

June 2006

[License or reprint this article](#)

YOUR MONEY

50 Smart Places to Live

by

You told us your ideal city is fun, vibrant and affordable. We found dozens that fit the bill.

Not too many of us have the opportunity -- or the inspiration -- to quit our jobs, sell our homes and travel the country in search of the perfect place to live. But last year former Washington, D.C., residents Karen-Lee Ryan, 40, and her husband, Mark Wood, 42, started a six-month odyssey with that goal in mind. "We were ready for a life change, and the road trip was amazing," says Karen-Lee.

In that spirit, we asked hundreds of you for the criteria you'd use to pick a place to call home. You told us you wanted good value in home prices and a reasonable cost of living -- not surprising, considering that choosing a place to live is one of the biggest financial decisions you'll ever make -- combined with a great quality of life.

To find such cities, we joined forces with Bert Sperling, co-author of *Cities Ranked & Rated* (Wiley, \$25) and host of BestPlaces.net, to compile a database with an eye to these elements. Among other things, we looked for places where you could buy an attractive house for \$300,000 to \$400,000 or less. Access to quality health care was also a must, as was a strong economy.

Next, we traveled to the cities that bubbled to the top of the list, to speak with residents and savor the flavor of their neighborhoods. Based on our experiences, we ranked our top-ten picks -- the first of which just happens to be the city that Karen-Lee and Mark now call home.

[#1 Nashville, Tenn.](#)

Our top pick offers affordable homes, a mild climate and a phenomenal entertainment scene that goes far beyond country.

[#2 Minneapolis-St. Paul, Minn.](#)

The Twin Cities offer a hip and progressive atmosphere with a midwestern sensibility, multiple cultural outlets, pro teams in all four major sports, a dozen universities and colleges, and a diverse economy.

[#3 Albuquerque, N.M.](#)

This laid-back city offers resort-town ambience, a boomtown economy and cow-town prices.

[#4 Atlanta, Ga.](#)

The capital of Georgia is a vibrant city with a rich history, good health care, a great cultural scene and genteel neighborhoods shaded by magnificent dogwood and magnolia trees.

[#5 Austin, Tex.](#)

Home to the University of Texas, the state capitol, the Zachary Scott Theatre and the Umlauf Sculpture Garden and Museum, Austin is a sophisticated salsa of culture, history and politics.

[#6 Kansas City](#)

This city split along state lines offers something for everyone: from stately houses to downtown lofts and world-class museums to barbecue.

[#7 Asheville, N.C.](#)

A virtually franchise-free downtown, world-class cuisine, amazing crafts, live music venues and fine arts make this city tucked into the Blue Ridge mountain range one of a kind.

[#8 Ithaca, N.Y.](#)

True, it's in the Finger Lakes boonies of central New York, but Ithaca is an Ivy League outpost with great food, beautiful scenery and Naderite politics.

[#9 Pittsburgh, Pa.](#)

Currently undergoing a renaissance, this hidden gem has distinctive neighborhoods, tree-lined streets, glittering skyscrapers, upscale shops and a diversified economy.

[#10 Iowa City, Iowa](#)

An oasis on the prairie, this wholesome middle-American city is bursting with creative and intellectual energy.

[Top 50 Smart Places](#)

See the complete list of *Kiplinger's* smart places to live.

[Slide Show of the Top Ten](#)

Here are our top picks. As you'll see, each city has a distinct flavor. Have a taste.

[Affordable Homes in Our Top Ten](#)

Take a look what your money could buy in our top ten cities.

[Find Your Own Best City](#)

Enter your criteria into our calculator and be matched with a customized list of perfect cities for you.

This page printed from: <http://www.kiplinger.com/personalfinance/features/archives/2006/05/intro.html>

All contents © 2006 The Kiplinger Washington Editors