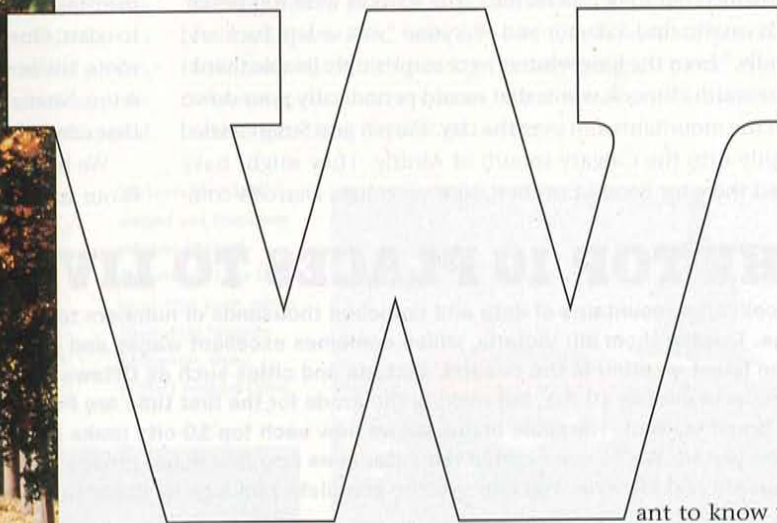


2009 CANADA'S BEST PLACES TO LIVE

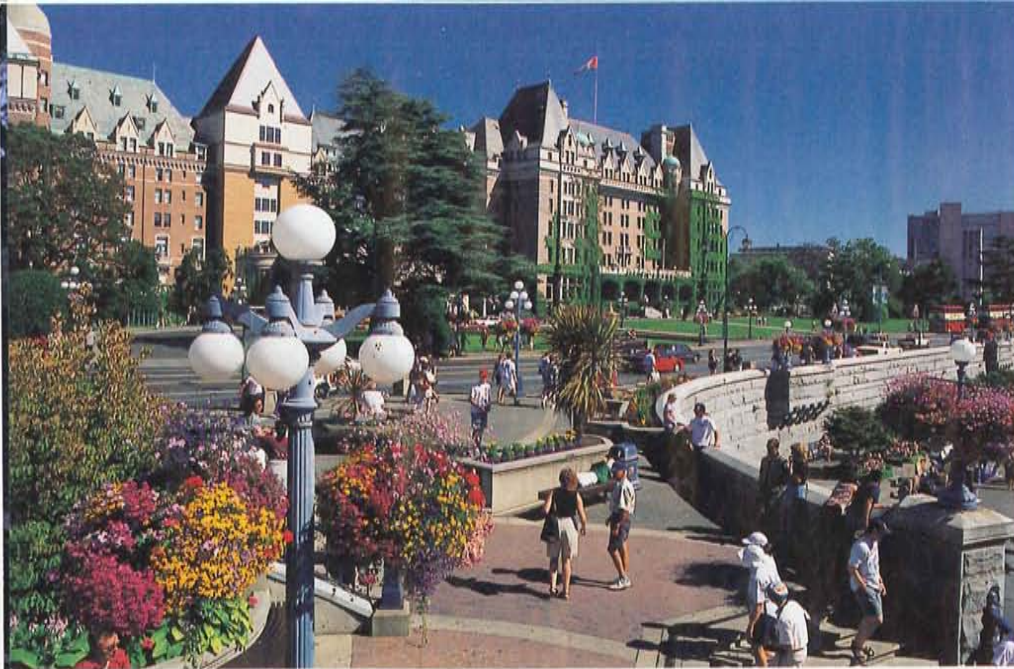
**WHERE DOES YOUR CITY
RANK? WE'VE RATED
154 COMMUNITIES TO FIND
THE VERY BEST SPOTS FOR
YOU TO CALL HOME**



Want to know what makes a great place to live? Ask Susan Bird. Over the past 20 years she and her husband Darren have hopscotched across Canada, going wherever Darren's engineering career has taken them. Along the way, they've raised two kids and seen first-hand what's right—or wrong—about life in several towns and cities.

