

# Austin's job market, cool factor make city top draw for young adults

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Cliff Chong left Florida for Austin armed with good reasons and good intentions. Work? Check. Education? Check. Fun? Check that all day long.

"I wanted to explore, to play hard and work hard. I feel Austin definitely encapsulates that," says Chong, 25, a social worker for a nonprofit group that works to prevent homelessness.

Born and raised in the Deep South, Travis Marcum moved to the Live Music Capital with a singular purpose — to chase his dream of becoming a concert classical guitarist.

That thousands of young people like Marcum and Chong move to Austin every year, drawn by the pull of jobs, higher education and, lest we forget, the city's reputation for being a hip destination, has long been apparent. Austin is filled with people who relocated here after saying the city swept them off their feet.

**But new census data show Austin solidifying its cachet among adults ages 25-34, generally considered among the most mobile of Americans. According to a report released this month, the Austin-Round Rock metro area had the highest annual average net migration of young adults for 2007-2009, with 14,318. The area leaped from ninth place in 2005-2007.**

Two other Texas metro areas — Dallas and Houston — ranked in the top five for 2007-2009, according to an analysis by William Frey, a senior demographer with the Brookings Institution in Washington, D.C.

**Austin also ranked No. 1 for 2007-09 in migration rate of young adults with college degrees.**

Frey said Austin's gains were significant because they occurred as the nation's historically low levels of long-distance migration fell further. According to Frey, in 2007-2008, the overall U.S. migration rate reached its lowest point since World War II.

College graduates and young adults tend to be the lifeblood of the labor force, quicker to respond to shifts in national job networks, said Frey, who thinks unemployment and the rise in home foreclosures led to the migration stalls.

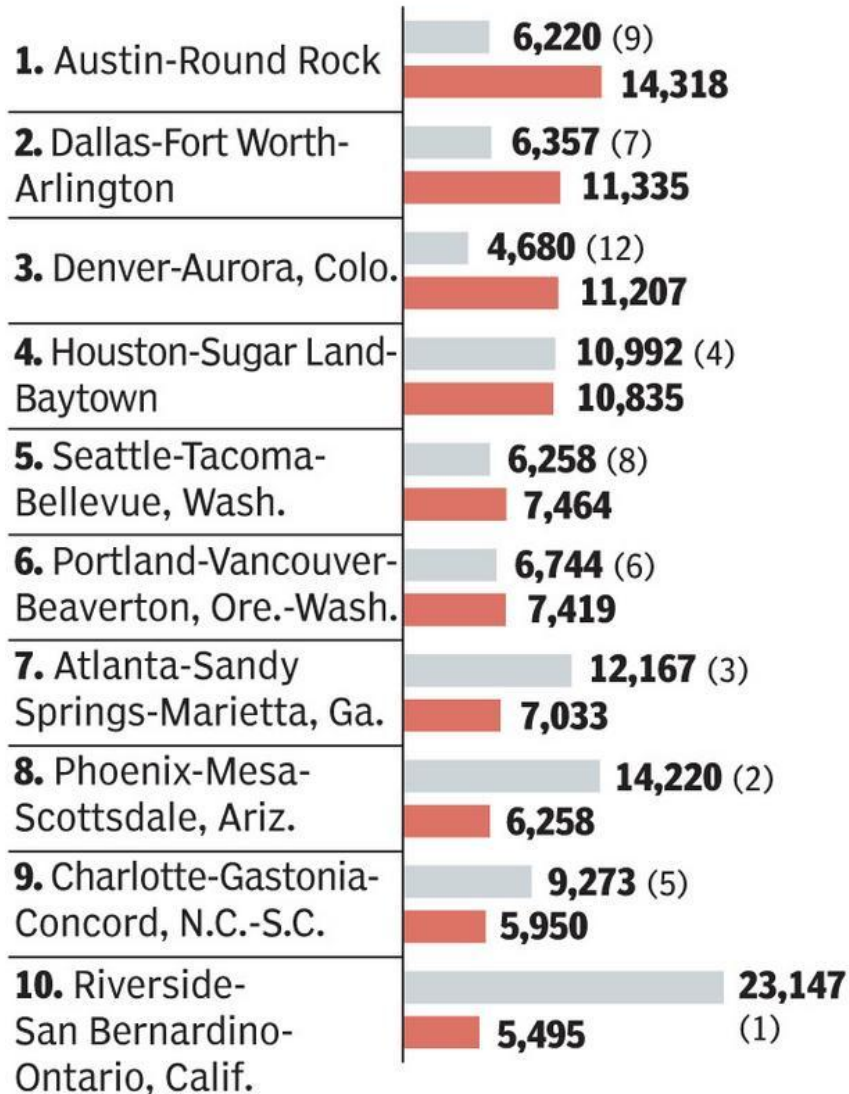
## For young adults, Austin a hot spot to relocate

From 2007 to 2009, the Austin-Round Rock area had the highest annual average net migration of young adults among metropolitan areas with a population of at least 1 million. Austin-Round Rock was ranked ninth for 2005-2007.

### Annual average net migration, ages 25 to 34

■ 2007-09 ■ 2005-07 (ranking through time span)

**Metro area** (previous ranking)



Source: William Frey, Brookings Institution analysis of 2005-07 and 2007-09 American Community Survey estimates.

What does Austin have going for it that other major metro areas don't?

"It's a state capital and a college town. Some people always say both are a little bit recession-proof. And it's a self-identified cool city," Frey said with a laugh. There are other factors, too — the metro area's high-tech industry and the region's generally good economic health when compared with other parts of the country.

**"It's got all the ingredients to withstand hard times, and it has some things going for it even in good times," Frey said.**

City of Austin demographer Ryan Robinson said the report is a reflection of the overall health of the Austin economy "and to this certain attractiveness we have for college-educated individuals."

Though the rate of growth appears to be slowing, the Austin area continues to add jobs, according to the Texas Workforce Commission. Area employers added 15,200 jobs during the one-year period beginning December 2009.

The area's unemployment rate in December was 6.8 percent. Statewide unemployment was 8.3 percent, and the national jobless rate was 9.4 percent. The fact that job markets are struggling elsewhere may reinforce Austin's standing as a mecca for young people, Frey said.

Shannon Jordy, a 32-year-old Web content strategist and interactive copywriter, moved from Houston to Austin in 1996 to go to the University of Texas, where she got a communication degree.

"You want to go to Austin," she recalled. "It's the place if you're weird or artsy."

Jordy's career flourished, and she still loves Austin. It's easy to find work here, she said, and the people are nicer than anywhere she's ever been. Jordy and her boyfriend, both movie lovers, enjoy the Alamo Drafthouse, the live music scene and the variety of restaurants, bars and nightlife.

"The work-life balance is really respected in Austin," Jordy said.

But Jordy has also felt a need to grow professionally, a move she feels would be best accomplished in a bigger market, like New York. In testing the waters, however, Jordy hasn't found jobs out there.

"I forgot how insulated Austin has been from the recession," she said.

**Courtesy of JB Goodwin**