

Top 25 cities for your career

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Now more than ever, it's important to get the **best bang for your buck**. And there's no question about it — when it comes to value, not every U.S. city is created equally.

Why chase a great salary if your rent swallows most of it, unemployment is skyrocketing and you spend two hours a day just to get to and from work?

So, which cities offer the *most* overall value in 2009?

[WomenCo.](#) has come up with the top 25 — and some may surprise you! After examining various city lists, weighing the rankings and taking note of our personal opinions, we've produced a list of cities that's sure to offer something for everyone.

Our Criteria We looked at cities' growth rates, average salaries and costs of living.

We factored in average commute time — which, according to experts, has a colossal impact on your overall happiness.

We looked not only at unemployment figures, but also at the rate that unemployment has actually increased since February 2008.

Thinking of relocating for better job prospects? Need to compare two top contenders? Just curious to see where your city ranks? We've got you covered. Read on!

#25. San Diego, CA

Population: 1,266,731



Average Salary: \$45,210

Cost of Living Rank (in a 1-100 list): 91

Average Commute Time: 23.4 minutes

Job Growth Rank (in a list of 372 Highest Growth Cities): 208

Unemployment Rate: 8.8 San Diego is a splashy surfers paradise in Southern California. If wealth were measured by sun and sand, San Diego would be the nation's richest city. Unfortunately, the recession has burned San Diego with a 3.8% increase in unemployment. Still, the city enjoys a mean income of over \$45,000 and a top-25 ranking amongst the nation's best cities for job growth. So grab your board and your resume because San Diego remains a promising place to work and even better place to play.

#24. Philadelphia, PA



Population: 1,449,634

Average Salary: \$44,460

Cost of Living Rank (in a 1-100 list): 59

Average Commute Time: 29.4 minutes

Job Growth Rank (in a list of 372 Highest Growth Cities): 176

Unemployment Rate: 8.0 The "City of Brotherly Love" — and the largest city on our list — has experienced a modest 3.1% uptick in unemployment, but has maintained an unemployment rate much lower than that of comparable cities. A mecca for tourists and American history buffs, Philadelphia also promotes itself as a center for biomedical and pharmaceutical companies. In recent years, education and health sectors have emerged as principal drivers of the local economy, helping the city stay in our top 25.

Bonus fun fact: The lemon meringue pie was invented in Philadelphia.

#23. Cincinnati, OH



Population: 332,458

Average Salary: \$40,540

Cost of Living Rank (in a 1-100 list): 14

Average Commute Time: 21 minutes

Job Growth Rank (in a list of 372 Highest Growth Cities): 207

Unemployment Rate: 8.9 Procter & Gamble, Sunny Delight, and Chiquita Brands International are amongst the impressive list of 10 Fortune 100 companies based in the this all-American, river-front city. Its unemployment rate has not grown as much as other former industrial cities, gaining only 3.6 % since before the economy collapsed. With solid job growth potential, Cincinnati's big Fortune 100 companies are slowly pulling the city back into a positive economic reality.

#22. Louisville, KY



Population: 256,231

Average Salary: \$37,410

Cost of Living Rank (in a 1-100 list): 16

Average Commute Time: 21.5 minutes

Job Growth Rank (in a list of 372 Highest Growth Cities): 204

Unemployment Rate: 10 Louisville is a charming southern belle of a city with a derby full of galloping job opportunities. Ranked at #16 for cost of living, Louisville offers country charm and city amenities. The job growth is pacing around the national average, and the unemployment rate has gone up a reasonable 4.2% since the recession began.

Bonus fun fact: 90% of the United States' disco balls are produced in Louisville.

#21. Hartford, CT



Population: 124,563

Average Salary: \$48,650

Cost of Living Rank (in a 1-100 list): 74

Average Commute Time: 33.2 minutes

Job Growth Rank (in a list of 372 Highest Growth Cities): 199

Unemployment Rate: 8 Nicknamed the "Insurance Capital of the World," Hartford is home to some of the world's largest insurance company headquarters. It also boasts some of our nation's oldest institutions — the oldest art museum, park and continuously published newspaper all hail from Hartford. With a high average salary and a relatively low cost of living, it's no wonder this picturesque city made our cut.

Bonus fun fact: Nitrous oxide (laughing gas) was discovered in Hartford.

#20. St. Louis, MO



Population: 354,361

Average Salary: \$40,630

Cost of Living Rank (in a 1-100 list): 23

Average Commute Time: 21.5 minutes

Job Growth Rank (in a list of 372 Highest Growth Cities): 179

Unemployment Rate: 9.2 Known as the city that marks the divide between the Eastern and Western United States, St. Louis is often called the "Gateway City." It's home to some of our nation's largest public and privately held corporations —Enterprise Rent-A-Car, Scottrade, Energizer and Anheuser-Busch Breweries are just a few of its best known local companies. And it didn't just make our own short list of great cities — this charming city ranks among the whole world's top 100 cities in terms of quality of life.

