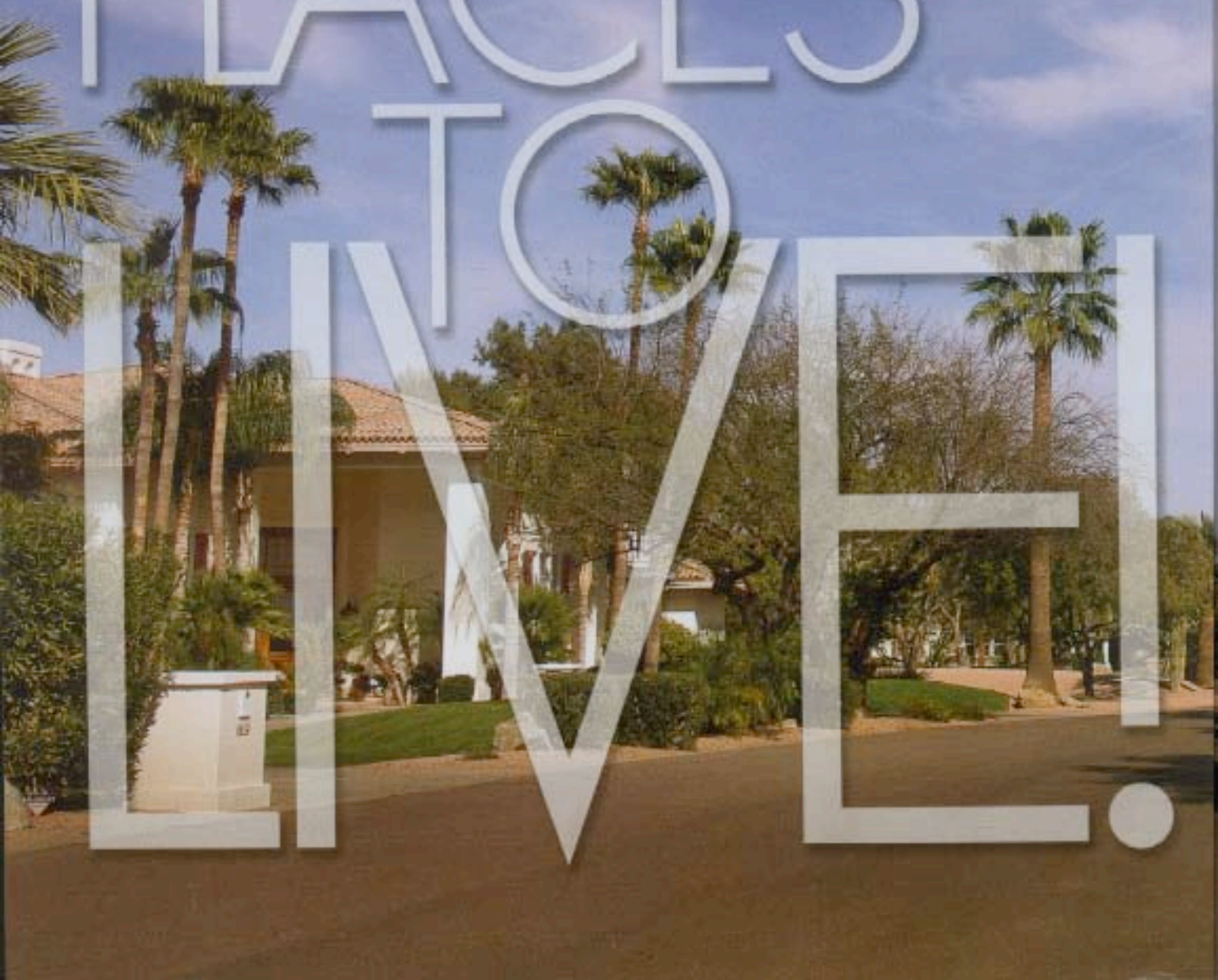


WHICH VALLEY CITIES HAVE THE BEST SCHOOLS, THE LOWEST CRIME RATES AND THE MOST VALUABLE HOMES? WELL, WE'VE CRUNCHED THE NUMBERS FOR ALL 22 MUNICIPALITIES, AND HERE'S WHAT WE LEARNED: FOUNTAIN HILLS IS *NUMERO UNO*.