Start with Burtt's Corner, a small town outside of Fredericton. Susan grew up there. It was a great place to be a kid. Safe, quiet. No need to lock your doors at night. In 1989, when she was 22, Susan married Darren, a local boy, and they moved down the road to Fredericton. They could have happily spent the rest of their lives there, but only six months after their wedding Darren >

BY PHIL FROATS + ROB GERLSBECK



landed a job building ships in Saint John, N.B. That's where the Birds' son, Josh, was born in 1991 and, two years later, their daughter, Rachael.

Life was good until 1996 when work at the shipyard began to dry up. Darren went looking for another place to apply his engineering skills and found it on the other side of the country, at an engineering firm in Calgary. "We were sad to leave the Maritimes, because it's where we grew up," says Susan. But Calgary turned out to be "awesome." The schools were top-notch, it was easy to find a doctor and everyone "was so laid back and friendly." Even the long winters were surprisingly livable thanks to the warm chinook winds that would periodically pour down from the mountains and over the city. Darren and Susan settled happily into the Calgary suburb of Airdrie. They might have stayed there for good—but then, four years ago, Darren's com-

pany offered him a job in Ottawa. The Birds have been living in the nation's capital ever since.

Susan scoffs at the notion that places are all pretty much alike. While franchise stores and television shows may be much the same anywhere, the Birds have become experts at recognizing the sometimes big, sometimes subtle, differences that give cities their distinct personalities.

Susan can tick off the high or low points of every place she's lived. Saint John offered sweeping ocean views, but its air was a foggy, polluted soup. Calgary boasted fresh air, but its house prices were ridiculous, even in the

outlying subdivisions where yards the size of postage stamps contradicted the Birds' image of Alberta as the wide-open West. As for Ottawa, Susan loves its long, hot summers (in Calgary, she remembers, it once snowed in July). She is less thrilled with Ontario taxes, which are much higher than in Alberta.

As Susan will tell you, a lot of factors go into making a city a great place to live. And that's precisely what our fourth annual ranking of *Canada's Best Places to Live* sets out to measure. We've painstakingly compiled vital stats on 154 communities from coast to coast. Our goal is to help you find the best places to put down roots, the best places to have a good time and the best places to retire. No matter how you define paradise, we've got the numbers that can help you find the city that will suit you best.

We believe this year's version of *Canada's Best Places to Live* is our most comprehensive research project yet. While we've

THE TOP 10 PLACES TO LIVE

We collected mountains of data and crunched thousands of numbers to discover the best cities to call home. Topping them all: **Victoria**, which combines excellent wages and job opportunities with some of the finest weather in the country. **Victoria** and cities such as **Ottawa** and **Kingston, Ont.**, are veterans of our top 10 list, but making the grade for the first time are **Peterborough, Ont.**, and **Brandon, Man.** The table below shows how each top 10 city ranks out of the 154 communities we measured. We've color-coded the categories into four major groups: weather, affordable housing, prosperity and lifestyle. You can see the complete rankings by going to www.moneysense.ca.

- weather
- affordable housing
- prosperity
- lifestyle

Rank out of 154 communities across Canada:

Overall rank	Community	Weather rank	Affordable housing	Household income	Discretionary income	New cars on road	Job prospects	Population growth	Access to health care	Low crime rate	Walk or bike to work
1	Victoria, B.C.	5th	147th	46th	20th	135th	13th	26th	23th	79th	5th
2	Ottawa-Gatineau	44	85	22	24	23	40	23	51	35	52
3	Kingston, Ont.	32	67	45	41	101	61	62	3	51	11
4	Burlington, Ont.	3	95	9	9	16	40	26	88	10	142
5	Vancouver, B.C.	86	150	44	42	47	31	22	45	111	6
6	Moncton, N.B.	142	19	88	95	19	53	16	15	76	60
7	Fredericton, N.B.	124	12	73	81	55	37	39	83	85	45
8	Winnipeg, Man.	29	36	74	79	51	32	75	35	112	90
9	Peterborough, Ont.	46	53	64	63	85	88	41	61	71	32
10	Brandon, Man.	56	35	104	124	111	9	57	36	108	40

WEATHERING HEIGHTS

Looking for Palm Springs North? Forget it. There's no such thing as perfect weather anywhere in Canada. But places such as Oakville, Ont., and Port Hope, Ont., offer a balance of warm temperatures, dry conditions and unpolluted air. If you really want to escape the cold, we suggest a

move to Powell River, B.C., where the thermometer dips below zero only 32 days a year. (It does rain a lot, though.) On the off chance you find parkas fashionable, head to Thompson, Man. It's the coldest city on our list with 240 days a year below freezing.