Bonus fun fact: The ice cream cone was invented in St. Louis.

#19. Indianapolis, IN



Population: 795,458

Average Salary: \$39,840

Cost of Living Rank (in a 1-100 list): 12

Average Commute Time: 21.7 minutes

Job Growth Rank (in a list of 372 Highest Growth Cities): 197

Unemployment Rate: 8.2 Formerly a manufacturing-heavy city, Indianapolis has shifted to encompass a much more diversified economy – today, its key industries include education, healthcare, tourism and finance. And if you love sports, Indianapolis may just be the place for you. The city hosts several major sporting events, including the Indianapolis 500, Brickyard 400 and men’s and women’s NCAA championships. It is also the fourth largest city on this list – below Philadelphia, San Antonio, and San Diego.

Bonus fun fact: Indianapolis has the largest children’s museum in the world.

#18. Columbus, OH



Population: 747,755

Average Salary: \$40,770

Cost of Living Rank (in a 1-100 list): 17

Average Commute Time: 20 minutes

Job Growth Rank (in a list of 372 Highest Growth Cities): 178

Unemployment Rate: 7.9 Named after Christopher Columbus, the largest city in Ohio is also one of the largest cities on our list. The city boasts a robust economy, ranking in the top 10 in the nation. Government jobs provide the largest source of employment here, followed by its large higher education institutions. Columbus offers a relatively low cost of living and also boasts the lowest unemployment rate of all the 25 best value cities on this list.

Bonus fun fact: 50% of the United States population lives within a 500-mile radius of Columbus.

#17. Buffalo, NY



Population: 272,632

Average Salary: \$38,640

Cost of Living Rank (in a 1-100 list): 1

Average Commute Time: 19.4 minutes

Job Growth Rank (in a list of 372 Highest Growth Cities): 174

Unemployment Rate: 9.6 Known for an abundance of greenery, a historic waterfront and a diverse cuisine, Buffalo has a lot to offer in terms of overall value. New York's second largest city topped the list for cost-of-living per income ratio, and boasts one of the lowest average commute times in the nation. Unfortunately, this city also has one of highest unemployment rates on the list, so this year it ranks in the bottom half.

Bonus fun fact: Not surprisingly, buffalo wings were invented here!

#16. Boston, MA



Population: 599,351

Average Salary: \$51,730

Cost of Living Rank (in a 1-100 list): 80

Average Commute Time: 27.3 minutes

Job Growth Rank (in a list of 372 Highest Growth Cities): 118

Unemployment Rate: 7.4 The unofficial "Capital of New England" is home to 21 four-year colleges and universities, making it a national center for higher education. These schools add to the local economy, not just by creating jobs but by attracting loads of high tech industries to the city. And at an average salary of \$51,730, Boston boasts one of the highest incomes on our list. Living costs, however, are on the higher side, which pushes this iconic city farther down the list.

Bonus fun fact: The first telephone call was made in Boston.

#15. Charlotte, NC



Population: 671,588

Average Salary: \$41,200

Cost of Living Rank (in a 1-100 list): 36

Average Commute Time: 25.2 minutes

Job Growth Rank (in a list of 372 Highest Growth Cities): 125

Unemployment Rate: 11.7 Home to the nation's largest financial asset – Bank of America – as well as a number of Fortune 500 companies, this comfortable North Carolina city offers a solid salary to cost of living ratio. However, this has also left it more vulnerable to the economic downturn. It would have scored higher on our list, were it not for the drastic increase in unemployment since last year (up 6%).

Bonus fun fact: Charlotte has two nuclear power plants!

#14. Pittsburgh, PA



Population: 311,218

Average Salary: \$38,190

Cost of Living Rank (in a 1-100 list): 9

Average Commute Time: 21.2 minutes

Job Growth Rank (in a list of 372 Highest Growth Cities): 169

Unemployment Rate: 7.6 With its former steel-manufacturing base and 446 bridges marking its skyline, Pittsburgh is unofficially considered both "The City of Bridges" and "The Steel City." Our #14 pick is historically known for its heavy industry, but today its leading industries are healthcare, education, technology, robotics, fashion and financial services. Boasting the third best income to cost of living ratio and third smallest drop in unemployment rate, Pittsburgh comes WomenCo-approved and recommended!