BEST PLACES

TO

LIVE!



R.L. Brown has been reporting on the Valley's real estate market for more than 18 years. As the CEO of Home Builders Marketing, he analyzes housing trends and shares his expertise with developers, builders, lenders and investors. Recently, he shared some of his knowledge with us, and, among other things, he told us "the demand for money and the political influence is shifting rapidly to the West Valley."

If you've been to a concert at Glendale Arena lately, you'll understand why — there's plenty of land out there, and home prices are still relatively affordable. No doubt, the West Valley has become a desirable place to live. Whether it's the best or not depends on who you ask. For example, what looks good to a working mom with three kids can be very different from what appeals to a semiretired surgeon. It's all very subjective.

Therefore, when you're talking about "the best places to live," it's important to look at things like crime rates, tax rates, home prices, schools, etc. And that's what we did. In the following pages, we measure "quality of life" issues for the Valley's 22 cities — Sun City, Sun City West and Sun Lakes aren't included because they're not available to all readers; Anthem and Ahwatukee aren't included because they're officially a part of Phoenix, which finished 18th overall.

That number, however, can be a little misleading, considering the geographical size of Phoenix. In reality, the city is too big to measure as a whole — think about it, living at Kierland is very different from living in Maryvale. Nonetheless, we've included it in our ranking. We've also included some short profiles of the 15 villages that make up the city of Phoenix — Alhambra, Camelback East, Encanto, etc. These will give you a little taste of what it's like to live in those sectors of the city.

Of course, whether you're looking at Phoenix, Peoria or Paradise Valley, you'll also have to consider the intangibles, such as history, personality and reputation. For our purposes, though, we focus on the numbers, which provide useful data on why you may or may not want to live in a particular city. In the end, as you'll see, no city finished first in every category; however, a few places did stand out, including Fountain Hills, which jumped from No. 5 last year to No. 1 this year.

THE TOP 10...

1. FOUNTAIN HILLS

INCORPORATED: 1989
ELEVATION: 1,700 FEET
POPULATION: 22,475

This small town was developed in the 1960s when founder Robert P. McCulloch bought 4,500 acres of a cattle ranch northeast of Scottsdale. McCulloch intended Fountain Hills' world-famous fountain to be a landmark to delight residents and visitors. Now, the small-community feel combined with a lake and a lush 32-acre park make Fountain Hills a welcome oasis on the outskirts of a metropolis.

• **What makes it great:** The fountain, of course. For more than 35 years, it has shot water hundreds of feet into the air for 15 minutes at the top of every hour from 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. daily. Once the "world's highest fountain" according to

the *Guinness Book of World Records*, the fountain's spray soars 300 feet into the air, and can soar as high as 560 feet for special occasions.

• **What makes it not so great:** It's easy to miss. Because it's so close to Scottsdale, people miss out by never driving far enough east on Shea Boulevard to get there.

• **Annual events:** Pony Express Day (February), the Fountain Hills Great Fair (February), the Fourth of July celebration (July), the Fountain Festival of Arts & Crafts (November) and the Thanksgiving Day Parade (November).

2. CAREFREE

INCORPORATED: 1984
ELEVATION: 2,528 FEET
POPULATION: 3,310

Founded in the 1950s, Carefree is well known for its beauty, including its

large, round boulders. The natural desert landscaping and Southwestern feel of this community make it unique to Arizona. From the Boulders Resort to the Moroccan-style el Pedregal Festival Marketplace, Carefree offers a great mix of Southwest flair and luxury.

