

# Top 10 Most Expensive Cities in the U.S.

By [LISA GOETZ](#) Updated Jul 5, 2019

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 1. New York City, New York
- 2. San Francisco, California
- 3. Honolulu, Hawaii
- 4. Boston, Massachusetts
- 5. Washington, D.C.
- 6. Oakland, California
- 7. San Jose, California
- 8. San Diego, California
- 9. Los Angeles, California
- 10. Miami, Florida

People relocating for business, new jobs or simply planning a vacation can benefit from knowing details about the most expensive cities in the United States. Understanding how much it costs to live in a city, and why, can make or break a decision to move. Not surprisingly, California cities dominate the list of America's priciest cities.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Cities offer a variety of employment opportunities along with loads of culture, sports, dining, and entertainment.
- Because of the desire to live in cities, they can become quite expensive places to live.
- In the U.S., New York City is the most pricey to live in, followed by San Francisco - however, NYC is only #9 on the world's most expensive cities.

## 1. New York City, New York

New York City leads the pack as the [most expensive city](#) in the United States. The city, with a population approaching 8.4 million, also tops lists of the world's most expensive cities.<sup>1</sup> The cost of living in Manhattan is a whopping 154% higher than the national average.<sup>2</sup> The median cost of homes in the five boroughs of New York is about \$652,700, compared with a national median of \$245,000.<sup>3</sup> <sup>4</sup> In Manhattan, home prices easily exceed \$1 million.<sup>5</sup> Everything costs more in New York City, from groceries to public transportation. As of December 2019, the city's unemployment was 3.9%, slightly better than the previous month.<sup>6</sup> That compares with a national unemployment rate of 3.6%.<sup>7</sup> Perhaps further proof that if you can make it there, you can make it anywhere.

Fast Fact: *The most expensive cities to live in 2019 in the world are Hong Kong, Tokyo, and Singapore. New York City, the only American city to make the top 10, comes in at #9.*

## 2. San Francisco, California

People make the decision to leave [San Francisco](#) every day, as the city's staggeringly high cost of living and out-of-reach housing prices have been known to break many a bank. Median home prices are approaching \$1.4 million inside the city, whose major industries include tourism, IT and financial services.<sup>8</sup> A family of four would need \$103,200 in household income just to make ends meet.<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, unemployment remains extremely low at just 1.8% as of December 2019, due to highly favorable conditions offered to entrepreneurs and its dominant position in attracting venture capital for start-ups.<sup>10 11</sup>

## 3. Honolulu, Hawaii

Honolulu residents pay a lot of money for just about everything. Groceries run about 64.6% higher than the national average, while utilities cost 72.5% more.<sup>12</sup> Yet paychecks are not that much higher to compensate. The median household income in Honolulu is \$82,900. This is better than the national median of \$60,300, but falls well short of a median income of \$104,500 for San Francisco.<sup>13</sup> If you plan to live in Honolulu, get used to paying more for every day items. One dozen eggs that costs \$1.40 in Iowa runs \$2.58 in Honolulu.<sup>14 15</sup> Honolulu enjoys an exceptionally low unemployment rate of 2.6% as of December 2019, which means that, if nothing else, people with jobs on this Pacific island paradise can afford to eat omelets.<sup>16</sup>

## 4. Boston, Massachusetts

Groceries and health care cost a lot of money in Massachusetts, exceeding the average national cost by 22% for healthcare and nearly 14% for food.<sup>12</sup> Boston enjoys a robust higher education environment, a booming tech scene that rivals Silicon Valley and historic sites dating back to the 13 original colonies, which makes it one of the nation's leading tourist destinations. All of these add up to an unemployment rate of 2.1% in Boston and the surrounding areas as of December 2019, but city residents fork out big money to live in Boston.<sup>17</sup> The median home value hovers around \$632,000, while household income is about \$65,900.<sup>18 19</sup> A family of four needs \$84,905 in income to make ends meet.<sup>20</sup>