Rank	Community	Days with rain or snow	Total precipitation (mL/year)	Days when the temperature drops below 0 °C	Air quality grade
1	Oakville, Ont.	117.3	808.7	143.1	C+
2	Port Hope, Ont.	128.1	832.0	132.7	B
3	Burlington, Ont.	130.2	878.9	129.2	B
4	Mississauga, Ont.	145.5	792.7	146.2	A
5	Victoria, B.C.	154.2	883.3	52.6	A+

kept all the indicators of community quality used in previous editions, we've added more data on crime rates and medical services. We've also turned our attention to measuring the impact of culture and recreation. Finally we've compared how much more in sales and income tax you'll pay from one province to the next. (Hint: the further west you go, the more you save.)

Our approach to ranking communities is unique in two ways. First, we don't rely on subjective judgments. Most rankings of best places rely upon touristy impressions of historic downtowns and spectacular beaches. We think that approach is flawed because a visitor's impressions can be skewed by personal preference or by a single experience, good or bad. In contrast, our grading system looks only at features that have broad appeal and that can be reliably measured with hard numbers.

Second, we focus on the factors most likely to affect your long-term happiness. While we've got nothing against charming downtowns and nice beaches, we prefer to concentrate on more practical matters: your chances of landing a good job, affording a nice home, and getting high-quality medical care. Much of what we measure is invisible to the tourist's eye—which is why

some of our top communities might come as a surprise to you.

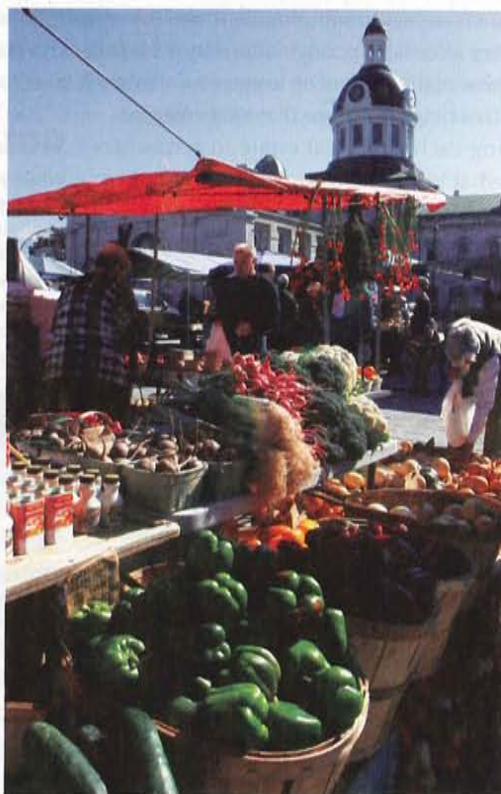
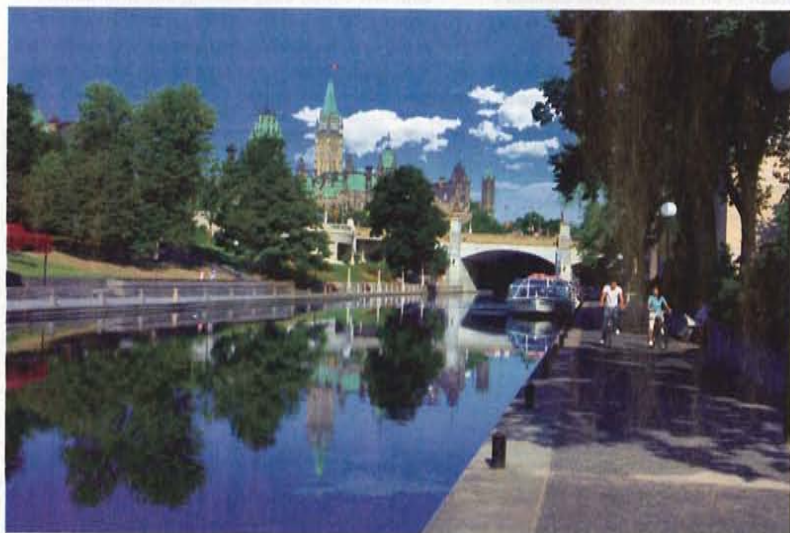
To arrive at our rankings, we rate each community on 24 indicators. We pride ourselves on being tough markers. No city comes close to earning full points and even our very top cities don't get much beyond 70 points out of a maximum of 105. Here's how we dole out our marks:

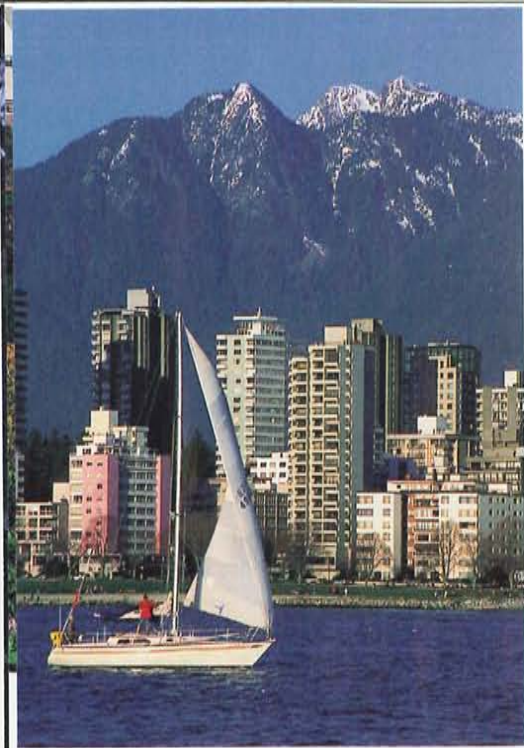
CHANCE OF FLURRIES Our first category is weather—and for good reason. Other than hockey, nothing fascinates Canadians more than the five-day forecast. But even among us hardy northerners, most people prefer a climate that's more like California than Corner Brook. So we award each city up to 20 points based on how closely its weather resembles a Mediterranean-like ideal.

We start by looking at daily temperatures. Places that enjoy fewer days below zero earn more points than ones that resemble a meat freezer most of the year.

Next we look at rain and snow. We assume that most people prefer not to get drenched every day, but most of us also don't want to live in permanent drought. So we award top points to places that receive a moderate 700 mL of rain and snow every year. We take away points from places that fall substantially above or below that mark. Whitehorse, with a sparse 267 mL of precipitation a year, loses points for being Canada's driest city; Prince Rupert, B.C., with 2,594 mL of the wet stuff each year, suffers an equal hit for being Canada's soggiest place. The ideal city—at least when it comes to precipitation—is Barrie, Ont., which gets bang on 700 mL a year. ➤

Victoria (top left) edged out two-time winner Ottawa (below left) for top spot this year, while perennial favorite Kingston, Ont., (right) ranked third





Vancouver's mountain beauty (left) is marred only by the city's sky-high home prices. Burlington, Ont., (above) boasts good weather at more affordable prices

We also award points for air quality. Cities with the lowest ozone levels and lowest particulate matter earn top marks in that category.

A HOME OF YOUR OWN Living in a city with great weather is a pleasure. Trying to afford a home there may be another matter. An average home in beautiful Vancouver goes for a hefty \$561,000. If that's out of your range, you may be happier living in a place with less desirable weather but cheaper real estate.

To reflect this practical reality, we award each city up to 15 points for housing affordability. As you might expect, communities with the cheapest home prices earn points as low-cost delights. But the very cheapest places are sometimes cheap for a reason—such as high unemployment and low wages. So we balance off our affordability calculations by awarding extra points based on how many years of an average local salary it takes to own a home. This helps to ensure that we're measuring each city's real estate in terms of what local people can actually afford.

BIG MONEY Affluent places tend to be cleaner, safer and more enjoyable than areas that are down on their luck. So we award each community up to 25 points based upon the prosperity of its residents.

To measure prosperity, we start by looking at average salaries—the higher, the better. But since living costs vary so much across the country we place an equal weight on discretionary income. This figure calculates how much money people have left after they pay their taxes, mortgages, grocery bills and transportation expenses. The differences between communities on this scale can be huge. A typical household in Calgary has \$35,478 left over after paying for the necessities of life, while households

in Thetford Mines, Que., scrape by on just over \$11,000 a year in discretionary income.

To give us a broad picture of a community's economic health, we look at its unemployment level. (It's hard to jump-start your career in a city where the jobless rate is in the double-digits.) We also take into account the number of new cars on the road. (Because

when people splurge on a brand new car, it's a sign they're not only well off, but upbeat about the future.)

