

Best Cities for Young Adults in California – June 2014

Publico

For young people starting out in their post-college career, there's no place like California. Computer science majors flock to Silicon Valley, actors and writers try their luck in Hollywood, and people from almost any other discipline can find a place in the state's huge, diverse economy. But when they go home, where should they live? We set out to find the very best cities in the state for young adults.

STUDY METHODOLOGY

Looking at 130 of the biggest cities in the state, we considered three factors:

1. Median salary for college graduates
2. Percent of residents between ages 20 and 34
3. Safety

We started out by looking for the cities that reward a college degree with high pay, checking U.S. Census data for median pay for residents with a bachelor's degree. Among the cities we considered, the average annual salary was \$53,814.

Second, we wanted to find out where the young people are. We used the U.S. Census again, looking for the percent of the population in each city between ages 20 and 34. A high number in this category not only suggests it should be easy to find friends and things to do, but also that other young people have voted with their feet in favor of a given city. The average was 22.2 percent.

Last, since most twentysomethings want to be able to go out at night without feeling nervous, and since [new college graduates](#) can't always afford to live in the best parts of town, we looked for the safest cities. For this, we turned to the FBI's figures for violent crimes reported in 2012. The average number of violent crimes per 1,000 residents in the cities we reviewed was 3.8.

Median salary for residents with a bachelor's degree: \$80,150

1. SUNNYVALE

- Percent of population between 20 and 34: 25.8%
- Violent crime per 1,000 residents: 1.2

The typical college graduate in this Silicon Valley city of 144,000 earns an impressive \$80,150 annually. This is the home of AMD, Network Appliance, and Yahoo. Its city boasts of a “[beautiful, clean suburban setting](#)” with “18 prize-winning parks,” and its violent crime rates is an impressively low 1.2. But it’s clearly not just a place for established suburbanites, with 25.8 percent of its residents between 20 and 34.

2. MOUNTAIN VIEW

- Median salary for residents with a bachelor’s degree: \$81,395
- Percent of population between 20 and 34: 28.2%
- Violent crime per 1,000 residents: 2.0

Right next door to Sunnyvale, and with an even more youthful population, Mountain View may be best known as the home of Googleplex, a place where many young people dream of working. Median pay for college graduates here is the fourth highest of any city we considered at \$81,395, it’s the fifth most youthful city in our review, and it has only two violent crimes per 1,000 residents. Mountain View is not all about work and no play: the city has an [active downtown](#) with many restaurants and occasional festivals.

3. IRVINE

- Median salary for residents with a bachelor’s degree: \$61,229
- Percent of population between 20 and 34: 23.6%
- Violent crime per 1,000 residents: 0.5

This Orange County suburb of Los Angeles is the largest city in our top 10, with 218,000 residents. Despite its size, it ranks first among all the cities we considered for safety, with a violent crime rate of just 0.5. The pay for college graduates here is not as high as in some Silicon Valley communities, but it’s more than respectable at \$61,229. Irvine is essentially a planned community [created by the](#)

[Irvine Co.](#) back in the 1960s, but if that sounds somewhat stodgy, note that its residents are more youthful than the average for the cities we considered.

4. SANTA CLARA

- Median salary for residents with a bachelor's degree: \$77,290
- Percent of population between 20 and 34: 23.8%
- Violent crime per 1,000 residents: 1.9

Another Silicon Valley city, right next to Sunnyvale, Santa Clara is the home base of Intel, ranked by Forbes as the fourth "[happiest company for young professionals.](#)" And the number one pick on that list, EMC, also has a location here. Young people have good reason to stay in Santa Clara, with the high potential of making a good living and feeling relatively safe. The area offers a median salary of \$77,290 for college graduates and a low crime rate of 1.9 violent crimes per 1,000 residents. Plus, nearly a quarter of the local population falls between ages 20 and 34.

5. ORANGE

- Median salary for residents with a bachelor's degree: \$52,497
- Percent of population between 20 and 34: 24.5%
- Violent crime per 1,000 residents: 1.0

The city of Orange is less than 40 minutes from L.A. (assuming you manage to avoid heavy traffic,) and it's home to [hundreds of acres of open land](#) with hiking trails through Southern California's canyon country. Plus, it's really close to Disneyland, if that's your scene. Violent crime is quite low, at just 1 per 1,000 residents, and about a quarter of the residents are between 20 and 34 years old. The typical salary for college grads is about average for the cities we reviewed.

6. CAMARILLO

- Median salary for residents with a bachelor's degree: \$70,386
- Percent of population between 20 and 34: 20.9%
- Violent crime per 1,000 residents: 0.9

Located in Ventura County, halfway between L.A. and Santa Barbara, this city of 67,000 has an impressive median salary for college grads of \$70,386, plus a crime rate of less than 1 per 1,000 residents. It's a spot with mild, breezy weather pretty much all year and "300 days of sunshine a year," according to the city's tourism website.

7. TUSTIN

- Median salary for residents with a bachelor's degree: \$60,129
- Percent of population between 20 and 34: 20.9%
- Violent crime per 1,000 residents: 1.5

Tustin borders Orange City and offers some of the same advantages, including proximity to L.A. and a low crime rate of 1.5 per 1,000 residents. The typical college graduate here earns more than the average for the cities we looked at as well, and more than one in five residents falls in the 20-to-34 age range.

8. REDWOOD CITY

- Median salary for residents with a bachelor's degree: \$67,236
- Percent of population between 20 and 34: 23.1%
- Violent crime per 1,000 residents: 2.7

A half hour south of San Francisco and right next to San Francisco Bay, Redwood City offers the typical college graduate an impressive \$67,000 salary. Twenty-three percent of residents here are aged 20 to 34, and the rate of violent crime is significantly lower than the average for the cities we considered. Redwood City also officially has the best climate in the world, tied with the Canary Islands and North Africa's Mediterranean coast, based on a [U.S government study](#).

9. COSTA MESA

- Median salary for residents with a bachelor's degree: \$52,406
- Percent of population between 20 and 34: 26.7%
- Violent crime per 1,000 residents: 2.3

Of the 130 cities in our study, Costa Mesa is the 10th most youthful, with 26.7 percent of residents between ages 20 and 34. And, as you might guess from the city's name, if you live here, you don't have to go far to get to the beach. The median salary is slightly lower than some of the other cities on our list, but the proximity to ocean, open space, and big-city amenities (just 45 minutes away in Los Angeles) might make up for that.

10. HUNTINGTON BEACH

- Median salary for residents with a bachelor's degree: \$60,240
- Percent of population between 20 and 34: 22.7%
- Violent crime per 1,000 residents: 1.6

If living close to the beach isn't good enough, this city is right on the beach. Huntington Beach's nickname is [Surf City USA](#), and just as full of surfers and sun lovers as you might expect for Southern California. Right next door to Costa Mesa, Huntington Beach doesn't skew quite as young, but college graduates tend to make a bit more, and the rate of violent crime is an impressively low 1.6 per 1,000 residents.

Of course, where to live is a personal question, and any Californian can tell you that different personality types tend to thrive in the northern part of the state than the southern. If you want to work for a tech company with treadmill desks, you're probably best off looking in Silicon Valley. If you've got to surf, the Orange County coastline might be more to your liking. Either way, though, if you want a safe, youth-friendly place to live—and make a good living—these cities are a good place to start.

Sources used in this study:

- [FBI](#), Crime in the USA 2012 report
- [U.S. Census](#), American Communities Survey, 2012 one-year estimates, "Educational Attainment"
- [U.S. Census](#), American Communities Survey, 2012 one-year estimates, "Age & Sex"