## 5. Washington, D.C.

Being the seat of the world's most powerful nation accounts for Washington, D.C.'s high cost of living. Government and private-sector jobs abound in the city, thanks to numerous federal agencies, think tanks, lobbying firms, and a robust tourism sector. Median [home values](#) in the District stand at approximately \$636,000, and the median household income is about \$82,600.<sup>21 22</sup> Similar to Boston, a family of four needs \$75,100 in income to make ends meet in Washington, D.C.<sup>23</sup>

## 6. Oakland, California

Being located on the opposite end of the Bay Bridge might make living in Oakland a cheaper alternative to San Francisco, but the city is still a more expensive place to live than most cities in

the United States. Median home prices are \$765,400, while it costs in excess of \$3,000 per month to rent.<sup>24</sup> That is nearly double the national of \$1,600 to rent.<sup>4</sup>

## 7. San Jose, California

Anyone looking to escape high prices in the Bay Area will find little respite in San Jose, located within commuting distance of San Francisco and Oakland. The presence of Silicon Valley makes everything in San Jose expensive, including median home prices that top \$1 million.<sup>25</sup> The median household income hovers at around \$104,200.<sup>26</sup> The numerous tech industry employers in the city account for a lower-than-average unemployment rate, which is 2.2% for San Jose, Sunnyvale and Santa Clara as of December 2019.<sup>27</sup>

## 8. San Diego, California

A strong defense department presence and military contracting firms, such as Northrop Grumman Corporation (NYSE: [NOC](#)) and Science Applications International Corporation (NYSE: [SAIC](#)), make California's southernmost city one of the priciest in America. Residents in this city of approximately 1.4 million enjoy a median household income of \$75,500, giving them opportunity to spend on luxuries such as high-end eateries, yacht clubs and other pricey forms of entertainment.<sup>28</sup> The median home value is \$652,200.<sup>29</sup> The unemployment rate in San Diego and the surrounding area is 2.8% as of December 2019, which edges close to the national average.<sup>30</sup>

## 9. Los Angeles, California

Los Angeles brings to mind wealthy, glamorous movie stars, but the movie industry plays a small role in the city's booming economy. The city's shipping industry also plays a role, as the Port of Los Angeles is one of the busiest ports in the world. A bustling manufacturing sector and a noteworthy start-up scene contribute to the city's high cost of living. Certain ZIP codes, such as the much-ballyhooed 90210, drive up housing costs. The median home value in Los Angeles is \$723,800.<sup>31</sup> The median household income is around \$58,400.<sup>32</sup> A family of four would need income of \$85,155 to make ends meet in Los Angeles.<sup>33</sup> About 19.1% of the city's residents live below the poverty line, compared with 11.8% nationally.<sup>32</sup>

## 10. Miami, Florida

Miami is the only southern U.S. city ranking on the top 10 most expensive list. A high population of wealthy foreigners, the presence of numerous international financial institutions and the busiest cruise ship port in the world give life in Miami a high price tag. Median household income for Miami Beach stands at about \$53,300, while the unemployment rate of 1.8% as of December 2019 is better than the national average.<sup>34</sup> <sup>35</sup> A family of four would need income of \$70,800 to make ends meet in this stylish city replete with newly constructed residential and commercial buildings.<sup>36</sup>

### ARTICLE SOURCES

Investopedia requires writers to use primary sources to support their work. These include white papers, government data, original reporting, and interviews with industry experts. We also reference original research from other reputable publishers where appropriate.

You can learn more about the standards we follow in producing accurate, unbiased content in our [editorial policy](#).

