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Best Places to Live

Jackie Shane

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Best Places to Live

This month we examine sites that compile statistics on cities and recommend various places based on your criteria. Next month we will visit some agencies that create the original data.

How do we decide where to live? Often our jobs or our families decide for us, but what if we had the luxury of prioritizing the place before employment.

What would be our criteria for locating the perfect place to reside? Perhaps we dream of a nice climate, better schools, potential for employment or a safe distance from needy relatives.

Certainly there are books replete with their personal bests of places to work, retire, and exist. Free websites abound as well.

CNN Money

<http://money.cnn.com/best/bplive/>

lists their top ten best places to live overall on their Best Places to Live 2005 site, along with their supplemental “top tens” on a variety of topics. You can also search for your personal best based on various criteria. Unfortunately, the criteria are somewhat arbitrary and my top ten were all located in the state of New Jersey, a place I admittedly had not previously considered. This simple search asks the user how important clean air, crime rates and affordable car insurance are, but doesn’t mention job availability education, or access to natural beauty. The upside to this site is that it offers some thoughts about places that are considered to be favorable for various reasons. Perhaps the best feature is located towards the bottom of the page, where you can submit the name of any city to see how it compares to the average “best place.” Their list of the top 100 best places is obviously more comprehensive in terms of geography, but not criteria.

For a greater breadth of coverage go instead to Sperling’s Best Places

<http://www.bestplaces.net/>

Sperling named for Bert Sperling who developed a software program called “Places U.S.A.” claims that his studies have been used by more “Best Place” studies than any other organization. The list of best places is based entirely on data supplied primarily by government agencies—such as the U.S. Census Bureau, the Centers for Disease Control, the F.B.I. and the U.S. Geological Survey (incorrectly listed as the U.S. Geologic Service). The upside to this site is that by typing in the zip code of an area, one can paint a fairly accurate picture of the cost of living, the average income, the percent of homes rented versus owned and the average appreciation rate of homes. One can see the number of physicians per capita, average commute time the percentage of people who take mass transit to work, as well as general demographic and climate data to name a few. Each area is defined along a dozen characteristics including crime, education, income, housing, politics, health, the economy and religion. All of this assumes that you have a few places in mind, and want to see some statistics on each. If this is not the case and you are still fishing for ideas, I found the “see our recent studies” section to be quite entertaining.

You can learn about the Most and Least Stressful Cities, the Best and Worst Cities for Dating, and America's Migraine Hot Spots, perhaps all inter-related.

This site is loaded with advertising, but at least it is neatly contained within the right-hand margin and directly corresponds to each page. Surfer Magazine and Armytents.com help sponsor the list of hurricane hot spots for example. Despite the commercial slant, this is a great site if you don't really want to do too much research on your own. The drawback is that it primarily examines the larger cities, even when it comes to best places to retire.

Cityrating.com

<http://www.cityrating.com/>

invites people to see how a city rates based on simple criteria such as school rankings, crime, and cost of living. They also glean their data from government agencies such as the U.S. Department of Labor and Education. The Cost of Living search warns you what you would realistically need to earn in your new city based on your current salary. The City Search appeared to be broken when I tried it out. I suggest instead selecting an indicator from the top of the page and then searching for your city. Don't bother with the City Guide nor the School Rankings as they are useless other than to get the population of a city and check the average expenditure for each student. I suspect that this site is intentionally bare bones so that you will be tempted to order the advertised book entitled 50 Fabulous Places to Raise Your Family through Amazon.