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Top 10 Cities: New England's Best Cities 2012

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Tuesday, April 03, 2012

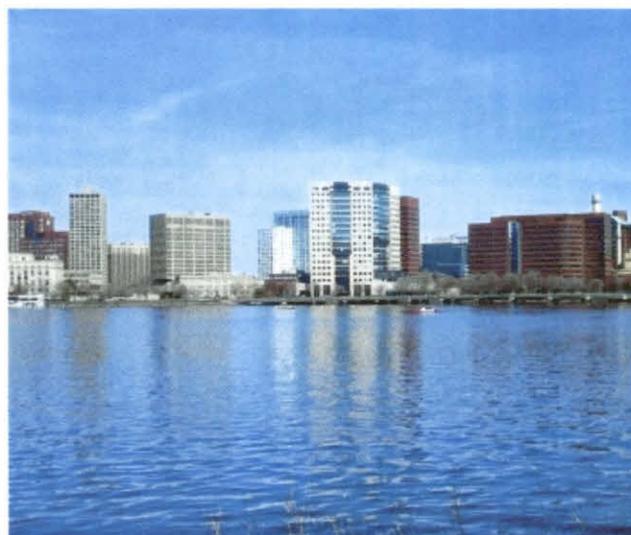
GoLocal Features Team

They are the cream of the New England's crop of cities far and wide. Here is an inside look at the Top 10 New England's Best Cities. For [how GoLocal ranked the cities, go here.](#)

#1 Cambridge, MA

Population: 105,162

No wonder this vibrant city packed with some of the most prestigious colleges and universities in the world took top honors in GoLocal's first ranking: it has everything, and in spades. Cambridge dominated on nearly every quantifiable front in this year's ranking, especially in the areas of culture and education (it may come as no surprise that Cambridge boasts a remarkable 72.4% of its adult population possessing a BA or higher... the highest score in New England). Cambridge is also the #1 "walkable" city in New England, and possesses the #1 ranking for air quality in Massachusetts. Its unemployment rate is the lowest in Massachusetts, and its median income the highest (and #3 on the list overall, behind #1 Stamford, CT and #2 Nashua, NH).

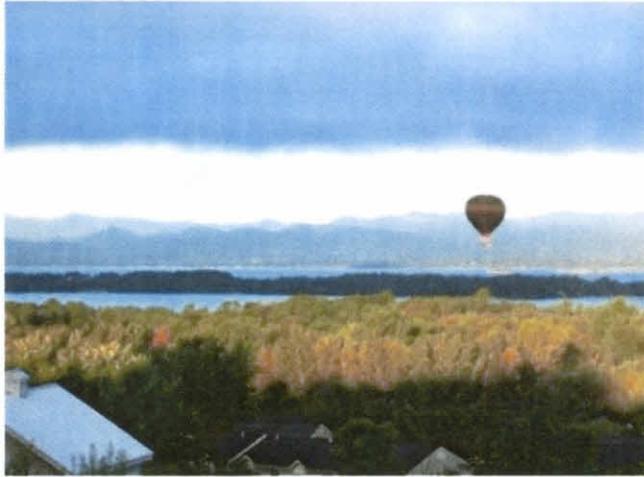


Named for the University of Cambridge in England, Cambridge was an important center of Puritan theology. Now, it's home to a wide diversity of beliefs, and residents (known as Cantabrigians). Known as a "City of Squares", Cambridge is home to many thriving residential and commercial neighborhood, from high-tech Kendall Square near MIT, to ivy-covered Harvard Square to restaurant-packed spots like Central Square, Porter Square, and Inman Square. Full of culture, full of life, full of diversity, Cambridge is a shining example of what a New England city can aspire to be.

#2 South Burlington, VT

Population: 17,904

Is this a surprise? If you have a big-city bias, it is. If you examine this proud, smaller city on the shores of beautiful Lake Champlain that gets the quality of life combination just right, combining natural gifts such as clean air with high-



quality public schools (tied with Bangor, ME as the highest on the list) and lots of recreational spots, then South Burlington's honors make perfect sense. On the prosperity front, South Burlington is in an enviable position, with the lowest unemployment rate of the 30 New England cities measured. And its median household income of \$61,007 makes the city #5 on the list for another key prosperity measure.

