

Best Cities for Young Families in California

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by [Maggie Clark](#) on January 27, 2014

California offers a wealth of opportunity for young families, from good jobs with high salaries to tons of recreation and great schools. Homes values here have [remained high](#) despite the housing bubble and the unemployment rate [continues to drop](#). So where can young families get the best education for their kids and the most bang for their buck? NerdWallet crunched the numbers to find the best cities for young families in California.

1. **Does the city have good public schools?** We measured schools' academic performance with ratings from GreatSchools. This non-profit compares a given school's standardized test scores to the state average to obtain a rating on a 1 to 10 scale (10 representing the highest score). Higher ratings led to a higher overall score.
2. **Can you afford to live there?** We looked at both median home values in each city and ongoing monthly home costs, including mortgage payments, real estate taxes, insurance costs, utilities, fuel and other bills. Lower costs led to a higher overall score.
3. **Is the city growing and prospering?** We assessed a city's economy by looking at average household income and income growth over the last decade. Higher income and greater growth led to a higher overall score.

What makes these cities great? Let us know in the comments below.

The Best Cities for Young Families

1. Clovis

Source: City of Clovis

This city in California's San Joaquin Valley offers affordable homes, good schools and great quality of life. Clovis bills itself as the "gateway to the Sierras" and offers 285 [acres](#) of parks and trails, plus family-friendly activities including Friday night farmer's markets in the summer, [BIG Hat Days](#) in April which brings about 140,000 people to downtown Clovis for art, food and music, and the annual [Clovis Rodeo](#). Families can also take a short trip to the [Chafee Zoo](#) in nearby Fresno to visit with animals such as elephants and sea lions. The graduation rate for Clovis-area high schools was 92.6 percent for the class of 2011-2012, the most recent year data is available from the California Department of Education Data Reporting Office. That's much higher than the [statewide graduation rate of 78.5 percent](#). Salaries here are also on the upswing: the median household income grew by 54.4 percent between 1999 and 2011, according to data crunched by NerdWallet.

Here's what people are saying about life in Clovis:

“(Clovis has) a distinctive culture that embraces its past, celebrates the present and plans for the future – all at the same time. It focuses on, and is committed to the Clovis community family, their needs, their values and a quality way of life for all.” -Lynne Ashbeck, mayor of Clovis

“Clovis is a very family oriented community with safe, clean neighborhoods and activities to keep families active...whether they are strolling through Old Town’s Farmer’s Market, cheering for their favorite high school team or riding bicycles on the Old Town Trail...” - Tina Summer, communications director for Clovis

2. Folsom

Great schools, great parks and great jobs await young families in Folsom, which is located about 20 miles east of Sacramento. Local graduation rates here are well above the state average: in 2011-2012, Folsom High School and Vista del Lago High School had graduation rates of 98.4 and 99.1 percent respectively, according the California Department of Education Data Reporting Office. Folsom also made our [NerdWallet list of top 10 California cities for job seekers](#) as it’s home to the research and development offices for Intel and the corporate offices for Verizon and Jadoo Power. Families can enjoy outdoor fun at Castle Park or go ice skating in the winter at the historic [Sutter Street Ice Rink](#) in the Folsom historic district.

Here’s what people are saying about life in Folsom:

“Folsom is widely regarded as a progressive and safe, family-friendly community with great schools, wonderful neighborhoods, an excellent jobs to housing balance, and outstanding employers including Intel, Kikkoman and California ISO. We also have two beautiful lakes, miles of recreational trails, a revitalized Historic District, a regional performing arts center, and exciting dining and shopping opportunities.” -Kerri Howell, Mayor

3. Yuba City

Families looking for affordable housing and growing incomes will feel right at home in Yuba City. Located about 45 miles due north of Sacramento, median household incomes here grew by 48.6 percent from 1999 to 2011, according to data crunched by NerdWallet. The median home value was \$227,400 in 2011, according Census data. For family fun in the water, Yuba City offers Gauche Aquatic Park, which has a 25-ft water slide, a kids pool and a lap pool for competitive swimmers. The city is bordered by the [Sutter Buttes](#), which are remnants of volcanic activity from millions of years ago. Families can take educational hikes on the Buttes guided by the [Sutter Land Trust](#), a nonprofit organization dedicated to protecting the Sutter Butte region.