This year we also began to factor in tax rates. As Susan Bird discovered after she moved to Ottawa from Calgary, provincial income and sales taxes vary substantially from one province to the next. The low-tax winners? Alberta (which charges no provincial sales tax), British Columbia (which has some of the lowest provincial income tax rates in the country) and the Northwest Territories (which has the lowest income tax rates of all). Cities in each of these areas earn more points than cities in more highly taxed jurisdictions, such as Quebec and the Maritimes.

AH, THE GOOD LIFE Here's where we turn away from dollars and cents and look at how enjoyable it is to live in a place. We award up to 40 points based on lifestyle indicators.

First up: health care. We give top marks to places with lots of doctors and other health-care professionals per capita. We also award a community a point for having at least one hospital.

Next we look at population growth, since there's no more sincere endorsement of a community than a steady influx of new residents. We give top marks to cities that are growing a couple of percentage points faster than the national average, but not so fast that they threaten to overwhelm their resources.

GOLDEN CITIES FOR GREY HAIR

When you stop working, jobless stats become meaningless. Health care jumps up your list of priorities, as does weather since you'll no longer be stuck in an office. To find Canada's best places to retire, we built a scoring system designed to reflect the realities of old age. We started by awarding points for a pleasant climate. We also rewarded cities with lots of

health-care workers per capita. Because retirees live on fixed incomes, we handed out bonus points for low taxes. And we looked for places with low crime, easy walking and affordable homes. Turns out that the top three places to retire—Victoria, Kingston and Ottawa—are also the cities we think are best to live in at any age. See? Some things don't change as you get older.

Rank	Community	Weather	Affordable housing	Access to health care	Low crime rate	Population growth	Walk or bike to work
1	Victoria, B.C.	1st	147th	23rd	79th	26th	5th
2	Kingston, Ont.	24	67	3	51	62	11
3	Ottawa-Gatineau	48	85	51	35	23	52
4	Vancouver, B.C.	19	150	45	111	22	6
5	London, Ont.	61	36	18	74	41	82
6	Courtenay, B.C.	37	132	20	114	23	17
7	Vernon, B.C.	7	141	28	121	3	50
8	Cobourg, Ont.	14	120	97	92	21	13
9	Joliette, Que.	65	77	2	25	44	28
10	Salmon Arm, B.C.	18	146	16	105	39	29

THE TRUE WORKER'S PARADISE

Where you live when holding a job boils down to dollars and cents. To find the best cities in Canada to work, we recalculated our numbers to emphasize places with generous salaries and above-average discretionary incomes. We removed factors like weather and crime that tend to be less important to the career-minded.

The best city to work in turns out to be Calgary. But you can't go wrong with several

other Alberta communities. Take the city of Brooks, for example. An average family pulls in over \$90,000 a year, and a 2.7% unemployment rate means finding work is a snap. Best of all, at \$184,450 on average, homes are still a bargain. Compare that to Montreal, the worst city in Canada to work. There, a house costs \$315,000, but you'll earn about \$34,000 less a year than in Brooks.

Rank	Community	Average house price	Time to buy	Household income	Discretionary income	Job prospects	Access to health care
1	Calgary, Alta.	135th	86th	7th	1st	15th	88th
2	Brooks, Alta.	46	16	20	22	6	154
3	Cold Lake, Alta.	113	65	16	17	4	70
4	Grande Prairie, Alta.	98	21	10	10	10	146
5	Edmonton, Alta.	120	108	21	7	20	49
6	Estevan, Sask.	27	8	31	60	1	150
7	Lévis, Que.	62	47	57	82	23	12
8	Ottawa-Gatineau	109	68	22	24	40	51
9	Winnipeg, Man.	45	38	74	79	32	35
10	Red Deer, Alta.	107	62	18	19	32	77

We take a close look at each community's statistics for homicides, violent crime, and property crime. Cities where your new Lexus is most likely to get stolen lose points. Communities where you can leave your door unlocked earn extra points.

Finally, we examine local amenities. Cities earn marks for having a transit system and a college or university campus with more than a thousand students. We also award points to cities where a high percentage of people walk or bike to work, since a large number of pedestrians and bicyclists suggest a community that's clean, compact and safe.

