

the **BEST PLACES** to **LIVE**



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REAL ESTATE**

Best places to live

Read about our winning picks, see how far your salary will go in different U.S. cities, and search our online database of cities to find your best place to live.

BEST PLACES 2000 WINNERS BEST SMALL CITY



Sarasota, FL There are 35 miles of pristine white sand beaches just minutes away from Rose and Richard Elliott's three-bedroom home in Sarasota, Fla. But you'd never know it by talking to them. "Of course, there are beaches," says Elliott, 52. "But we hardly ever go to them. There's just so much else to do down here."

Sarasota may be the ultimate beach town, with its sun-kissed location on the Gulf of Mexico, more than 200 sunny days a year and an average year-round temperature of 71°F. Yet there are plenty of other reasons why we named it the best small city. The county -- which includes Venice, Northport, Longboat and Siesta Keys -- has its own symphony, ballet and opera companies. The 1,800-seat Van Wezel Performing Arts Center lures productions like the Broadway road company of *Chicago*. The Ringling Museum of Art -- established by circus baron John Ringling, who settled in the area in the 1920s -- has an extensive collection of American and European art. Like sports? Just an hour away there's the NFL Tampa Bay Buccaneers and arena football's Storm.

Sarasota also offers a triple treat: The lifestyle is very affordable. The median home price is a mere \$126,000. Says Tracey Seider, an agent with Re/Max Realty: "This is the kind of place where you can get an incredible, brand-new home for \$200,000." The schools are outstanding, and the job market is brisk. Sarasota County's public school students in key grades outscored 95% of their peers in the state. And perhaps most of all, the city posted job growth of 5 percent in the past year, ranking it among the top 25 metro areas in the country. During the next decade, it's expected to see a 30.5 percent increase in jobs, putting it at No. 7 in the U.S. Many of those jobs are in the retail and service sectors -- Sarasota is a thriving tourist destination -- but they are also in other industries.

Accounting firm Arthur Andersen established a small presence when it acquired a 20-person tax software company there in 1984. Today it has 850 employees in four divisions, including its technology solutions unit. "For people who want to work and live in a small community, it offers plenty of advantages," says James Shedivy, Andersen managing partner. "You can go home to have lunch with your kids."

It's so desirable that communications executive Nicholas Branica commutes to his job in Charlottesville, Va. rather than uproot his wife Tonie and his two daughters, Christina, 11, and Nichole, 8. Branica settled in a six-



Sarasota: Sun, sand, and shore

Claudia Dhimic/Viesti

bedroom beach house in Siesta Key when he took over Sarasota-based Key Voice Technologies, a telecommunications firm. When Branca became CEO of another telecom firm, Charlottesville-based Comdial, he never thought of leaving Sarasota. "We can jump in our boat and drive around the keys to fish or watch dolphins; we can watch manatees at the beach," says Branca, 47. "You couldn't get us out of here with a nuclear explosion."

Sarasota, FL	
	The metro area in a
Population:	530,900
Avg. home price:	\$126,100
Public school spending per pupil:	\$5,491
Student/teacher ratio:	18
Average commute time:	18.4 mi
Future job growth rate:	30.6%



About Best Places data

Statistical data is taken from the most recent information for the overall metropolitan area. This information is used, instead of statistics for just the city itself, because most data is reported at the metro-area level. A U.S. metro area is defined as any city with a population of at least 50,000, or an urbanized area of at least 50,000, located in a county or counties with a total population of at least 100,000 (75,000 in New England).

Sources and credits:

National Climatic Data Center, NOAA; American Chamber of Commerce Researchers Association; Bureau of Labor Statistics Consumer Price Index; Acxiom/DataQuick; Commerce Clearing House; Bureau of National Affairs; Federation of Tax Administrators; State Farm Insurance; National Association of Homebuilders; Department of Energy; American Medical Association; HCIA-Sachs; Environmental Protection Agency; National Center for Education Statistics; FBI Uniform Crime Reports; Federal Aviation Administration Amtrak; Urban Mass Transit Agency; Federal Transit Administration; National Park Service; National Atmospheric and Oceanic Administration; Sportswear Technologies; Major League Baseball; National Basketball Association; National Football League; National Hockey League; The White Book of Ski Sites; National Yellow Pages directory; Symphony Magazine; Theatre Profiles; Dance Magazine; Opera America; Profiles; American Association of Museums Official Museum Directory; Bowker's American Library Directory; Public Broadcasting System; National Public Radio

WEATHER	City Stats	Natl. Avg.	Rank
Annual days some precipitation	107	110	
Annual days with mostly sun	238	213	
Annual snowfall (inches)	0	24.2	
Annual days < 32° F	4	88.0	
Annual days > 90° F	81	37.9	
Average high temp in July °F	90.4°	86.8°	
Average low temp in January °F	50.1°	26.5°	
CRIME	City Stats	Natl. Avg.	Rank
Violent crime (per 100K population)	634.4	506	236
Property crime (per 100K population)	4,506.3	4,329	196
HOUSING	City Stats	Natl. Avg.	Rank
Median home price	\$126,100	\$128,572	201
Property taxes (per \$1,000 of home value)	\$9.8	\$15.64	53
Home utility cost index	98.30	105	130
Average home appreciation %	6.7%	7.17%	224
New home starts (12 months ending 6/00)	15.95	12.87	115
EDUCATION	City Stats	Natl. Avg.	Rank
Spending per pupil	\$5,491	\$5,387	121
Student/teacher ratio	18	16.95	222
Number of 4-year colleges	2	4.03	141
Number of 2-year colleges	1	2.77	167
ECONOMY	City Stats	Natl. Avg.	Rank
Cost of Living Index	105.3	104	233
State and local taxes%	6%	10.35 %	7
Recent job growth (past 12 months)	5.1%	1.68%	22
Projected job growth (10 years)	30.55%	15.09%	6
Unemployment rate %	2.3%	4.24%	25
Auto insurance rates (\$ per year)	\$750	\$829	135
HEALTH	City Stats	Natl. Avg.	Rank
Health cost index	101.1	103	187
Hospital beds	2,410	2,602	90
MDs per capita	12.6	12.02	136
Air quality index (higher is better)	21	65.9	317
Water quality index (higher is better)	57	52.0	131
Number of teaching hospitals	0	3.88	257
QUALITY OF LIFE	City Stats	Natl. Avg.	Rank
Leisure Index (100 is best; 0 is worst)	26	19.42	91
Arts Index (100 is best; 0 is worst)	8	11.48	184
TRANSPORTATION	City Stats	Natl. Avg.	Rank
Commute time	18.4	19.23	142
Mass transit availability	5.43	8.03	169
Number of airline flights	54	139	124
Amtrak service	0	2.57	146



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