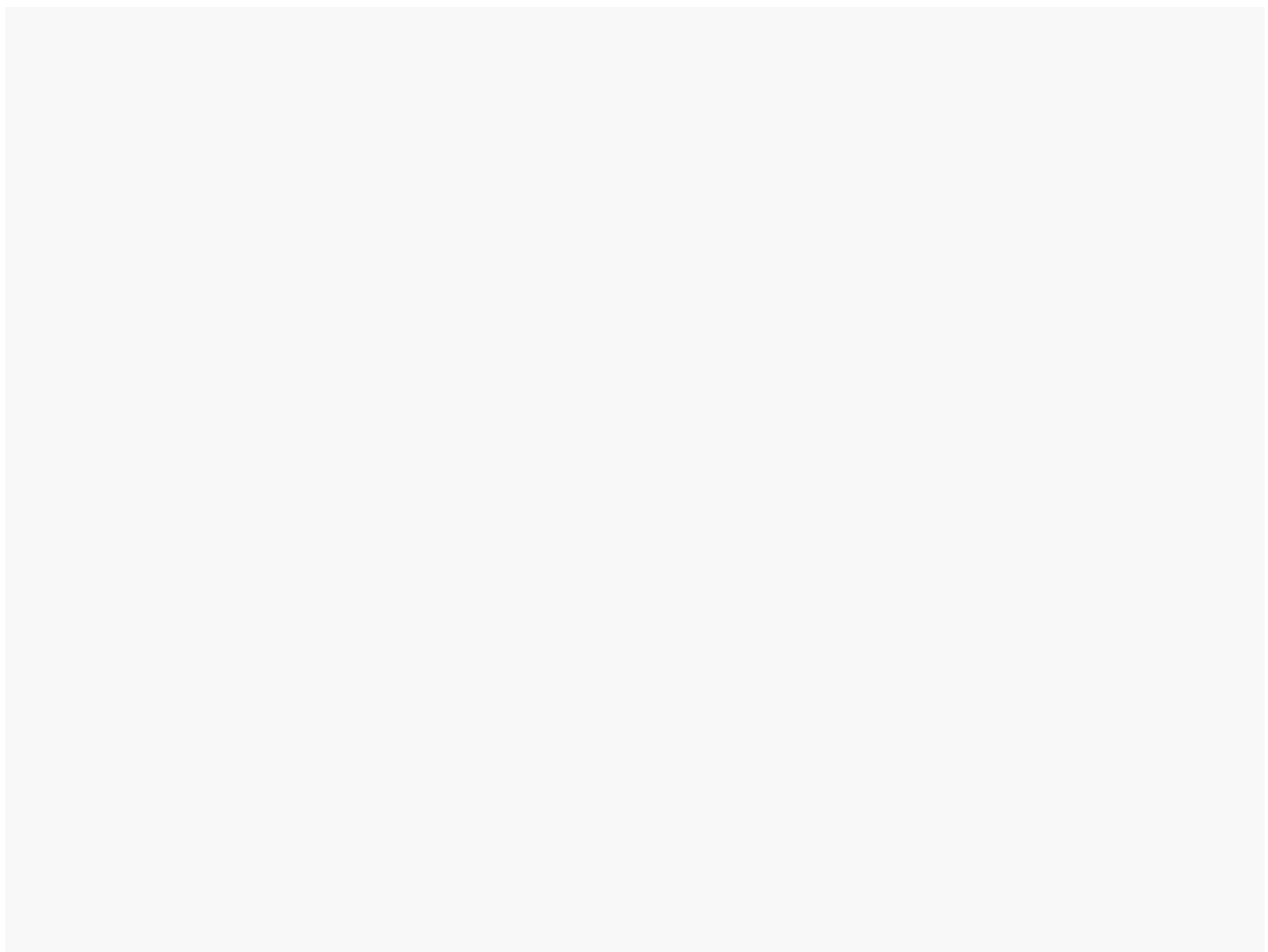


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6. Minneapolis-St. Paul, Minnesota



St. Paul, Minnesota. Sam Wagner/Shutterstock



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country skiing in the winter and music festivals and baseball games in the spring and summer.

