

Huntsville, Ala.

City population: 165,464

Metro population: 406,316

Mean family income: \$81,754

Median home value: \$138,400

Employment growth: 3.6%

City school rating: 6

Violent crimes per 100,000 residents: 707

If you're after affordability, Huntsville is worth a look: Home prices are 20% below the national average, and the city's cost of living is 10% below the national norm for medium and large cities. Huntsville also offers solid public schools, several thousand acres of woodlands and natural parks and the South's largest children's museum. Consider neighborhoods in the Madison County School District -- its test scores are considerably higher.

PROS: Extremely affordable housing, low cost of living, solid public schools, traffic-less commutes, strong wage and employment growth, promising opportunities in aerospace and military tech.

CONS: High summer heat and humidity, high violent crime rate in the city and rising property-crime rates, lackluster schools in Huntsville proper.