A LITTLE BUZZ, PLEASE In past years, we awarded bonus points to communities for amenities such as a professional hockey team, a theatre festival or a theme park. Some of you told us that our system punished smaller cities or less obvious attractions. Why did Toronto deserve a point for playing host to the Maple Leafs, but Squamish, B.C., got zip for being next door to some of the best ski slopes in the country?

We took your comments to heart. But rather than try and guess at whether a hockey team in Toronto should receive more points than a ballet company in Winnipeg or a ski hill in British Columbia or a theatre festival in P.E.I., we asked ourselves how we could objectively measure how much "buzz" each community possesses. Our solution is to look at the percentage of residents in each community who are employed in art, culture, recreation and sports. Communities can earn up to five bonus points for having an especially large proportion of jobs in those categories.

Our reasoning is that any attrac-

CAPITALS OF CASH

If being well off is your aim, we recommend a job out west drilling for oil or digging diamonds. Canada's highest income households are in Wood Buffalo, Alta., home to the oilsands and the boomtown of Fort McMurray. Paycheques in diamond-rich Yellowknife are nothing to scoff at either. But if hard hats and steel-toed boots aren't your thing, head to one of Toronto's moneyed suburbs, like Oakville, where many Bay Street types park their BMWs at night.

Rank	Community	Average annual household income
1	Wood Buffalo, Alta.	\$164,122
2	Oakville, Ont.	\$147,515
3	Vaughan, Ont.	\$135,354
4	Yellowknife, N.W.T.	\$127,500
5	Markham, Ont.	\$122,757

tion—whether it be a ski hill or a music theatre or a pro sports team—should have jobs attached to it, and counting up those jobs should provide an excellent indicator of the amount of interest the attraction generates. The overall number of cultural and sports-related jobs in a community should provide a telling gauge of that place's potential for good times, whether those good times consist of rocketing down a ski slope or taking in live music.

So there you have it. We ranked 154 communities with populations greater than 10,000. We lumped small suburbs in with nearby cities, but if a suburb had a population greater than 100,000, we ranked it separately. That means you'll find Surrey and Burnaby listed separately from Vancouver, while Mississauga and Richmond Hill are broken out from Toronto.

Which city is best? For the past two years, Ottawa has topped our rankings, but this year the nation's capital was edged out by a new champion: Victoria. The West Coast city earned a top score of 73 points on our grading scale. It boasts a nearly embarrassing number of positives. Start with weather: the thermometer drops below zero in Victoria just 53 days a year, making the climate idyllic for gardeners and skateboarders alike. On top of that, the city's air is clean and fresh and its low unemployment rate rivals that of Alberta's oilsands regions. There are plenty of doctors, it's easy to get to wherever you're going by foot or bus, and tax rates are low. Victoria's only major downside? High home prices. You'll pay more than \$440,000 to buy an average home in British Columbia's capital.

Sybil Harrison, the chief librarian at a local college, thinks the high cost of living in Victoria is justified. She and her husband Larry, who works for a college in New Westminster, have lived in Vancouver, Seattle, Denver and Abu Dhabi. They moved to Victoria from Ontario a year ago. "Living here just feels easier than most places," Sybil says. "When you think of what a city should be, Victoria is it." Sybil loves the tree-lined streets and 19th-century homes. She also enjoys the mild weather, which allows her to walk to work most days, even though her office is two and a half kilometres from home.

Ottawa can't boast the same weather as Victoria, but while our capital city has lost its top spot in this year's ranking, it's still no slouch. It earned 72 points on our scale, just one less than Victoria. Its secret is consistency. ►

Ottawa isn't stellar in any single category we measured, but it ranked a bit above average in nearly everything. Local incomes are high, houses are affordable, an excellent transit system serves the city, and should you head out to sample the city's many art galleries and museums, you face little chance of getting mugged.

Kingston, Ont., took the bronze medal in our rankings with 71 points. Tourists enjoy this historic city's waterfront and limestone architecture. Residents enjoy cheap homes (average price: \$228,000), a large number of doctors, two universities, and easy strolls to many workplaces.

You can see all of our top-rated communities by turning to *The Top 10 places to live* on page 32. The good news? There are excellent communities to live in no matter which part of the country you prefer. Two of our top 10 picks are in New Brunswick, two are in Manitoba and two are in B.C. Four are located in Ontario, but one of those, Ottawa, straddles the Gatineau region of Quebec.

