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America's 10 hippest cities

Forbes

By Morgan Brennan | Forbes.com – Mon, Aug 13, 2012 12:58 PM EDT



Houston is known for many things: oil, NASA, urban sprawl and **business-friendly policies**. But the Texas city deserves to be known for something else: coolness.

The Bayou City may not be the first place you associate with being hip or trendy. But Houston has something many other major cities don't: jobs. With the local economy **humming through the recession**, Houston enjoyed 2.6% job growth last year, and nearly 50,000 Americans flocked there in response — particularly **young professionals**. In fact, the median age of a Houston resident is a youthful 33.

The result? Over the past decade, the dreary corporate cityscape — pictured above — has been quietly transforming. Stylish housing developments have popped up downtown, restaurants have taken up residence in former factories and art galleries like the **Station Museum** have been inhabiting warehouses.

Combine that with a strong theater scene, world-class museums and a multicultural, zoning-free mashup of a streetscape and you have the recipe for the No. 1 spot on Forbes' list of America's Coolest Cities To Live.

Yahoo! Homes is publishing the top 10 here. You can find the rest of the top 20 at Forbes.com:



Behind the Numbers

"Cool" is defined by Merriam-Webster's dictionary as "very good; fashionable."

Of course what, exactly, is good and fashionable is very much in the eye of the beholder. We sought to quantify it in terms of cities, ranking the 65 largest Metropolitan Statistical Areas and Metropolitan Divisions (areas that include cities and their surrounding suburbs that are defined by the U.S. Office of **Management and Budget**) based on seven data points weighted evenly.

Sperling's Best Places helped us calculate the number of entertainment options per capita in each metro area. We also ranked the cities based on other recreational opportunities, including the amount of green space, the cost and number of outdoor

activities like golfing and skiing available, and the number of pro and college sports teams.

With the help of Sperling's, we tallied restaurants and bars per capita, weeding out chain establishments – Applebee's has less sizzle than a local chef's bistro.

We also looked at each city's cultural composition using Sperling's Diversity Index. It measures the likelihood of meeting another person of a different race or ethnicity. Increased diversity tends to lead to a larger assortment of interesting shops, restaurants and events.

Using the most recent data from the U.S. Census Bureau, we factored in median age, favoring places with a large young adult population.

We ranked the cities based on net migration (the number of people who relocated there in 2011) and also on unemployment rates, since a city's offerings are only as good as the amount of people who want and can to afford to enjoy them. (No one likes to hang out in an empty bar, right?) We culled this data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics and [Moody's Analytics](#).

Houston is joined in our top 20 by four other Lone Star metro areas: Dallas ranked fourth; San Antonio, 11th; Fort Worth, 13th; and Austin, 19th. They all boast strong economies, large young adult populations and relatively high levels of cultural diversity.

Second on our list is Washington, D.C. With federal spending strong, the nation's capital sailed through the recession with low unemployment and an influx of newcomers. Many of those newcomers have, like Houston, been young adults. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, residents in their 20s and early 30s make up about a third of the metro area's population – 23% more than in 2000.

Washington also scored high thanks to its melting pot of a population, a large selection of local eateries and watering holes, and a host of activities that range from Smithsonian museums to music concerts. Washington reportedly hosts more festivals and events than any other U.S. city, [according to Destination DC](#).

Perhaps not surprisingly, many of America's priciest cities also made the cut: Los Angeles ranked third, San Francisco came in ninth and New York took 10th. "Established places like New York ... have a built-in cool crowd," says Bert Sperling, founder of Sperling's Best Places. "They are like adult playgrounds, and people go there for good food and interesting events."

In general the cities on our list fall into one of two categories: established (typically wealthier) cities (like New York, Los Angeles, even D.C.) and up-and-coming places whose low costs of living and/or strong economies have been attracting artists and young adults who [can't afford to live](#) in the former. Up-and-coming metro areas that made our list include D.C.'s neighbor to the north, Baltimore (No. 14), and New York's neighbor to the southwest, Philadelphia (No. 15).

