

Personal Finance

America's Best Cities For Young Adults

Morgan Brennan, 12.15.10, 6:45 PM ET

With the sluggish economy slowing many a budding career, 30 has for many become the new 20. But regardless of their age when they strike out on their own, young adults continue their endless quest for the most vibrant cities to call home.

The criteria for a great city geared toward young adults include a young, trendy social scene, decent entry-level career opportunities and a quality of life that consists of more than store-bought ramen noodles. The cult classic *Reality Bites* may have made thrift-store clothing and gas-station food appealing to Generation Xers, but these days a peer-oriented, tech-savvy, counterculture-rejecting vibe tends to predominate.

According to our list, uber-hip **Austin** is the best place to live if you're in your 20s and searching for a town filled with peers, good job prospects and fun things to do. The central-Texas metro, known both for a bustling tech community and a trendsetting music scene, ranks first on our list of America's Best Cities for Young Adults.

[In Pictures: Best Cities For Young Adults](#)

Behind the Numbers

To compile our Best Cities list, we defined young adults as those ages 20 to 29. Then we narrowed our search to the 40 "coolest" Metropolitan Statistical Areas, as defined by a Harris Interactive poll conducted exclusively for Forbes earlier this year.

Next we compared five data points that directly affect young adults. We assessed job markets based on unemployment rates, as measured by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, and average salaries for college-educated adults ages 20 to 29, with data from [PayScale.com](#), a salary and career data provider. To see just how far salaries stretch, we evaluated the cost of maintaining a household in each of city, using the Cost of Living Index from Moody's Economy.com, a model that incorporates the cost of housing, food, utilities, apparel and transportation.

Lastly we looked at the social scenes. We factored in the median age per metro, as measured by the U.S. Census Bureau's 2009 American Community Survey. To evaluate nightlife, we used a measure of restaurants and entertainment per capita, based on data from [CitySearch.com](#).

The Lone Star State Dominates

The result? Texas' self proclaimed Live Music Capital of the World is a promising place for young adults--particularly fresh-faced starving artists. Yes, **Austin's** population leans heavily toward the younger side, and its arts scene is blossoming, but a decent economy cinched its place as the winner.

Austin's unemployment rate is almost one-third lower than the 9.8% national average. Young adults take home an average salary of \$43,000 (including entry-level salaries) and the cost of living isn't exorbitant as it is in some other hot spots that make our list.

In fact, four Texas cities made the top 10 due to these economic factors: **Austin (No. 1)**, Houston (No. 2), Dallas (No. 6) and **San Antonio (No. 9)**. Every one of them also rates in the top five (behind Salt Lake City) in terms of the youthfulness of its median age.

Hipster Scenes Rule

Another component shared by these cities is a thriving social scene. New York, which comes in third, ranks first for nightlife, with nearly 20,000 venues populating its MSA boundaries (the city's five boroughs; Newark, N.J.; lower Westchester County; and Long Island, N.Y.). The City that Never Sleeps also reigns supreme as the "coolest city."

Seventh place on our list is gourmet coffee capital Seattle. The Emerald City boasts the No. 3 ranking in terms of nightlife and coolness.

Chic social scenes landed New York and Seattle on our list, but a low cost of living is a lure for neither. Both offer high salaries compared with almost every other city in the country, but their costs of living are also two of the highest.

The one city on our list ranking exceptionally low in nightlife is Minneapolis-St. Paul (38 out of 40). What it lacks in hip hangouts it makes up for with a 6.5% unemployment rate and high salaries (compared with its cost of living).

Other cities best suited to the Y Generation? Blustery Midwestern metropolis Chicago, which came in fourth; mountain-tucked ski haven Denver, which ranked fifth; and Southern hot spot Atlanta at No. 8.

Courtesy of JB Goodwin