1. NYC Planning. "[Current estimates of New York City's population for July 2018.](#)" Accessed Feb. 23, 2020.
2. The Council for Community and Economic Research. "[Quarter 3, 2019 Cost of Living Index Released.](#)" Accessed Feb. 23, 2020.
3. Zillow. "[New York Home Prices & Values.](#)" Accessed Feb. 23, 2020.
4. Zillow. "[United States Home Prices & Values.](#)" Accessed Feb. 23, 2020.
5. Zillow. "[Manhattan Home Prices & Values.](#)" Accessed Feb. 23, 2020.
6. New York State, Department of Labor. "[Labor Statistics for the New York City Region.](#)" Accessed Feb. 23, 2020.
7. Bureau of Labor Statistics. "[Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey.](#)" Accessed Feb. 23, 2020.
8. Zillow. "[San Francisco Home Prices & Values.](#)" Accessed Feb. 23, 2020.
9. MIT Living Wage Calculator. "[Living Wage Calculation for San Francisco County, California.](#)" Accessed Feb. 23, 2020.
10. State of California, Employee Development Department. "[San Francisco-Redwood City-South San Francisco Metropolitan Division.](#)" Accessed Feb. 23, 2020.
11. Silicon Valley Business Journal. "[Bay Area retained venture funding dominance in 2019.](#)" Accessed Feb. 23, 2020.
12. Missouri Economic Research Center. "[Cost of Living Data Series.](#)" Accessed Feb. 23, 2020.
13. U.S. Census Bureau. "[QuickFacts: San Francisco city, California; New York County \(Manhattan Borough\), New York; New York city, New York; Honolulu County, Hawaii; United States.](#)" Accessed Feb. 23, 2020.
14. Walmart. "[Iowa City - Eggs.](#)" Accessed Feb. 23, 2020.
15. Walmart. "[Honolulu - Eggs.](#)" Accessed Feb. 23, 2020.
16. Hawaii State Department of Labor & Industrial Relations. "[Hawaii Unemployment Rate Remains at 2.6 Percent in December.](#)" Page 1. Accessed Feb. 23, 2020.
17. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. "[Economy at a Glance: Boston-Cambridge-Quincy, MA-NH.](#)" Accessed Feb. 23, 2020.
18. Zillow. "[Boston Home Prices & Values.](#)" Accessed Feb. 23, 2020.
19. U.S. Census Bureau. "[QuickFacts: Boston city, Massachusetts; United States.](#)" Accessed Feb. 23, 2020.
20. MIT Living Wage Calculator. "[Living Wage Calculation for Boston-Cambridge-Newton, MA.](#)" Accessed Feb. 23, 2020.
21. Zillow. "[Boston Home Prices & Values.](#)" Accessed Feb. 23, 2020.
22. U.S. Census Bureau. "[QuickFacts: Washington city, District of Columbia; United States.](#)" Accessed Feb. 23, 2020.
23. MIT Living Wage Calculator. "[Living Wage Calculation for Washington-Arlington-Alexandria, DC.](#)" Accessed Feb. 23, 2020.

24. Zillow. "[Oakland Home Prices & Values.](#)" Accessed Feb. 23, 2020.
25. Zillow. "[San Jose Home Prices & Values.](#)" Accessed Feb. 23, 2020.
26. U.S. Census Bureau. "[QuickFacts: San Jose city, California; United States.](#)" Accessed Feb. 23, 2020.
27. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. "[Economy at a Glance: San Jose-Sunnyvale-Santa Clara, CA.](#)" Accessed Feb. 23, 2020.
28. U.S. Census Bureau. "[QuickFacts: San Diego city, California; United States.](#)" Accessed Feb. 23, 2020.
29. Zillow. "[San Diego Home Prices & Values.](#)" Accessed Feb. 23, 2020.
30. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. "[Economy at a Glance: San Diego-Carlsbad-San Marcos, CA.](#)" Accessed Feb. 28, 2020.
31. Zillow. "[Los Angeles Home Prices & Values.](#)" Accessed Feb. 23, 2020.
32. U.S. Census Bureau. "[QuickFacts: Los Angeles city, California; United States.](#)" Accessed Feb. 23, 2020.
33. MIT Living Wage Calculator. "[Living Wage Calculation for Los Angeles-Long Beach-Anaheim, CA.](#)" Accessed Feb. 23, 2020.
34. U.S. Census Bureau. "[QuickFacts: Miami Beach city, Florida; Miami city, Florida; United States.](#)" Accessed Feb. 23, 2020.
35. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. "[Economy at a Glance: Miami-Miami Beach-Kendall, FL.](#)" Accessed Feb. 23, 2020.
36. MIT Living Wage Calculator. "[Living Wage Calculation for Miami-Fort Lauderdale-West Palm Beach, FL.](#)" Accessed Feb. 23, 2020.