

## ATLANTA IN LIST OF TOP CITIES

By [JANET FRANKSTON](#)



The jobs may be harder to find these days. But, hey y'all, the weather is nice.

New transplants may be sitting in metro Atlanta traffic, but housing is cheaper here than in New York, Chicago or San Francisco.

In a recent survey conducted by Harris Interactive, U.S. adults ranked Hotlanta the No. 9 city they would choose to live in or near.

Atlanta, perennially in the top 10 or 15 in the annual survey, ranked second in 2000 and dropped to No. 11 in 2003.

Humphrey Taylor, chairman of the Harris poll of Harris interactive, said the aura after the 1996 Olympics helped raise the city's profile and draw newcomers.

And they keep coming in almost record numbers.

From April 2004 to April 2005, nearly 100,000 people moved to the 10-county metro region, according to population estimates released this month from the Atlanta Regional Commission. Tom Weyandt, director of comprehensive planning for the ARC, said a lot of the attraction is the temperate weather.

"I think they keep coming here for all the same reasons they've always been coming here," he said. "We have a great climate, relatively inexpensive housing, good job opportunity certainly compared to other places."

Most of the top-ranked cities — New York, San Diego, Las Vegas, San Francisco, Seattle and Chicago — have a higher cost of living than Atlanta.

"The top six cities are on the sea or a lake," Taylor said. "Maybe there's something about being on the coast."

The lack of a water didn't deter Chris Bowden, who moved in September after graduating from law school at Yale University. He had a job waiting for him at the law firm of King & Spalding.

The 26-year-old, originally from Spartanburg, S.C., said he didn't feel like he was giving up a big city practice by coming to Atlanta, when classmates were taking jobs in New York and Washington.

"One of the reasons King & Spalding is able to maintain a practice of that sophistication and breadth is because the area economy is so strong," he said. "We have a lot of big local clients like Coca-Cola."

He also liked the proximity to his family, the mild weather compared with Connecticut and the lower cost of living.

Bowden said traffic and the feeling of overcrowding are detractors, but it's not bad enough to have stopped him from moving to Atlanta.

"They're problems we definitely have to work through, but they're not problems that are so bad that they make me want to move to another city," he said.

Those factors didn't stop the other estimated 97,599 from coming to Atlanta over the last year. The gain came close to the largest single-year population increase — 101,621 — from 2000 to 2001.

Sam Olens, chairman of the ARC and the Cobb County Commission, said the area offers lots of choice.

"It's very kid-friendly, it's very family-friendly. You've got urban living, you've got suburban living all in the same region," said Olens, a Miami transplant who moved to Atlanta to study law at Emory University. "Compared to many other parts of the country, we're still a great deal."

But he doesn't hide that the region needs to fix its problems, namely traffic and education.

"We have huge issues like every other growing area of the country, but we're working to solve them," he said.

Olens also credits Atlanta Mayor Shirley Franklin with giving the area — not just the city — a good impression for the rest of the country.

Franklin, a Philadelphia native, is a great cheerleader for her adopted city. "Atlanta is a vibrant, dynamic city with boundless opportunity, and we are experiencing exceptional economic growth," she said.