Bonus fun fact: Beloved TV personality Mr. Rogers' *real* neighborhood was the Oakland section of Pittsburgh.

#13. Kansas City, MO



Population: 450,375

Average Salary: \$37,970

Cost of Living Rank (in a 1-100 list): 25

Average Commute Time: 20.7 minutes

Job Growth Rank (in a list of 372 Highest Growth Cities): 164

Unemployment Rate: 8.4 Kansas City houses the headquarters of four Fortune 500 companies and several more Fortune 1000 corporations, providing a richly diverse economy with significant trade and transportation sectors, government programs and business services. Its cost of living has consistently been at or below the national average, boosting its rating on our list. Not only that, Forbes.com claims “there’s a ‘zone of sanity’ across the middle of the country, including the region around Kansas City, Mo., that largely avoided the real estate bubble and the subsequent foreclosure crisis.”

Bonus fun fact: The city is well known for its contributions to jazz music as well as the blues.

#12. Virginia Beach, VA



Population: 433,746

Average Salary: \$37,550

Cost of Living Rank (in a 1-100 list): 37

Average Commute Time: 21.7 minutes

Job Growth Rank (in a list of 372 Highest Growth Cities): 160

Unemployment Rate: 7.2 This beachfront city is best known for its thriving tourism, but is also home to 208 city parks, a national wildlife refuge, long-protected beach areas, three military bases, two universities and numerous historic sites. Major employers include Geico car insurance, Amerigroup health care, Virginia Beach-headquartered Lillian Vernon and Navy Exchange Service Command, while a large agribusiness sector gives our #12 city an extra boost, keeping it just in the top half.

Bonus fun fact: The *Guinness Book of World Records* lists Virginia Beach as having the longest pleasure beach in the world.

#11. Nashville, TN



Population: 590,807

Average Salary: \$36,330

Cost of Living Rank (in a 1-100 list): 39

Average Commute Time: 20.7 minutes

Job Growth Rank (in a list of 372 Highest Growth Cities): 153

Unemployment Rate: 8.4 As a leader in finance and insurance, health care, music and entertainment, publishing, transportation technology, higher education, biotechnology, plastics, and tourism and conventions, the economic diversity of America's country music capital strengthens itself from the inside out. Its income to cost of living ratio is close to the best, especially given the city's larger size, while the rise in unemployment has remained decently low.

Bonus fun fact: Nashville once had the highest number of churches per capita.

#10. Honolulu, HI



Population: 588,349

Average Salary: \$41,250

Cost of Living Rank (in a 1-100 list): 93

Average Commute Time: 22.3 minutes

Job Growth Rank (in a list of 372 Highest Growth Cities): 132

Unemployment Rate: 5.4 More than just sun, sand, surf and volcanoes, Hawaii's capital city boasts the second lowest unemployment rate on our list. The city is heavily focused in government; trade, transportation and utilities; leisure and hospitality; and professional and business services. One-fifth of the land is actually zoned for agriculture and, despite ongoing residential and commercial development, diversified agriculture and aquaculture have seen steady upward trends in recent years.

Bonus fun fact: President Obama was born here.

#9. Denver, CO



Population: 588,349

Average Salary: \$45,610

Cost of Living Rank (in a 1-100 list): 47

Average Commute Time: 22.6 minutes

Job Growth Rank (in a list of 372 Highest Growth Cities): 113

Unemployment Rate: 7.9 Emphasizing employment in air transportation, telecommunications, aerospace and manufacturing, Denver is a major energy research center and the regional headquarters for government agencies. Its bustling downtown financial district is also considered the "Wall Street of the Rockies," housing both major national and international banks. And that's not all — Denver is 346 miles west of the exact geographic center of the country, placing it in a great spot for future economic development and growth.

Bonus fun fact: Denver is the only city ever to turn down the Olympics.

#8. Portland, OR



Population: 550,396

Average Salary: \$43,370

Cost of Living Rank (in a 1-100 list): 58

Average Commute Time: 22.4 minutes

Job Growth Rank (in a list of 372 Highest Growth Cities): 55

Unemployment Rate: 10.7 Historically, Portland has had a long-standing association with high-tech industries. According to City-Data.com, more than 1,200 tech companies currently operate in Portland, and, in 2004, microcomputer components manufacturer Intel was the city's largest employer. The city has also seen consistent growth in the education and health-services sectors, helping the area maintain its high growth ratings despite significant decreases in employment in the natural resources, mining and construction sectors.

Bonus fun fact: Portland has the largest independent book store in the world.

