

June 5, 2014

Study: Best Cities to Live in Arizona

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Some of the most enduring images of Arizona's breathtaking desert landscape are those captured by photographer Ansel Adams in the 1940s. Although these photos are memorable, nothing compares to seeing Horseshoe Bend or Canyon de Chelly in person. Residents know that a major part of the Arizona's appeal lies in its natural beauty, but that's not all the Grand Canyon state has to offer.

While the summers here are hot, especially around Phoenix and Tucson, wintertime brings cooler temperatures and a generous sprinkling of snow. The cost of living is relatively low, particularly for those who prefer to settle down in smaller communities, and jobs are abundant. Major corporations that have set up shop in Arizona include Bank of America, Intel and Wells Fargo.

Whether you're new to Arizona or a current resident looking to make a fresh start in a new town, planning a move starts with choosing the right city. You'll find everything from major urban centers to towns with less than 1,000 residents, and having so many choices can be overwhelming. In an effort to make your decision less complicated, the CreditDonkey team has ranked the top Arizona cities to call home.

STUDY METHODOLOGY

Each city on our list was ranked based on the following:

1. Odds of Being a Victim of a Violent Crime
2. Commute Time
3. Income
4. Residents Who Attended Some College
5. Restaurants Per Capita

Staying safe is of paramount importance, especially if you have children. For our study, we only looked at cities that scored the best marks in terms of their crime rate. In fact, one of the cities we've included is considered one of the safest communities nationwide.

Unless you'll be working from home, there's a good chance you'll spend part of your day in traffic. We looked at average commute times to find those cities that offered the shortest drive to work.

When payday rolls around, you don't want to feel shortchanged. We considered the average income for each city on our list as well as the percentage of residents who attended some college, since this can directly affect wages.

Eating the same thing day after day gets old eventually, and trying out a new restaurant is a good way to wake up your taste buds. In compiling our rankings, we took into account the number of restaurants per capita to make sure we included cities with the widest variety of dining choices.

10 Best Cities to Live in Arizona



SEDONA, ARIZONA

10. FLAGSTAFF

- Odds of Being a Victim of a Violent Crime: 1 in 254
- Commute Time: 15.2 minutes
- Income: \$48,676
- Residents Who Attended Some College, No Degree: 23.4%
- Restaurants: 1 per 323 inhabitants

Flagstaff is uniquely positioned approximately 150 miles north of Phoenix and 80 miles south of the Grand Canyon. Nearly a quarter of the residents attended some college, and average incomes hover close to the \$50,000 mark. Major employers include Purina, Dell and Northern Arizona University. Summers here are warm, with temperatures typically climbing into the high 80s. Come winter, colder weather pushes in, bringing with it more than 100 inches of snow each year.

Did You Know: Flagstaff is home to several major scientific and technological research centers, including the Lowell Observatory.

9. PRESCOTT VALLEY

- Odds of Being a Victim of a Violent Crime: 1 in 443
- Commute Time: 22 minutes
- Income: \$43,457
- Residents Who Attended Some College, No Degree: 35%
- Restaurants: 1 per 584 inhabitants

The small town of Prescott Valley is a rapidly growing offshoot of nearby Prescott. Just over an hour north of Phoenix, Prescott Valley is a popular spot among retirees who are looking for scenic views and a milder climate. The average commute is under 25 minutes, and the local restaurants serve an authentic southwest dining experience.

Did You Know: One of Prescott Valley's most famous attractions is Glassford Hill, an inactive volcano that last erupted between 10 and 14 million years ago.

8. MARANA

- Odds of Being a Victim of a Violent Crime: 1 in 1,018
- Commute Time: 27.7 minutes
- Income: \$71,723
- Residents Who Attended Some College, No Degree: 25.6%
(Bachelor's Degree or Higher: 39.8%)

- Restaurants: 1 per 484 inhabitants

Head north out of Tucson and eventually you'll come to Marana, a quaint little town that's home to just under 40,000 people. The town's close proximity to the metro area makes it an attractive place to call home, both for professionals and young families. Marana ranks second on our list in terms of safety, and average incomes are among the highest of any city included in our study. If a job opportunity has you considering a move to the Tucson area, you'll find the commute from here is less than 30 minutes.

Did You Know: Marana takes its name from the Spanish word "maraña," which means jungle or thicket, largely due to the dense brush that covered the landscape when the town was first founded.

7. SCOTTSDALE

- Odds of Being a Victim of a Violent Crime: 1 in 680
- Commute Time: 22.3 minutes
- Income: \$72,163
- Residents Who Attended Some College, No Degree: 21.8%
(Bachelor's Degree or Higher: 52.7%)
- Restaurants: 1 per 347 inhabitants

Just east of Phoenix, Scottsdale is the most populous spot on our list as well as one of the largest cities in the state. Nicknamed the "West's Most Western Town," Scottsdale first got its start in the late 1800s. Despite its size, crime rates here are well below average and professionals won't have to worry about a long commute. On the weekends, you can head out to explore the Sonoran Desert or take in the wildlife at the Phoenix Zoo.

