

So You've Got to Leave the Area....



Though it's hard to imagine anyone wanting to move from the Chapel Hill area, sometimes, regrettably, it happens. When jobs, proximity to kids or parents, or an unexplained need to shovel snow propel a move out of the area, it can be valuable to extensively research your new location, or if you have choice, to make a comparative decision about where to relocate. Happily, there are some fantastic – and sometimes quite specific – websites that provide information on everything from the best rural places in America to the best places for adventure or top salaries. Other sites allow you to evaluate cities based on crime rates, school scores – even the severity of drought. Below is a run-down of websites which may come in handy if circumstances call you to leave the Triangle.

First off, the “Best of’s”. Each year, Money magazine publishes its Best Places to Live list. The website, found at <http://money.cnn.com/magazines/moneymag/bplive/2007/>, also includes compilations of the 10 best big cities, the top-earning towns, where homes are most affordable, and the 25 places with the highest percentage of singles. Their comprehensive site even details the 25 locations with the hottest and coldest temperatures, the youngest demographic, and the skinniest cities. In addition, there's an interactive tool that allows you to rate the import to you of quality of life factors, including sunny weather and commuting time, and then generate a list of most favorable locations for you.

Another “best places” quiz can be found at www.findyourspot.com. Here, a survey matches you with your perfect hometowns and undiscovered havens. The search returns in-depth reports on each of the top spots matches, along with tools for finding a job, a home or a roommate. The site's four-page reports also highlight great travel deals to the chosen areas, so you can visit and do some first-hand research.

Looking for adventure? Check out National Geographic's 50 Best Places to Live and Play. The report, found at <http://www.nationalgeographic.com/adventure>, compiles a list of the top adventures towns in the U.S. Each location is cited for its ideal mix of terrain, activity and opportunity. Towns are further featured as top wilderness towns, top small towns, top mountain towns, top waterfront towns and top cities.

If you'd like to go back to basics, The Progressive Farmer has published the best places to live in rural America. Their top ten locations include Polk County, North Carolina. Each of the top ten is chosen for being scenic, peaceful, and “perfect for living the American dream.”

You can view the top 10, as well as a regional top 60, at <http://www.progressivefarmer.com/farmer/bestplaces/>.

If you're in search of diversity, and specifically communities progressive in their acceptance of sexual orientation, surf over to www.planetoutinc.com, which lists The Advocate magazine's first annual look at the 10 best places for gay and lesbian families and singles, as well as emerging trends related to these locales.

And at <http://money.aol.com/bw/realestate/best-places-to-rent-cheap>, you can check out the best places for cheap rent across the country.

If you already know where you'll be moving, or are choosing between two locations, the following websites provide useful information about specific quality of life factors. At www.walkscore.com, the walkability of a neighborhood is rated by the proximity to stores, restaurants, schools, parks, libraries and more. Distances to each of these amenities are noted for you in tenth of a mile increments from the starting location. This can be very handy

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when researching what neighborhoods might be best within a specific town or community.

At www.streetadvisor.com, consumers can look for input from current residents of a community about their neighborhood. It's a fairly new site, so not all locations are yet represented, but for those that are, reviewers rate their street for its overall “vibe,”

proximity to amenities, level of health and more.

To research crime rates and compare between cities, head over to www.areaconnect.com. Here you can view the latest in crime statistics and ratios for the areas of your choice, as

well as benchmarks against national averages.

If you have school-aged children, www.greatschools.net offers a wealth of resources at your fingertips. You can compare schools near an address or in a district, find top-rated schools in a city, and search nationwide for the best of the best. The website includes both public and private schools, and details test scores, demographic information, teacher experience levels and more.

Interested in learning if where you're moving is experiencing the same level of drought as the Triangle? Visit www.droughtscore.com. By entering a city, town, or zip code, you can see a graphs showing the past 13 months of drought levels in an area, based on statistics from the National Climatic Data Center.

Here's hoping you never have to leave our beautiful, special, spectacular area. But if a move is in your future, to places known or not yet decided, the above websites can guide you on your way. Happy researching, and until next time, here's to your house!