4. Murrieta

For southern California families looking for affordable housing and lots of activities, Murrieta has a lot to offer. The city already has 12 family [events](#) set for the coming year, including a “[star party](#)” in February where families can look at the stars through telescopes, do crafts and enjoy time outdoors. The graduation rates at Murrieta’s three high schools were 98 percent, 94.5 percent and 96.8 percent respectively, according to the California Department of Education Data Reporting Office. The median household income, at \$80,792, was higher than our previous choices of Clovis and Yuba City. However, because the city sits in the [South Coast Air Quality Basin](#), the air quality is routinely poor. The American Lung Association [gave](#) the Murrieta-Riverside-County-area an F for air quality in 2013. Murrieta has a [plan](#) to improve air quality by conducting air quality impact studies before doing any new construction, encouraging biking and walking rather than driving and working with state and federal authorities to meet air quality requirements. The city also adopted a climate action plan to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to ensure better air quality for the future.

5. Irvine

Source: City of Irvine

For families who enjoy diversity, Irvine has a place for everyone. The median home value here is \$661,700, the highest value of any of our top 10 cities for young families in California. Schools here are excellent: the district received [high marks](#) from GreatSchools.org and 85.1 percent of students who graduated in 2009 went to college, according to the most recent available data from the California Department of Education Data Reporting Office. Young families can expose their children to cultures from all over the world at Irvine’s numerous ethnic community centers, or spend the day relaxing at nearby Laguna Beach. Irvine is also a 20-minute drive from Disneyland and is home to major [employers](#) including University of California Irvine, Blizzard Entertainment, Verizon Wireless and Kaiser Permanente Hospital.

Here’s what people are saying about life in Irvine:

“The cultural amenities in Irvine are as numerous as our diverse population, who speak more than 65 different languages at home...people of all backgrounds and cultures feel as if they are a part of the community, no matter where they live, work, or go to school in the City of Irvine.”-
Steven S. Choi, mayor

6. Lake Forest

Located about 10 miles south of Irvine, Lake Forest offers a similar lifestyle but at a tad lower cost. The median home value here is lower than Irvine, coming in at \$543,600, and the median household income is actually slightly higher than Irvine at \$94,632 per year. Lake Forest was also named [one of NerdWallet’s top 10 cities for job seekers in California](#). The district-wide graduation rate was 95.4 percent for the class of 2012 according to the California Department of Education Data Reporting Office, and the schools scored an [8 out of 10](#) based on GreatSchools.org’s test score ranking system. Lake Forest also has a program specifically designed for teens known as [LF Teens](#), where students can get after-school homework help, learn about volunteer opportunities in local government and take day trips throughout the region. Families

with young kids can spend the day picnicking at [Heritage Hill Historical Park](#) or talking with parrots at [Omar's Exotic Birds](#).

7. Redlands

Source: City of Redlands

Located squarely in the Inland Empire, the large swath of metropolitan communities situated between Los Angeles and San Diego, Redlands offers affordable housing, growing salaries and good schools. The median home value was \$340,600, well below the high prices of Lake Forest and Irvine. The area is still [recovering](#) from the subprime mortgage housing crisis and home values still have not rebounded to what they were in the early 2000s, but families have a lot of opportunity here. [Redlands is home to Esri](#), a large tech company which creates GIS mapping systems and software, and to multiple medical centers, including Redlands Community Hospital. The community also has a rich history with ties to the California citrus industry- many [homes of citrus tycoons](#) are on display in Redlands today. The city offers many family-friendly activities, including [Market Night](#) each Thursday in downtown, the Redlands Bowl Summer Music Festival and weekly [farmer's markets](#) each Saturday.

Here's what people are saying about life in Redlands:

"Redlands has a rich blend of cultural, historical, commercial and community resources surrounded by a unique natural setting." - Pete Aguilar, mayor of Redlands

8. Roseville

Source: City of Roseville

Back up in northern California, Roseville sits northeast of Sacramento and offers over 4,000 acres of parklands and 31 miles of trails. Families here benefit from high-scoring schools and high-paying employers including Hewlett-Packard and Kaiser Permanente. Roseville recently finished a major renovation on the [Vernon Street Town Square](#), which now hosts free concerts, free outdoor movies every Friday, free kids programs every Wednesday during the summer and a kid-friendly water play area. Families can also learn about eco-friendly living at the [Roseville Utility Exploration Center](#), which educates parents and kids about energy and water conservation.