Did You Know: A 1994 mayoral proclamation established chili as the official food of Scottsdale.

6. GILBERT

- Odds of Being a Victim of a Violent Crime: 1 in 1,045
- Commute Time: 26.7 minutes
- Income: \$80,121
- Residents Who Attended Some College, No Degree: 28.5%
(Bachelor's Degree or Higher: 38.6%)
- Restaurants: 1 per 906 inhabitants

Once a primarily agricultural community, Gilbert is a thriving suburban community situated just southeast of Phoenix. The city ranks highest on our list for income, with workers earning an average of slightly over \$80,000 annually. Gilbert prides itself on being family-friendly and offers a small-town feel with all the conveniences of living in a major city.

Did You Know: In 2013, Business Insider ranked Gilbert as the 5th safest place to live in the U.S.

5. COTTONWOOD

- Odds of Being a Victim of a Violent Crime: 1 in 224
- Commute Time: 15.8 minutes
- Income: \$35,870
- Residents Who Attended Some College, No Degree: 31.2%
- Restaurants: 1 per 209 inhabitants

Good things come in small packages, something that residents of Cottonwood have experienced firsthand. Plenty of families call Cottonwood home, and there's also a healthy retiree community. Things to do

include camping, hiking, and horseback riding at Dead Horse Ranch State Park and canoeing along the Verde River.

Did You Know: The Coconino National Forest takes up 80% of the land surrounding Cottonwood and the Verde Valley.

4. KINGMAN

- Odds of Being a Victim of a Violent Crime: 1 in 308
- Commute Time: 17.4 minutes
- Income: \$44,859
- Residents Who Attended Some College, No Degree: 30.1%
- Restaurants: 1 per 443 inhabitants

Unlike many Arizona towns that were founded as mining camps, Kingman originally began as a railroad depot. Its central location on the eastern edge of the Mojave Desert makes it convenient to some of the state's biggest attractions, including historic Route 66, the Hoover Dam and the Grand Canyon. Crime rates are low and commute times are short, and when the workweek is over, you can escape to nearby Las Vegas for a quick weekend getaway.

Did You Know: Arizona's first commercial airport was dedicated here in 1929 by aviators Charles Lindbergh and Amelia Earhart.

3. SIERRA VISTA

- Odds of Being a Victim of a Violent Crime: 1 in 359
- Commute Time: 16 minutes
- Income: \$56,433
- Residents Who Attended Some College, No Degree: 28.5%
- Restaurants: 1 per 552 inhabitants

Sierra Vista is Spanish for "mountain view," and it's a name that's well suited to this bustling city just 75 miles southeast of Tucson. Surrounded by the Huachuca, Dragoon, Mule, and Whetstone Mountains, Sierra Vista first got its start during the Apache Wars when members of the 6th U.S. Cavalry set up camp there. Today, the city is considered a major commercial and cultural hub in southeastern Arizona.

Did You Know: Sierra Vista dubs itself the "Hummingbird Capital of the U.S." but it's also a great place to scope out trogons, warblers and other tropical birds.

2. SEDONA

- Odds of Being a Victim of a Violent Crime: 1 in 509
- Commute Time: 14.8 minutes
- Income: \$51,430
- Residents Who Attended Some College, No Degree: 25.4%
- Restaurants: 1 per 143 inhabitants

Sedona, known for being an artistic and spiritual gathering place, is also one of the safest cities on our list. Home to just over 10,000 people, Sedona is close to Flagstaff but it still provides an out-of-the-way haven for those who are looking to escape the hectic pace of the city. Crime is low and the average commute time is the shortest on our list. When you're ready for a night on the town, you can choose from the best in international and local cuisine.

Did You Know: Some of Sedona's most popular tourist attractions include the vortex spots, areas of concentrated energy where people frequently go to meditate and pray.

1. LAKE HAVASU

- Odds of Being a Victim of a Violent Crime: 1 in 923
- Commute Time: 17.5 minutes
- Income: \$42,428
- Residents Who Attended Some College, No Degree: 32.7%
- Restaurants: 1 per 459 inhabitants

Lake Havasu is a top vacation destination, but residents agree that it's an excellent place to live year-round. Retirees are drawn to the city largely due to its moderate climate and affordability. Families love it here because there's always something to see or do and violent crime is extremely rare. With a commute time of just over 17 minutes, you'll find getting to work a breeze. On the weekends, you can check out the local attractions or head over the state line for a visit to Joshua Tree National Park.

Did You Know: Close to a million people enjoy the waters of Lake Havasu each year. The lake, which was once an area of dry desert, was formed by the damming of the Colorado River.

If you're looking for spectacular sunsets, a diverse landscape and plenty of outdoor attractions, Arizona has it all. The communities we've profiled are an eclectic mix, but it's their uniqueness that makes them stand out from the crowd. Our rankings are designed to offer a snapshot of what life in each city is like so you can find the one that best fits your needs and your lifestyle.

Data Sources:

- U.S. Census Bureau, Population Estimates
- FBI, Uniform Crime Reports
- U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey
- U.S. Census Bureau, Economic Census