

## Title: 11 factors to help you decide where to live

Subtitle: *The ultimate guide for answering the question, "where should I live?"*

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### TLDR:

Finding the right place to live is a complex process with many variables to consider. Most first-time home buyers don't ask themselves the right questions before making their decision to live in an area. This guide will walk you through key considerations such as employment opportunities, home affordability, crime rates, school and healthcare system quality, among other things.

Open Listings can help you quickly and efficiently find homes that meet your exact criteria.



[\(Source\)](#)

It's perfectly normal to feel overwhelmed while choosing a new area to live. There is a myriad of variables that need to be carefully reviewed and considered. For example, how does a neighborhood's

location affect the value of a home in the future? How will commuting to and from work affect your quality of life?

These are the types of questions new home buyers need to ask themselves before choosing the area they want to live.

To help you make the right decision and narrow down the places where you can and want to live, we've mapped out the following 11 essential questions that we believe every first-time home buyer needs to ask themselves before making this significant decision.

## 11 Essential Questions to Answer “Where Should I Live?”

### 1. What type of place will improve my *quality of life*?

You can remodel and renovate, but there are some things you just can't change in a home. For example, a home's location or property type, which greatly contributes to your quality of life.

*When considering how a home affects your well being, think about:*

- **Proximity:** What's most important to you; being close to work? Public transportation? Schools? Walkability?
- **Property type:** Would having 24/7 access to a gym or a pool improve your life? How would living in a low-maintenance home affect your life? If these factors are important to you, maybe it would be best to live in a condo or a home with a homeowners association.

**To determine where you want to live,** figure out what's most important for your quality of life. Make a list of amenities you're willing to part with and what you can't live without.

## 2. Which areas can I *afford* to live?

Some people want to move from the suburbs to the city, but don't realize how much living expenses can increase. Affordability refers to how much *house* you can afford, but also the *cost of living* you can afford.

### 1. Cost of living

*Can you afford the cost of living in the area you want to live?*

Cost of living refers to how much your everyday expenses, ranging from your mortgage or rent to the price of gas, groceries, utilities, transport, and entertainment.

For example, according to [NerdWallet's cost of living calculator](#), the housing, transportation, food, entertainment, and healthcare costs are about 82% higher if you want to live in Orange County, CA instead of Sacramento, CA ([Source: NerdWallet, 2017](#)).

**To determine where you can afford to live**, research the cost of living in different zip codes or neighborhoods.

### 2. Salary stability

*Does the area you want to live offer salary stability?*

Salary stability refers to your level of certainty that you can find or keep a job that provides a salary that will sustain your standard of living.

For example, if you're confident you can find a job in Orange County, CA that will offer a salary increase of 25%, but moving there will increase your cost of living by 30%, then you can't afford to live there.

### 3. Taxes

*Can I afford the property taxes in the area I want to live?*

Did you know that property taxes in California are below the national average? According to [Smart Asset](#), the average effective property tax rate in California is 0.81%, compared to a national average of over 1.1%” ([Source: Smartasset, 2017](#)).

Either the state, county, or city collects property taxes from each piece of real estate within their governing borders.

There are two methods for assigning property tax:

- **Ad Valorem:** Ad Valorem is latin for “according to value.” Therefore, each property is assigned a property tax based on its assessed value.
- **Direct Assessment:** Based on city or district-wide votes, a property tax flat fee is determined and placed on each piece of property. Direct assessment is usually voted for when the city or district is lacking certain services that will be covered by the revenue generated from the property tax flat fee.

Many first-time home buyers are surprised to find out how much the property taxes are on their new home and it’s actually the second largest expense of owning a home (next to the mortgage, of course). That’s why it’s important to figure out your property taxes beforehand so that you won’t be surprised by rising rates or reassessments.

**To determine if you can afford the taxes in the area you want to live**, click [here](#) to calculate the property taxes for any state.

### 3. Are there *employment opportunities* in the area I want to live?

Your job is a potential deciding factor of where you’ll want to live.

For example, living on the East side of L.A. puts you at a 1.5 hour commute to most tech jobs. Are you willing to make the trip in exchange for living in a better neighborhood?

If the answer is no, you may want to consider the job opportunities in the area you want to live.

**To determine if you can find viable employment opportunities in the area you want to live**, research if there are lots of opportunities in your industry nearby. Furthermore, determine how long you're planning on living in this new neighbourhood. If it's a short-term move, maybe it's worth it for you to commute to and from work for the time-being.