"Baltimore is in transition because it has been down and out for a long time but it's beginning to come back because it's affordable," says Sperling. "[And] Philadelphia had been forgotten, but now it's being referred to as the Sixth Borough."

Methodology

We attempted to quantify 'coolness' for the 65 largest Metropolitan Statistical Areas and Metropolitan Divisions (areas that include cities and their surrounding suburbs as defined by the U.S. Office of Management and Budget) based on seven data points we weighted evenly. Sperling's Best Places helped us calculate the number of entertainment options per capita with an Arts & Culture Index (100 is the best score); recreational opportunities, including the amount of green space, quality of outdoor activities available, and the number of pro and college sports teams (again, 100 is the best score); and number of restaurants and bars per capita, with a focus on local eateries. We also looked at each city's cultural composition using Sperling's Diversity Index (100 is the best). We included median age, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, favoring places with a large young adult population. Lastly, we looked at net migration for 2011 and unemployment rates, using data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics and Moody's Analytics. The following list is the 20 cities that ranked highest according to these

criteria.

10. New York, NY

Metro Division: New York-White Plains-Wayne, NY-NJ

Arts & Culture Index: 100

Recreation Index: 100

Diversity Index: 79.6

Number of Local Eats: 26,040

Median Age: 37

Unemployment: 9.2%

2011 Net Migration: -11,900 people

9. San Francisco, CA

Metro Division: San Francisco-San Mateo-Redwood City, CA

Arts & Culture Index: 98

Recreation Index: 99

Diversity Index: 73.1

Number of Local Eats: 5,650

Median Age: 41

Unemployment: 7%

2011 Net Migration: 6,810 people

8. Orange County, CA

Metro Division: Santa Ana-Anaheim-Irvine, CA

Arts & Culture Index: 87

Recreation Index: 98

Diversity Index: 75.7

Number of Local Eats: 5,735

Median Age: 36

Unemployment: 7.5%

2011 Net Migration: 13,910 people

7. Boston, MA

Metro Division: Boston-Quincy, MA

Arts & Culture Index: 100

Recreation Index: 99

Diversity Index: 54.3

Number of Local Eats: 3,862

Median Age: 38

Unemployment: 5.3%

2011 Net Migration: 3,660 people

6. San Diego, CA

M.S.A.: San Diego-Carlsbad-San Marcos, CA

Arts & Culture Index: 92

Recreation Index: 96

Diversity Index: 74

Number of Local Eats: 6,111

Median Age: 35
Unemployment: 8.8%
2011 Net Migration: 10,850 people

5. Seattle, WA

M.S.A.: Seattle-Bellevue-Everett WA
Arts & Culture Index: 96
Recreation Index: 99
Diversity Index: 55.1
Number of Local Eats: 6,101
Median Age: 37
Unemployment: 7.1%
2011 Net Migration: 22,380 people

4. Dallas, TX

Metro Division: Dallas-Plano-Irving, TX
Arts & Culture Index: 95
Recreation Index: 86
Diversity Index: 73.7
Number of Local Eats: 7,689
Median Age: 33.5
Unemployment: 6.9%
2011 Net Migration: 45,870 people

3. Los Angeles, CA

Metro Division: Los Angeles-Long Beach-Glendale, CA
Arts & Culture Index: 99
Recreation Index: 100
Diversity Index: 82.5
Number of Local Eats: 19,921
Median Age: 35
Unemployment: 11.1%
2011 Net Migration: 10,050 people

2. Washington, D.C.

Metro Division: Washington-Arlington-Alexandria, DC-VA-MD-WV
Arts & Culture Index: 99
Recreation Index: 93
Diversity Index: 70.9
Number of Local Eats: 6,149
Median Age: 36
Unemployment: 5.4%
2011 Net Migration: 34,260 people

1. Houston, TX

M.S.A.: Houston-Sugar Land-Baytown, TX
Arts & Culture Index: 91
Recreation Index: 94

Diversity Index: 77.1

Number of Local Eats: 11,196

Median Age: 33

Unemployment: 6.9%

2011 Net Migration: 49,820 people

See Nos. 11 through 20 of America's coolest cities at Forbes.com:



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