• **What makes it great:** Its famous giant sundial, which is the third largest working sundial in the Western hemisphere. Measuring 90 feet in diameter and made of steel and copper, the sundial is just one example of Carefree's eclectic, artsy community. Also, with a slightly higher elevation than Phoenix, Carefree is usually at least 10 degrees cooler than the rest of the Valley, and that makes a difference in the summer.

• **What makes it not so great:** Lots of tourists. Even though tourists are everywhere in Arizona, Carefree tends to attract a high number of vacationers, especially those looking for a relaxing "Arizona experience."

• **Annual events:** Carefree Fine Arts & Wine festivals (November, January and March) and the Sonoran Arts Festival (March).

3. CAVE CREEK

INCORPORATED: 1986
ELEVATION: 2,200 FEET
POPULATION: 4,370

This small town was settled in the late 1870s, but didn't become incorporated until 1986. A down-to-earth community, Cave Creek's small population is a testament to its tradition: It was once a retreat for miners, ranchers and others looking to get away from it all, and the town still fosters a relaxed yet active atmosphere.

• **What makes it great:** Its Western atmosphere, which is perpetuated by rustic Old West-style restaurants such as the Horny Toad and Crazy Ed's Satisfied Frog. For the adventurous, biking, hiking and horsebacking opportunities are available at the 2,100-acre Spur Cross Ranch.

• **What makes it not so great:** Its Western atmosphere — if that's not your thing. For those looking for a pushy city filled with modern art and culture, Cave Creek will be too quiet, too relaxed and too cowboy-esque.

HOW THE VALLEY CITIES COMPARE...

RANK	CITY	POPULATION	MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME	2001 MEDIAN HOME PRICE	2005 MEDIAN HOME PRICE	PROPERTY TAX RATE	VIOLENT CRIMES	NON-VIOLENT CRIMES	DISTRICT TEST SCORES (READING)	DISTRICT TEST SCORES (MATH)	STUDENT/TEACHER RATIO	PARK ACRES PER 1,000 RESIDENTS	MILES TO SKY HARBOR	SQUARE FEET OF RETAIL
19	Apache Junction	41,100	\$33,170	\$115,000	\$175,000	\$14.31	113	1,607	76%	68%	19:1	6.3	34	750,000
15	Avondale	60,255	\$58,000	\$132,900	\$239,900	\$15.29	204	4,274	80%	64%	23:1	4.6	23	3.9 million
19	Buckeye	14,505	\$35,383	\$114,950	\$204,950	\$13.30	29	735	72%	74%	20:1	4.3	41	N/A
2	Carefree	3,310	\$88,702	\$375,500	\$724,500	\$6.67	41	64	94%	87%	15:1	0	35	350,000
3	Cave Creek	4,370	\$59,938	\$244,955	\$466,740	\$6.67	5	99	94%	87%	15:1	1.2	32	500,000
11	Chandler	220,705	\$66,087	\$144,900	\$271,650	\$11.27	716	9,606	86%	79%	20:1	3.7	17.5	12 million
22	El Mirage	28,310	\$41,658	\$98,145	\$199,000	\$11.10	163	965	66%	53%	26:1	1.7	25	4.4 million
1	Fountain Hills	22,475	\$61,619	\$238,200	\$465,000	\$9.08	12	619	88%	82%	13:1	3.6	25	8.6 million
6	Gilbert	164,685	\$76,716	\$154,000	\$292,000	\$12.12	160	5,376	88%	89%	25	13.6	21	6.7 million
13	Glendale	233,330	\$50,929	\$126,500	\$221,900	\$14.88	1,406	13,653	77%	72%	17:1	9.2	14.5	12 million
14	Goodyear	35,810	\$57,492	\$145,000	\$260,000	\$12.67	75	1,784	29%	10%	18:1	4.2	20	2 million
10	Litchfield Park	3,920	\$71,875	\$185,500	\$284,000	\$11.95	23*	209*	80%	64%	23:1	7.9	25	188,000
12	Mesa	447,130	\$48,106	\$126,500	\$220,000	\$9.76	2,500	23,416	82%	85%	19:1	4.8	13.7	20 million
4	Paradise Valley	14,410	\$150,228	\$775,000	\$1,320,000	\$11.56	174	465	89%	85%	20:1	0	10.7	4,000
8	Peoria	132,300	\$55,458	\$128,500	\$250,000	\$13.04	307	5,696	87%	87%	14:1	7	19	13.5 million
18	Phoenix	1,416,055	\$41,207	\$112,000	\$189,500	\$15.53	9,466	94,784	69%	60%	23:1	26.6	5	43 million
9	Queen Creek	11,360	\$63,702	\$179,780	\$313,750	\$12.20	52*	788*	79%	73%	18:1	17.4	36	1.5 million
4	Scottsdale	226,980	\$65,361	\$267,500	\$525,000	\$9.19	468	9,030	89%	85%	20:1	4.2	9.4	14.3 million
16	Surprise	63,960	\$44,156	\$125,000	\$240,195	\$11.91	93	1,958	66%	53%	18:1	2.3	27	2 million
6	Tempe	160,820	\$42,361	\$148,000	\$250,000	\$11.46	980	13,078	85%	83%	17:1	11.8	5.4	8.1 million
21	Tolleson	5,445	\$38,773	\$96,000	\$215,000	\$16.53	29	743	70%	65%	21:1	3.7	17	294,030
17	Youngtown	3,970	\$23,164	\$80,000	\$149,100	\$9.48	174	144	66%	53%	18:1	3.8*	32	150,000