*How to research job markets in your desired neighbourhood:*

1. Look for available jobs listings on websites such as [Monster](#).
2. Research companies using job databases such as [Hoovers](#).
3. Use job boards such as [Quintessential](#) to find the best jobs based on your desired location.
4. Join [LinkedIn](#) groups that are location-specific and look through your LinkedIn connections. Follow companies you wish to work for on LinkedIn.
5. Cold call companies that interest you to see if they're hiring.

#### 4. Is the area I want to live in going to retain its *real estate value*?

More money coming into a neighborhood, new stores popping up, and homes being renovated are all signals that an area's real estate value is going to increase.

Since buying a home is a big investment, you'll want to make sure that the value of your property will grow with time.

To determine if the area you want to live has real estate value, research comparable properties in the vicinity. Comparable properties ("comps") are nearby, recently sold, similar properties and they're a good indicator of how hot a market is.

For example, the image on the left is a home for sale in Westwood, Los Angeles and the images below are *comps* in the same neighborhood:



**10776 Wilshire #1403**  
 Westwood - Los Angeles CA 90024  
**Listed at \$3,500,000** 🏠 2bd 3ba 2,735sf  
 \$1,280/sqft 3 days on market

[\(Source\)](#)

 <p>+ Select</p>	 <p>+ Select</p>	 <p>+ Select</p>
<p><b>10800 Wilshire Blvd #1302</b>            Westwood - Los Angeles, CA 90024  <b>\$2,715,000</b> \$1,028/sf 🏠 2bd 2.5ba 2,640sf</p> <p>Listed at \$2,795,000, 277 days on market            0.5 less baths, 95 sf smaller            Sold 2 months ago, -2.9% under asking</p> <p>📍 0.1 miles away    ❤️ 6    ➡</p>	<p><b>10580 Wilshire Blvd Unit TH3</b>            Westwood - Los Angeles, CA 90024  <b>\$3,700,000</b> \$1,317/sf 🏠 3bd 2.5ba 2,809sf</p> <p>Listed at \$3,995,000, 139 days on market            1 more bed, 0.5 less baths, 74 sf larger            Sold 2 months ago, -7.4% under asking</p> <p>📍 0.4 miles away    ❤️    ➡</p>	<p><b>10560 Wilshire Blvd #1906</b>            Westwood - Los Angeles, CA 90024  <b>\$2,471,176</b> \$879/sf 🏠 2bd 3ba 2,810sf</p> <p>Listed at \$2,688,000, 21 days on market            75 sf larger            Sold 23 days ago, -8.1% under asking</p> <p>📍 0.4 miles away    ❤️ 1    ➡</p>

[\(Source\)](#)

These *comps* reveal that most of the homes in this area spent more than 100 days on the market and were sold under the asking price. This tells us that these homes aren't necessarily in high demand.

Click [here](#) to use Open Listings *comp* tools to find out what your desired home is *really* worth.

## 5. Are there *potential hazards* when I want to live?

Potential hazards refer to the natural obstacles that may affect our day-to-day lives. For example, California is known for experiencing mild and, sometimes, extremely severe earthquakes.

When you buy a property, you'll receive a natural hazard report that determines if the place you're buying falls into any of these hazard zones:

- Special flood hazard area
- Special flood hazard area
- Area of potential flooding
- Very high fire hazard severity zone
- Wildland area that may contain substantial forest fire risk and hazards
- Earthquake fault zone
- Seismic hazard zone

If your neighbourhood falls into one of these categories, this is a potentially large consideration as it can have a severe effect on your life.

Furthermore, consider the noise levels, pollution, and weather in the state you want to live as they all have a huge impact on our day-to-day lives including on our moods and daily routines.

For example, did you know that Seattle, Washington experiences, on average, [149 rainy days](#) per year? If you don't mind jogging in the rain, Seattle, Washington is a great place for you to live! However, if you prefer running under the hot sun, then Los Angeles, California might be the place for you.

**To determine if there are potential hazards in the area you want to live**, research daily weather reports, average yearly climate reports, and natural disaster occurrences.

You can use maps such as this one created by software engineer [Kelly Worton](#), that outlines where in the USA you will find cities that experience the most "pleasant days." A "pleasant day" refers to temperatures that are between 55° F and 75°.

For example, here I scrolled over Seattle Washington, and the map reports that it has 89 pleasant days out of the year.



