

America's most livable cities



Job opportunities, low crime and thriving local culture make these cities great places to call home.

By Francesca Levy of [Forbes](#)



Pittsburgh ranks No. 1 on [Forbes.com's list of most livable cities](#). // © Jan Tyler/Getty Images

Each year, Carnegie Mellon's Tepper School of Business attracts some of the brightest master's degree candidates in the country. But the admissions staff occasionally has to sway prospective students who wonder why they should relocate to Pittsburgh.

"Pittsburgh has a really great cultural scene. We have a great ballet and a great symphony that travels the world and performs to packed houses, and there's a restaurant scene that's much more diverse than it ever was when I was growing up," says Wendy Hermann, director of student services for master's programs and a Pittsburgh native. "And it's an easier sell, now that the Steelers and Penguin won their respective titles."

Indeed, Pittsburgh's art scene, job prospects, safety and affordability make it the most livable city in the country, according to measures studied by Forbes. The city has rebounded from its manufacturing past. Disused steel mills have been repurposed into multimedia art centers, and amid a struggling national economy, Google Pittsburgh — a test site for the company's new high-speed broadband network — has expanded its offices to accommodate more hires.

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What's your home worth?

Pittsburgh's strong university presence — the city has more than a dozen colleges or campuses — helps bolster its livability. In fact, the key to finding the easiest places to live may be to follow the students. Most of the metros on our

list — including Ann Arbor, Mich.; Provo, Utah; and Manchester, N.H. — are college towns.

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"Universities are large employers in their cities," says Alexander Von Hoffman, senior fellow at the Joint Center for Housing Studies at Harvard University. "In the long term, not only do you have that employment, but you have an educated population and you have a large, youthful population which tends to be a consuming population."

 [Slide show: The top 5 most livable cities](#)

Behind the numbers

In compiling our list, we measured five data points in the country's 200 largest Metropolitan Statistical Areas: unemployment, crime, income growth, cost of living and artistic and cultural opportunities.

To find out where jobs were available and incomes were steadily growing, we ranked cities both by their rate of income growth over the past five years and the current unemployment rate, based on data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics. The stronger the income growth trend and the lower the unemployment, the higher each city ranked. Jobs don't mean everything, though: A city is more livable if a family's income goes further. Using cost of living data from Moody's Economy.com, we ranked cities higher that had lower costs for everyday goods.

Some places are inexpensive, but still not desirable, so we included a measure for crime, using the Federal Bureau of Investigation's and Sperling's Best Places reports on the number of crimes per 100,000 residents, ranking low-crime cities higher. We also considered a thriving local culture crucial to livability, so we gave higher rankings to cities that scored highly on the Arts & Leisure index created by Sperling's Best Places. We averaged the rankings for each of these metrics to arrive at a final score.

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The college bump

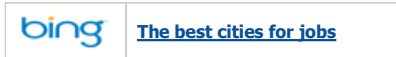
Ogden, Utah, No. 2 on our list, is home to Weber State University. Unemployment in the metro is below average, and incomes have increased by 3.4% over the last five years. Provo, Utah, a city 80 miles away and our No. 3 most livable, is home to Brigham Young University, the country's largest private college. The metro has the highest five-year income growth, 5.2%, of all the cities measured. No. 9 Lincoln, Neb., home to the University of Nebraska's main campus, boasts the lowest unemployment rate, 4.9%, of all the metros we surveyed. Unemployment is also at a low 5.9% in No. 5 Omaha, Neb., home to a University of Nebraska campus and roughly a dozen other colleges.

Rust Belt renaissance

Cities once driven by jobs in steel manufacturing, railroads and textile mills suffered as those industries dried up in the 1970s. But it's a mistake to write off places like Pittsburgh; Harrisburg, Pa.; and Manchester, N.H., Nos. 1, 5 and 7 on our list, respectively.

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Manchester, once dominated by textile mills, is revitalizing itself, converting its maze of mills and foundries into medical centers, museums and apartment buildings that now drive the local economy. The city has the second-lowest crime rate of all the metros we surveyed, incomes have grown 3% in five years and, at 7.7%, its unemployment rate is below the national average.



Low-key livability

In only a few of our most livable cities does population growth match prospects for employment and inexpensive living. Provo saw an 8% population boom between 2000 and 2006, and the head count in Omaha rose by 7.2% over the same period. In most of the cities on the list, however, the population has shrunk, or grown only by meager percentages, suggesting that word about the quality of life there hasn't yet gotten out. Being a well-kept secret is just fine for some residents.

"I'm a big proponent of Pittsburgh," Hermann says. "But I don't want to spread the message too much."

The top 5 most livable cities

1. [Pittsburgh](#)
2. [Ogden-Clearfield, Utah](#)
3. [Provo-Orem, Utah](#)
4. [Ann Arbor, Mich.](#)
5. [Harrisburg-Carlisle, Pa.](#)

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