

# Inclusive ‘Living Conditions’ Study Ranks Fla. No. 6

August 16, 2023



fizkes, iStock, Getty Images

By Kerry Smith

“Livability” is subjective, but an exhaustive study attempted to rank states based on how happy they’ll make residents. Fla. was No. 6 – but No. 1 in some categories.

ORLANDO, Fla. – Around 8.6% of Americans moved last year, a slight uptick from the year before. Some movers wonder if they should stay put or move to another state. Others know they want to move to another state, but which one?

To help answer that question, a personal-finance website, WalletHub, released a comprehensive report on [2023’s Best States to Live In](#).

WalletHub compared the 50 U.S. states across 51 key indicators of

livability, which is subjective by definition. But they also weighed each variable for its worth, which can change from person-to-person.

As a result, the “best state to live in” may not be true for any specific person – but WalletHub believes it's true for the average person. And for that average person, Florida ranks No. 6 on WalletHub’s list of best-to-live-in states.

## **Florida “Living Conditions” examples (1=Best, 25=Average)**

- No. 9 – Income Growth
- No. 17 – Percent of Adults in Fair or Poor Health
- No. 27 – Average Weekly Work Hours
- No. 1 – Restaurants per Capita
- No. 1 – Unemployment Rate

## **What should state-to-state movers consider?**

Jesse Saginor, Ph.D., AICP, chair and professor, Department of Urban and Regional Planning at Florida Atlantic University, says they should start with a market analysis.

“Ultimately, this depends on the person and where that person is in life,” Saginor says. “A young person might want an area with great job prospects related to that person’s industry of interest and/or other activities that person enjoys. So, beyond work, if that person enjoys the outdoors, then the combination of job and outdoor amenities might be the two most important things on that person’s list. If that person has young children, then schools

become another part of the equation.”

While WalletHub’s list might work for the average person, “Each step in a personal market analysis to determine whether an area is right for that person comes with additional dimensions,” Saginor adds. “In terms of pondering steps, where does that person want to be now, in five years, in ten years? Is there a place that enables them to have that personal growth without moving?”

“Use online resources to research basics like cost-of-living and housing costs in particular, employment opportunities, quality and cost of education and health care, state and local tax policies, climate, and given the recent political polarization in this country, where does the area lie in terms of liberal vs. conservative politics,” adds Alan Weinstein, Professor Emeritus, Cleveland State University. “Plan to visit the area for at least a few days and longer if possible. If you are able to work remotely and a longer stay is possible, that is even better.”

## **The most important financial factors when deciding where to live?**

“I tend to focus on the cost of living relative to the employment opportunities available in the area,” says H. Shelton Weeks, professor and director of the Lucas Institute for Real Estate Development & Finance, Florida Gulf Coast University.

“In addition to cost-of-living calculators that allow individuals to compare locations to see how much they will need to earn to have a comparable standard of living, there are other tools

available that will help them understand what to expect in terms of cost for rental housing and whether market conditions indicate that renting or buying makes more sense. Combining these tools with solid budgeting can help people make better decisions with respect to potential moves.”

## **What can state policymakers do to attract and retain new residents?**

“I think this starts with creating an environment that is business-friendly with a high degree of economic freedom,” says Weeks. “One of the key lessons that can be learned from the experience of states that have struggled with attracting and retaining residents is that less government intervention in markets is a good thing.”

“Adopt and maintain policies that: (1) attract new and keep existing employers that offer good-paying jobs with benefits; (2) adequately fund public education from pre-school through post-graduate; (3) adequately maintain and build as needed transportation infrastructure, including public transit where appropriate; and (4) fund governmental services as adequately as possible while holding tax increases as low as possible,” says Weinstein.

## **Factors WalletHub weighed to create its list of most livable states**

**Affordability** – total points: 20

- Housing affordability: full weight (~2.22 points)

- Median annual property taxes: double weight (~4.44 points)
- Cost of living: quadruple weight (~8.89 points)
- Median annual household income: full weight (~2.22 points)
- Homeownership rate: full weight (~2.22 points)

### **Economy** – total points: 20

- Unemployment rate: full weight (~1.05 points)
- Underemployment rate: full weight (~1.05 points)
- Sharecare well-being “economic security”: full weight (~1.05 points)
- Share of population living in poverty: full weight (~1.05 points)
- Median debt per median earnings: triple weight (~3.16 points)
- Population growth: full weight (~1.05 points)
- Income growth: full weight (~1.05 points)
- Building-permit growth: full weight (~1.05 points)
- Wealth gap: full weight (~1.05 points)
- General tax-friendliness: full weight (~1.05 points)
- Entrepreneurial activity: double weight (~2.11 points)
- Foreclosure rate: double weight (~2.11 points)
- Bankruptcy rate: full weight (~1.05 points)
- Food insecurity: full weight (~1.05 points)

### **Education & health** – total points: 20

- Quality of public school system: full weight (~1.74 points)
- High school graduation rate: double weight (~3.48 points)
- Share of population aged 25 & older with a high school diploma or higher: full weight (~1.74 points)

- Share of insured population: full weight (~1.74 points)
- Quality of public hospital system: full weight (~1.74 points)
- Premature-death rate: half weight (~0.87 points)
- Poor or fair health: half weight (~0.87 points)
- Life expectancy: full weight (~1.74 points)
- Share of live births with low birthweight: half weight (~0.87 points)
- Share of obese adults: double weight (~3.48 points)
- Share of physically inactive adults: full weight (~1.74 points)

### **Quality of life – total points: 20**

- Average hours worked per week: full weight (~0.93 points)
- Average commute time (in minutes): full weight (~0.93 points)
- Miles of trails for bicycling & walking per total state land area: full weight (~0.93 points)
- “bicycle friendly state” ranking (proxy for bike score): full weight (~0.93 points)
- Infrastructure & funding – 20%
- Education & encouragement – 15%
- Legislation & enforcement – 15%
- Policies & programs – 20%
- Evaluation & planning – 20%
- Discretionary scoring – 10%
- Access to public transportation: double weight (~1.86 points)
- Quality of roads: full weight (~0.93 points)
- Traffic congestion: double weight (~1.86 points)
- Restaurants per capita: double weight (~1.86 points)
- Bars per capit\*: full weight (~0.93 points)

- **Museums per capita: full weight (~0.93 points)**
- **Performing arts centers per capita\*: full weight (~0.93 points)**
- **Movie theaters per capita: half weight (~0.47 points)**
- **Fitness centers per capita: double weight (~1.86 points)**
- **Accessibility of beaches: full weight (~0.93 points)**
- **Weather: triple weight (~2.79 points)**
- **Air quality: full weight (~0.93 points)**

**Safety – total points: 20**

- **Violent-crime rate: full weight (~3.64 points)**
- **Property-crime rate: double weight (~7.27 points)**
- **Traffic-related fatalities per capita: half weight (~1.82 points)**
- **Total law-enforcement employees per capita: double weight (~7.27 points)**