[\(Source\)](#)

## 6. What *type of neighborhood* should I live in?

People get so caught up in the physical properties of a house that they sometimes forget to analyze the surrounding area to see if it matches their desired culture, entertainment, and lifestyle needs.

For example, on your spare time, are you looking for a quiet park to read your book, a loud concert to go dancing or both? Are you interested in living in the country on a farm or would you like to live near the water? Would you like to live in an area that has a community with similar values as you or are you looking to meet people very different from you?

Culture, entertainment, and lifestyle also refer to the available food in the desired area. If you're a foodie, the available restaurants, grocery stores, and food markets can have a significant impact on your lifestyle.

**To determine if the culture in an area matches your lifestyle**, write a list of things that you feel are necessary for your own culture, entertainment, and lifestyle needs. You can find lots of information online about the happenings in different cities. For example, [Clarity+Campaign](#) created a quiz that helps you find cities that match your political views.

## 7. How is the **public transportation** in the area I want to live?

According to Time.com, commuting to and from work every day adversely affects our [health](#). Commuting more than 30 minutes to and from work is associated with higher levels of depression, anxiety, and cholesterol.

Therefore, your accessibility to public transportation in the area you want to live can have a big impact on your lifestyle.

**To determine if the neighbourhood you want to live in has good public transportation**, check out this article created by [Smart Assets](#) that researched the best cities for public transportation in 2017.

**INSERT CTA HERE: Click [here](#) to see how Open Listings can help you find a home near your work.**

## 8. How close will I be to my **family and friends** if I live in this area?

If you already have an established community of family and friends nearby, moving to a different city or even just a different neighborhood may be tough.

Consider whether the potential savings and other perks of moving outweigh being farther from your family and friends.

For example, moving from Texas to New York is a problem as it's expensive and time consuming to fly home. On the other hand, moving from Houston, Texas to Austin, Texas is less of a big deal because you can easily drive to see your friends and family.

**To determine if you're able to see your friends and family easily**, check out the time it takes to bus, fly, or drive from your desired neighborhood to wherever you friends and family live.

## 9. What are the *crime rates* in the area I want to live?

This question is for everyone but is especially relatable to women and people with families. Feeling unsafe in your home or surrounding neighborhood has a huge effect on mental health and lifestyle.

Be sure to check out the crime rates and statistics for your desired neighborhood.

**If you want to determine the crime rates in an area**, check out [crimereports.com](http://crimereports.com), search your desired city, and find out the crime rates and statistics for that area.

## 10. Are there *quality schools* for my children to attend?

Even if you don't have children yet, school quality is a crucial factor to consider for your future and potential home resale value. Many parents base their entire decision to move around the schools their children can attend.

**To determine the area you want to live has good schools**, check out [GreatSchools.org](http://GreatSchools.org). Just type in the city, zip code or address of the area you would like to live and the website will direct you to the different schools in that area. Each school is rated and reviewed so you can determine if it's a school you would like your child attending. Plus, the website has a button labeled "Homes for Sale" so you can see if there a place available near your desired school district.

Furthermore, Open Listings offers information on schools based your home requirements. All this information is available by [setting up a feed of homes](#) with Open Listings.

*For example, this home in West Los Angeles, California has schools for children of every age available in the neighborhood:*

## SCHOOLS FOR THIS HOME

<b>B-</b>	<b>Carthay Center Elementary School</b> <a href="#">More</a>	K-5
<b>B-</b>	<b>Emerson Community Charter School</b> <a href="#">More</a>	6-8
<b>B+</b>	<b>Fairfax Senior High School</b> <a href="#">More</a>	9-12

School data provided by [NICHE](#)

[\(Source\)](#)

11. Is there a quality **health care system** in the area I want to live?

The quality of healthcare a city possess almost always has a direct correlation between quality of life. Again, this is an especially important factor to consider for those of you with families.

**To determine if the area you want to live has an excellent healthcare system**, check out [U.S. News' guide](#) to the best states for health care.

## How Open Listings Can Help

These 11 questions are meant to get you thinking about variables that can affect your happiness and quality of life when moving to a specific neighbourhood or new city. As you do more research and answer more questions, you'll be able to build a "bigger picture" of what the perfect place to live looks like for you.

Open Listings can make the search for a new place to live simpler by [setting up a feed of homes](#) made up of your exact criteria. You can see info on what a neighborhood is like, available schools in the neighborhood, the market history of your desired home and other homes in the same neighborhood.

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