Here's what people are saying about life in Roseville:

"With our excellent schools, expansive parks system, affordable housing and safe neighborhoods, Roseville is a wonderful place to raise a family. Being a growing employment center with high paying jobs, Roseville is a place where you can live, work and play." – Susan Rohan, mayor of Roseville

9. Davis

Source: City of Davis

On the southwestern side of Sacramento sits Davis, which is home to one of the largest campuses in the University of California system and also offers 400 acres of parks and 100 miles of bike paths. Families here can choose from tons of activities, including seasonal berry-picking and [Explorit](#), a hands-on science museum. [Downtown Davis](#) offers outdoor concerts, parks, farmer's markets and boutique shopping. Buying a home here can be challenging for families- the median household income is \$61,182 while the average home value is \$560,500. But families here get the benefits of great schools and good proximity to jobs in Sacramento and San Francisco.

Here's what people are saying about life in Davis:

"With a goal of enhancing people's lives and making the community more healthy, livable, and enjoyable, the variety of opportunities offered through the City of Davis are sure to meet everyone's needs." - Sarah Worley, economic development coordinator for the City of Davis

10. Walnut Creek

Located in the East Bay region to the east of San Francisco, Walnut Creek offers young families high salaries-\$84,722 was the median household income in 2011- and access to all the amenities of nearby San Francisco without the hassles of city life. Young families can enjoy weekly [farmer's markets](#) or take part in education events at the [Leshner Center for the Arts](#). Schools here are top-notch: the school district scored a nine out of 10 for its standardized test scores based on [GreatSchools.org](#)'s ranking system.

Ranking	City	Nearest big city	GreatSchools rating	Median home value	Monthly owner costs	Median household income	Growth '99 – '11	Overall score for young families
1	Clovis	Fresno	8	\$284,500	\$2,001	\$65,300	54.4%	66.76
2	Folsom	Sacramento	9	\$431,900	\$2,608	\$95,143	30.0%	58.47
3	Yuba	Sacramento	6	\$227,400	\$1,733	\$48,830	48.6%	57.45
4	Murrieta	San Diego	8	\$320,600	\$2,537	\$80,792	32.6%	56.55
5	Irvine	Los Angeles	10	\$661,700	\$3,032	\$92,599	28.5%	56.04
6	Lake Forest	Los Angeles	8	\$543,600	\$2,584	\$94,632	39.2%	55.99
7	Redlands	Los Angeles	7	\$340,600	\$2,279	\$68,015	41.2%	55.66

8	Roseville	Sacramento	8	\$356,500	\$2,427	\$75,245	31.2%	55.55
9	Davis	Sacramento	8	\$560,500	\$2,561	\$61,182	44.1%	55.41
10	Walnut Creek	San Francisco	9	\$614,000	\$2,927	\$84,722	34.0%	54.71
11	Chula Vista	San Diego	7	\$401,000	\$2,667	\$65,526	46.1%	54.46
12	Alhambra	Los Angeles	8	\$505,600	\$2,228	\$52,717	34.4%	53.72
13	Carlsbad	San Diego	9	\$633,200	\$2,945	\$85,743	31.6%	53.50
14	Fullerton	Los Angeles	8	\$540,900	\$2,697	\$69,432	38.1%	53.41
15	Chico	Sacramento	6	\$295,700	\$1,758	\$41,632	41.8%	53.18
16	Redondo Beach	Los Angeles	9	\$745,000	\$3,249	\$94,982	37.3%	52.94
17	Indio	Riverside	5	\$248,500	\$2,063	\$52,199	50.8%	52.45
18	Redding	Sacramento	7	\$255,400	\$1,728	\$43,157	26.2%	52.41
19	Chino Hills	Los Angeles	8	\$536,500	\$2,762	\$101,905	30.0%	52.33
20	Upland	Los Angeles	7	\$450,800	\$2,428	\$67,449	38.4%	52.03

Methodology

The overall score for each city was derived from the following measures:

1. [GreatSchools](#) city rating: GreatSchools city ratings are calculated by averaging the weighted overall rating for each school in the city (weighted by the number of students enrolled at the school)
2. Median home value from the U.S. Census: (2011 ACS, data set DP04, half-weighted)
3. Monthly homeowner costs from the U.S. Census: (2011 ACS, data set DP04, half-weighted)
4. Median household income from the U.S. Census: (2011 ACS, data set DP03, half-weighted)
5. Income change between 1999 and 2011 from the U.S. Census: (data sets P053 and DP03, half-weighted)