Jobs are [available](#) in science-focused fields at companies like Xcel Energy and Medtronic as well as retail corporations like Best Buy and Target.

Population: 3,629,190

Average annual salary: \$56,030

Quality of life: 7.1

Value index: 7.7



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[◀ HOMEPAGE](#)[Subscribe](#)A large, empty rectangular box intended for displaying a photograph of Des Moines, Iowa.

Des Moines, Iowa. f11photo/Shutterstock

Des Moines is drawing millennials and young families alike for its "one-of-a-kind shops, locally-owned restaurants, and hip bars" as well as its historical residences in quiet neighborhoods, said a local expert. Home to more than 80 insurance companies including giants Allied Insurance and Wellmark Blue Cross Blue Shield, [the job market is thriving](#).

Population: 214,237



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4. Fayetteville, Arkansas

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Fayetteville, Arkansas. shuttersv/Shutterstock

Fayetteville sits among the Ozark Mountains and is home to the University of Arkansas' flagship campus. The surrounding area of northwest Arkansas is home to [headquarters for seven Fortune 500 companies](#) including Walmart and Tyson Foods.

The city has experienced immense growth, according to a local expert, who said the region has evolved "from a small town to a center of higher education, culture, commerce, and entrepreneurialism."

Population: 87,590

Average annual salary: \$45,830

Quality of life: 7.5

Value index: 8.2

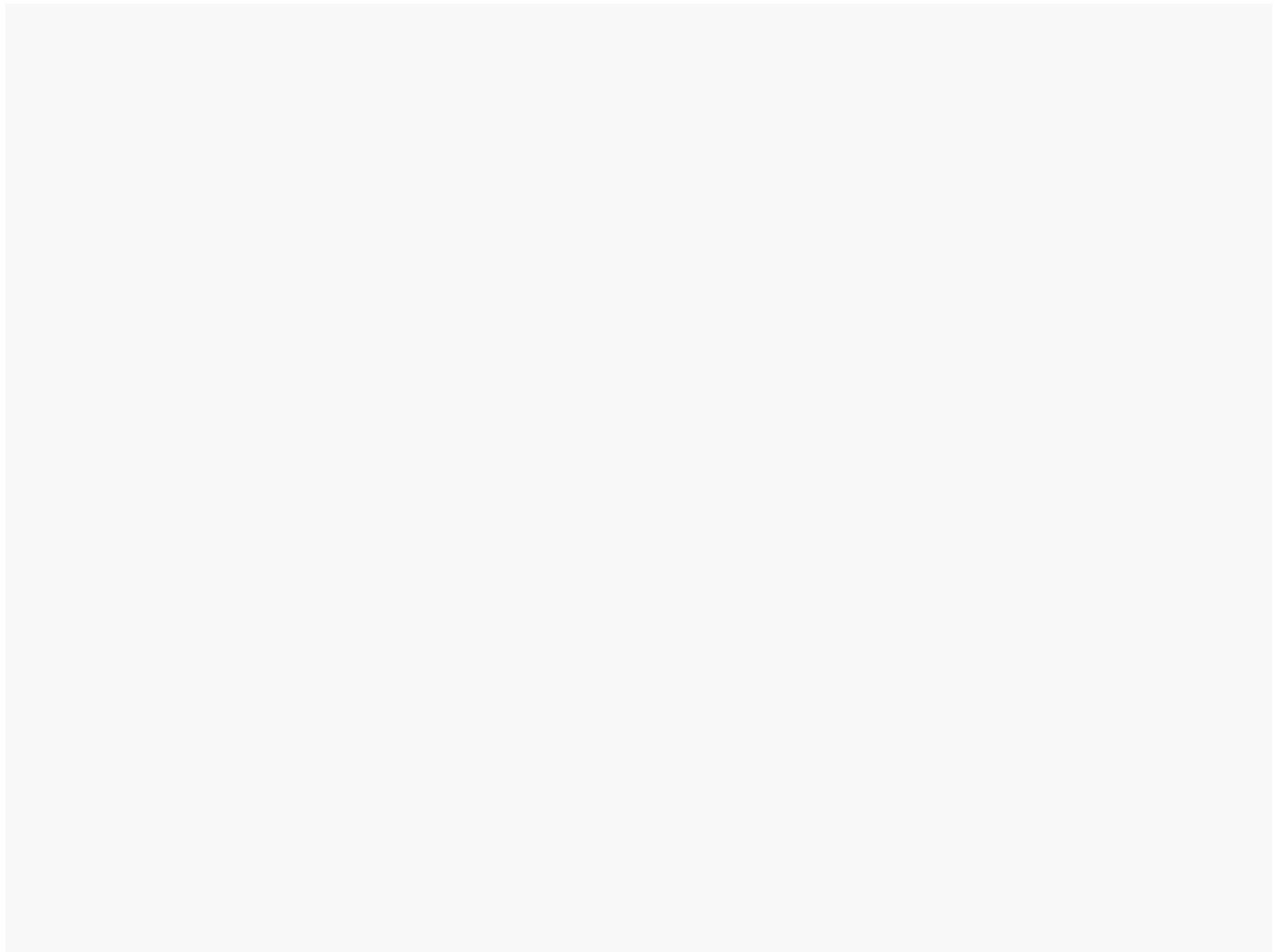


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3. Colorado Springs, Colorado



Colorado Springs, Colorado. John Coletti/Getty Images

Colorado Springs is "booming, with new residences popping up alongside quality schools, parks, and cultural attractions," touts a local expert. The city is just an hour's drive from Denver and in close proximity to Aspen and Vail's world-class ski resorts. Military jobs influence Colorado Springs' culture and economy, but [jobs are also](#)

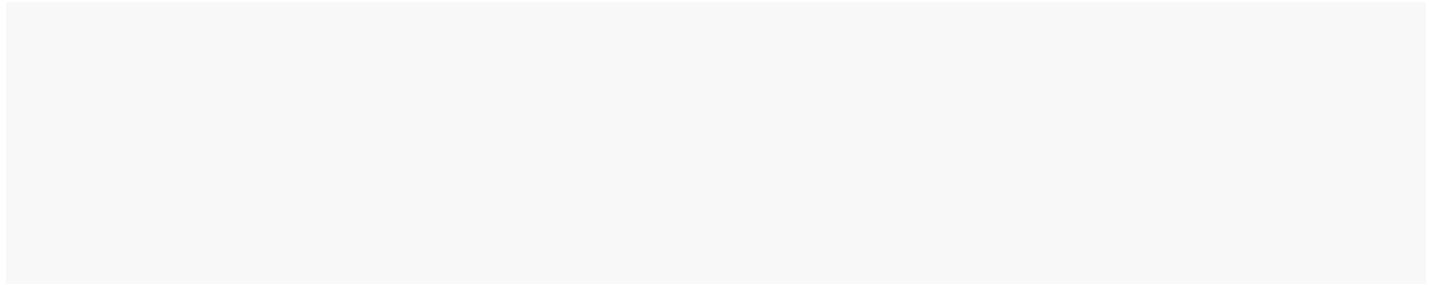


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[◀ HOMEPAGE](#)[Subscribe](#)~~Average annual salary: \$50,000~~**Quality of life:** 7.0**Value index:** 6.6

2. Denver, Colorado

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Denver, Colorado. littlenySTOCK/Shutterstock

While [Denver](#) sits at the base of the Rocky Mountains, it's not considered a mountain town since it takes at least an hour to get to the Rockies for snowboarding and ski activities, a local expert explained.

At 5,279 feet, the Mile High City lives up to its name in more ways than one: In 2012, Colorado legalized recreational marijuana, paving the way for a flourishing and [lucrative cannabis industry](#).