HOW WE RANKED THE CITIES: Comparing cities is difficult, and ranking them is an even bigger challenge. Nonetheless, we managed to do so, and here's how we did it: Working with the data in this chart (the latest data available at press time), we assigned a value to each city for the individual "quality of life" issues. The lowest performer in each category was given the lowest value, and the highest performer was given the highest value. For example, in the category "property taxes," Carefree ranked first and Tolleson ranked last among the cities. Carefree was assigned a value of "1" and Tolleson was assigned a value of "22." In the end, the numbers were tabulated and the cities were ranked accordingly.

DATA SOURCES: City Populations: Arizona Department of Commerce 2004 Figures; City Median Household Incomes: Census 2000; City Median Home Prices for 2001 and 2005: Arizona Real Estate Center-Arizona State University; City Property Tax Rate Per \$100 of Assessed Value: Arizona Department of Commerce 2004 Figures; City Violent Crimes and Non-Violent Crimes: Arizona Department of Public Safety and Maricopa County Sheriff's Office; District ADMS Grade 10 Test Scores**: Arizona Department of Education; District Student/Teacher Ratio: An Average of Districts in Individual Cities; City Park Acres Per 1,000 Residents: Individual Cities; Miles to Sky Harbor Airport (measured from City Halls): Individual Cities; City Square Feet of Retail: Individual Cities.

*2004 figures

**District test scores were tabulated from 10th grade reading and math ADMS tests. The following cities used the following district scores:

Apache Junction: Apache Junction Unified District; Avondale: Agua Fria Union High School District; Buckeye: Buckeye Union High School District; Carefree: Cave Creek Unified District; Cave Creek: Cave Creek Unified District; Chandler: Chandler Unified District; El Mirage: Dysart Unified District; Fountain Hills: Fountain Hills Unified District; Gilbert: Gilbert Unified District; Glendale: Glendale Union High School District and Peoria Unified School District; Goodyear: Maricopa County Regional District; Litchfield Park: Agua Fria Union High School District; Mesa: Mesa Unified District; Paradise Valley: Scottsdale Unified District; Peoria: Peoria Unified School District; Phoenix: Deer Valley Unified District, Maricopa County Regional District, Paradise Valley Unified District, Phoenix Union High School District and Scottsdale Unified District; Queen Creek: Queen Creek Unified District; Scottsdale: Scottsdale Unified District; Surprise: Dysart Unified District; Tempe: Tempe Union High School District; Tolleson: Tolleson Union High School District; Youngtown: Dysart Unified District.