#7. Rochester, NY



Population: 206,759

Average Salary: \$40,660

Cost of Living Rank (in a 1-100 list): 3

Average Commute Time: 19.4 minutes

Job Growth Rank (in a list of 372 Highest Growth Cities): 137

Unemployment Rate: 8.5 Rochester is home to several Fortune 1000 companies — including the largest wine company in the world, Constellation Brands, and photo experts Eastman Kodak — as well as several national and regional companies. With the second best income to cost of living ratio on our list as well as boasting the lowest commute time, this city is a solid choice.

Bonus fun fact: Rochester is known as the world capital of imaging.

#6. Seattle, WA



Population: 594,210

Average Salary: \$49,890

Cost of Living Rank (in a 1-100 list): 79

Average Commute Time: 25.7 minutes

Job Growth Rank (in a list of 372 Highest Growth Cities): 34

Unemployment Rate: 8.7 The home to many prominent corporate headquarters — including those of Starbucks, Nordstrom, Microsoft and Amazon.com — Seattle is Washington state's largest city and the region's major economic, cultural and educational center. While the cost of living is a little on the high side, our #6 city has a particularly promising job outlook in alternative energy development and software engineering.

Bonus fun fact: Seattle buys more sunglasses per capita than any city in the US.

#5. Raleigh-Cary Metropolitan Area, NC



Population: 497,602

Average Salary: \$40,840

Cost of Living Rank (in a 1-100 list): 46

Average Commute Time: 20.9 minutes

Job Growth Rank (in a list of 372 Highest Growth Cities): 38

Unemployment Rate: 8.8 One of the nation's top areas for overall growth, Raleigh-Cary shines with expected job growth in technology, tourism and academia. Home to one of the [largest high-technology R&D centers in the world](#), our #5 pick is becoming a preferred location for cutting-edge technology and manufacturing firms. Its relatively low income to cost of living ratio and potential for growth definitely place it in the top tier.

#4. Oklahoma City, OK



Population: 547,274

Average Salary: \$35,970

Cost of Living Rank (in a 1-100 list): 15

Average Commute Time: 18.7 minutes

Job Growth Rank (in a list of 372 Highest Growth Cities): 44

Unemployment Rate: 5.6 Ranked by *Forbes* magazine as 2008's most recession-proof American city, Oklahoma City is still bustling with the prospect of significant job growth. With last year's up trend in the leisure and hospitality sector as well as employment increases in natural resources, wholesale, mining and construction, Oklahoma's capital city has managed to hold steady with an impressively low change in unemployment rate since the recession's outbreak. Our #4 pick remains a center for government and energy exploration while also continuing to foster positive working environments, boasting an exceptionally low average commute time for workers and a sensible income to cost of living ratio.

#3. Salt Lake City, UT



Population: 180,651

Average Salary: \$39,590

Cost of Living Rank (in a 1-100 list): 41

Average Commute Time: 23.4 minutes

Job Growth Rank (in a list of 372 Highest Growth Cities): 36

Unemployment Rate: 5.2 Service-oriented Salt Lake City is not only home to the headquarters of the Mormon Church but is also the nation's largest industrial banking center. With stimulus from seasonal outdoor recreation tourism and a recent rebound in information-sector jobs, Salt Lake City has high expectations for job growth both now and after the economy recovers. Offering better employment conditions than most other large cities, Utah's biggest city boasts the lowest unemployment rate and the second lowest average commute time on our list — boosting it right near the top.

#2. San Antonio, TX:



Population: 1,328,984

Average Salary: \$34,610

Cost of Living Rank (in a 1-100 list): 29

Average Commute Time: 22.5 minutes

Job Growth Rank (in a list of 372 Highest Growth Cities): 20

Unemployment Rate: 6.0 The second largest city in Texas (and on our list!), San Antonio has one of the most solid salary to cost of living ratios in the country and has seen the lowest change in unemployment rate since the onset of the recession. Its projected job growth is extremely promising and consistently high-performing, with plenty of opportunity in the education, health care, manufacturing, government and service sectors. Famous for its River Walk, the Alamo and Tejano culture, San Antonio's tourism also continues to thrive despite a down economy.

#1. Austin, TX



Population: 743,074

Average Salary: \$41,330

Cost of Living Rank (in a 1-100 list): 51

Average Commute Time: 21.9 minutes

Job Growth Rank (in a list of 372 Highest Growth Cities): 6

Unemployment Rate: 6.3 Austin tops our list with robust projected job growth and one of the lowest changes in unemployment rate since the onset of the recession. The city has enjoyed a recent explosion of high-tech entrepreneurism, and its two largest employers — the state government and the University of Texas — are expected to add a couple thousand jobs this year. A “best cities” list veteran, **Austin’s our top pick!**

Courtesy of JB Goodwin