Population: 478,221

Average annual salary: \$57,400

Quality of life: 7.0

Value index: 6.7

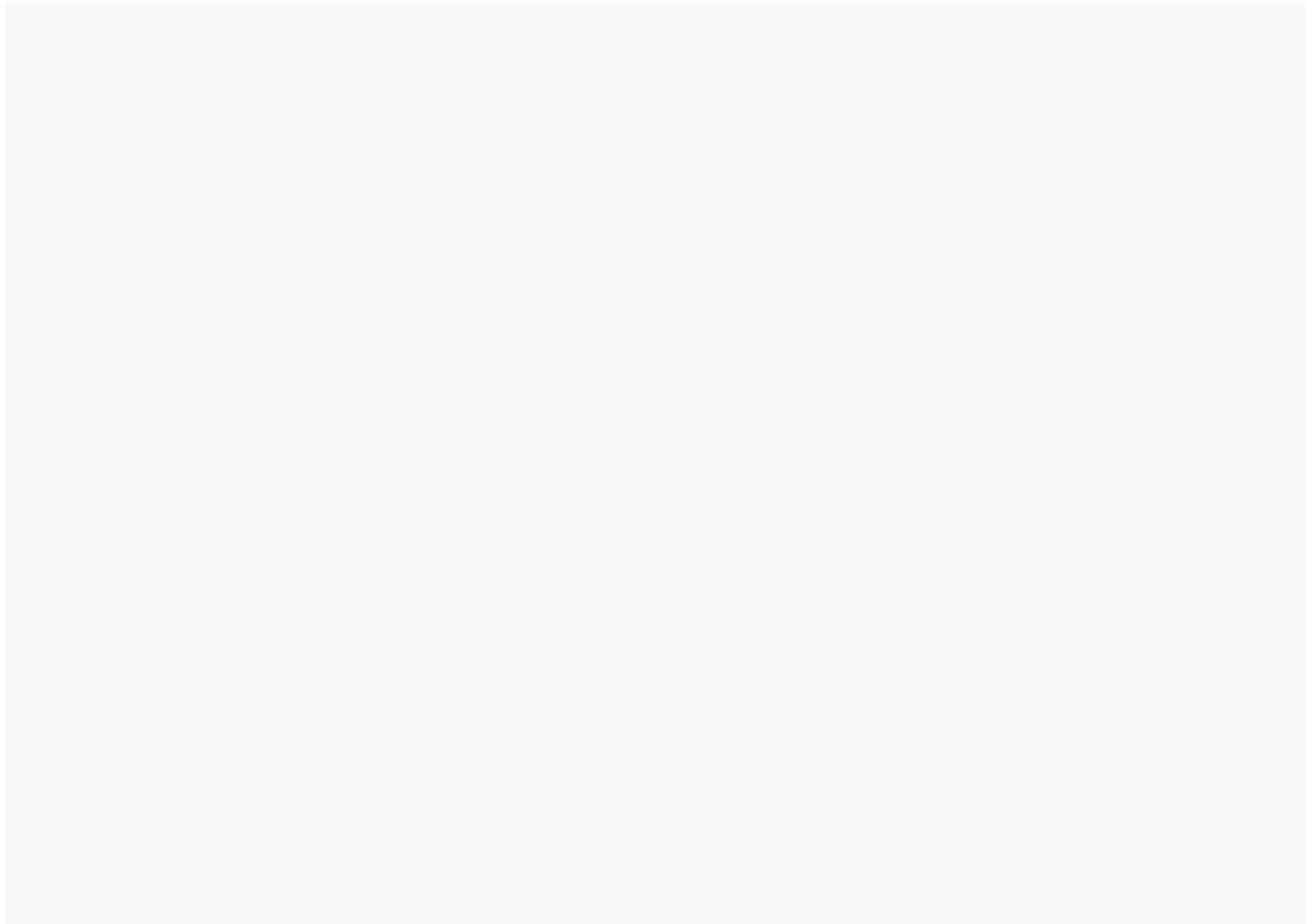


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1. Austin, Texas

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Austin is beloved for its live music scene and is host to some of the country's biggest music and culture festivals, including South by Southwest and Austin City Limits. The

city was nicknamed "Silicon Hills" in the 1990s for its status as "among the top areas for venture capital investment in the country."

Population: 978,908

Average annual salary: \$51,840

Quality of life: 7.3

Value index: 6.7

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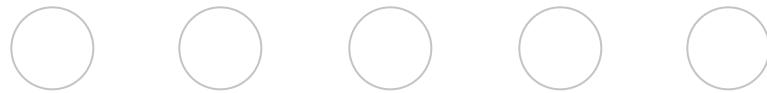
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