Our top cities tend to share two characteristics: government and students. Four of our top 10 cities are provincial or federal capitals. All the top 10—except for Burlington—boast both a university and a college within city limits. This mix of students, professors and civil servants is hard to beat when it comes to providing a city with a healthy heart. Unlike factory workers, civil servants and professors rarely get laid off. And unlike duller communities, a city with lots of students is likely to boast an active cultural life.

But that doesn't mean that other cities can't move into the top ranks. One benefit of our by-the-numbers approach is that a modest shift in any of a city's key stats can send it zooming up or down the charts. Take Dawson Creek, B.C. Last year we ranked it 114th. This year it vaulted to 34th, thanks mainly to falling unemployment. Mayors, take note: if you want to boost your community's ranking, we're happy to recognize the results of your efforts. (And just to make sure that we're not accused of favoring the hometown team, let us mention that Toronto, where *MoneySense's* office is located, skidded 28 places this year to finish in 79th spot.)

You can see rankings and detailed

BUZZ FACTOR

There's more to life than the nine-to-five grind. There are museums to visit, concerts to mosh at, hockey teams to jeer and golf games to play. To find the best spots to have fun, we ranked cities based on the percentage of the local population employed in arts, culture, sports and recreation. The more people who work in these fields, the more attractions a city is likely to offer.

Our top city for buzz turns out to be Montreal. No surprise there. Montreal has a thriving music scene, wonderful restaurants and is Canada's centre for French theatre, film and literature. Just don't try getting any work done. We also ranked the city as the worst place in Canada to hold down a job.

Rank	Community	Workers employed in culture, arts, sports & recreation
1	Montreal, Que	5.71%
2	Toronto, Ont.	5.36%
3	Canmore, Alta.	4.48%
4	Ottawa-Gatineau	4.29%
5	Vancouver, B.C.	4.14%

searching for paradise, it pays to be practical. **M**

For the full ranking of all 154 communities, plus a more detailed description of our methodology, please visit www.moneysense.ca

data on all 154 communities by going to www.moneysense.ca. We hope you'll refer to our listings whether you're looking to move, invest or retire. "You think all places are the same and it doesn't matter where you live," says Susan Bird. "But that's not really true." Often, it's the little things, she says. People in Ottawa are more reserved than Calgarians, so it took her far longer to make friends. And Ottawa's hospitals seem old and weathered compared to Calgary's shiny-new facilities. On the other hand, Susan found it maddening that no matter how much it snowed in Calgary, the highways never seemed to get completely plowed.

For now, the Birds are happy to call Ottawa home. Next year their son, Josh, is heading to university. With both Carleton University and the University of Ottawa nearby, he'll save plenty by living at home. After all, when you're

THE 1.7-YEAR MORTGAGE

You'd be hard-pressed to find a more spectacular place than Canmore, Alta. Nestled in the Rocky Mountains just minutes from Banff National Park, this ski village looks like a cold-filtered beer commercial sprung to life. But forget about picking up a mountainside villa on the cheap. Home prices average \$774,000. On a local salary it would take you 6.9 years to buy a house.

A move to Bathurst, N.B., is the best way to avoid becoming a slave to your mortgage. A house there costs a mere \$100,650 and you can buy one with just 1.7 years of the average local salary. Portage la Prairie in Manitoba offers a similar bargain. True, neither town has Canmore's stunning views. But with your house paid off, you'll be able to afford a ski vacation.

Where the living is cheap...

Rank	Community	Average house price	Average household income	Years to buy a house
1	Bathurst, N.B.	\$100,650	\$57,625	1.7
2	Cape Breton, N.S.	\$101,034	\$53,283	1.9
3	Portage la Prairie, Man.	\$102,367	\$57,617	1.8
4	Dolbeau-Mistassini, Que.	\$103,280	\$53,673	1.9
5	La Tuque, Que.	\$103,830	\$53,273	1.9

And where it's not....

Rank	Community	Average house price	Average household income	Years to buy a house
1	Canmore, Alta.	\$773,930	\$111,650	6.9
2	Vancouver, B.C.*	\$560,953	\$76,791	7.3
3	Kelowna, B.C.	\$545,000	\$73,374	7.4
4	Squamish, B.C.	\$532,770	\$81,779	6.5
5	Wood Buffalo, Alta.	\$527,219	\$164,122	3.2

*Includes Richmond, Burnaby and Coquitlam