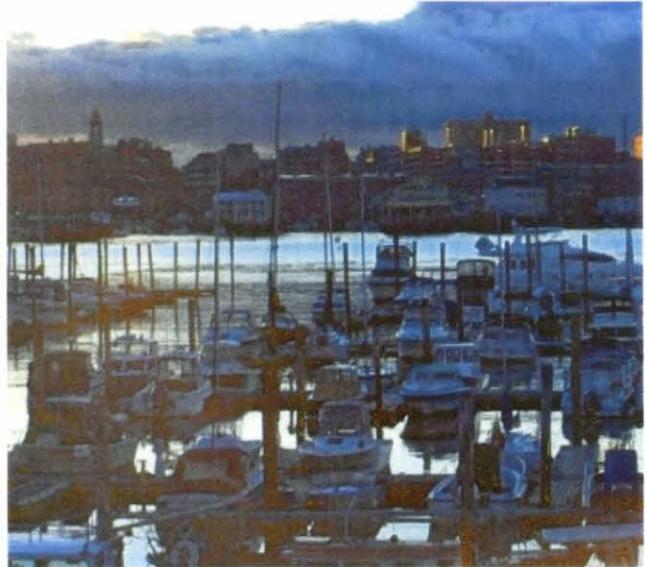
The area that is now South Burlington was first granted by New Hampshire as part of Burlington township in 1763, but didn't come into its own as an incorporated city until 1971. A chain of suburban neighborhoods (not to mention the home of the state's largest mall), South Burlington enjoys the proximity of college hotspot Burlington (see #6 below), and some of its own pop culture. Exhibits A and B: the national headquarters of Ben and Jerry's

Homemade as well as the Magic Hat Brewing Company, one of the country's larger craft breweries.

#3 South Portland, ME

Population: 25,002

With the motto, "Making All Things Possible," this city just south of well-known Portland, combines numerous strengths to place it in the Top 3 for 2012's rankings. Known for its working waterfront, South Portland overlooks the tidy skyline of Portland and the picturesque islands of Casco Bay. And due to South Portland's close proximity to air, marine, and highway transportation options, the city thrives as a center for retail and industry in the northern New England region. The data bears this out. The city's median household income of \$51,066 is #1 in Maine, and its unemployment rate is the lowest in the state as well. Both violent and property crime rates in the city are among the very lowest on the list. And its air quality ranks as the very best, tied with neighboring Portland--a rare feat, to combine good environment with commerce.



First settled in 1630, South Portland began as a small residential community with many farms. In 1895 it was incorporated as a town after it broke away from neighboring Cape Elizabeth over a dispute regarding a future source of public drinking water. Three years later, South Portland became an official city. The city's position as a retail center for the state began in the 1960s, when a former pig farm became the site for the construction of the Maine Mall.

#4 Essex, VT

Population: 19,587

Disclaimer: Essex is a town, not a city. But as the second-largest municipality in Vermont (after Burlington), it came under GoLocal's quantitative scrutiny and emerged in the Top 5. Like South Burlington, this town enjoys the twin attributes of regional prosperity (median household income of \$60,650 and one of the lowest unemployment rates on the list) along with the lowest violent crime rate among the 30 New England cities. Add in the environmental gift of northern latitudes--clean air--and you've got a town with lots to crow about. And with nearly 463 physicians per 100K population, this is a healthy spot if you need a doctor.

Known as sitting at the Crossroads of Vermont's Chittenden County, Essex is perched between the majestic Green Mountains and Lake Champlain. Combined with the Village of Essex Junction, the town has managed to retain its

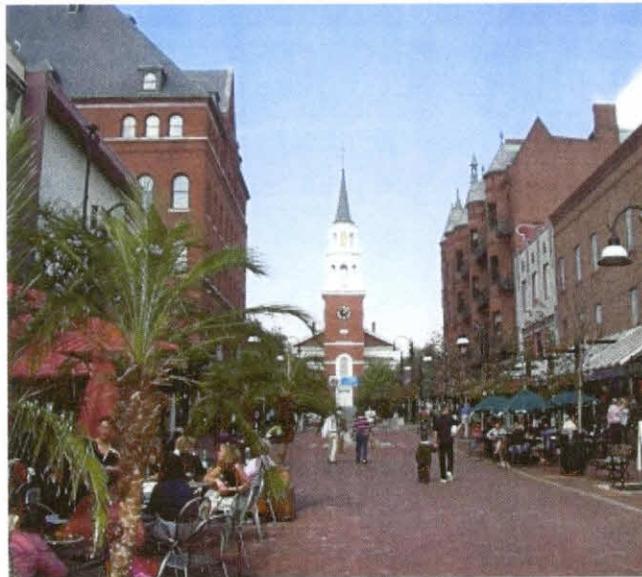


communities on this year's list, with 43.3% possessing a BA degree or higher (#6 overall). It also has some of the best weather on the list, boasting a high number of mostly sunny days. A gateway to Downeast (lobster, anyone?) and still a stone's throw from Boston, Portland sits right at the center of all New England offers. Can 3.6 million visitors a year be wrong about the charms of this city? Not likely, say the lucky 66,194 who live there year-round.

#6 Burlington, VT

Population: 42,417

Talk about a college town. It doesn't get more fun, hip, or beautiful, than on the busy streets of this funky city directly on the shores of Lake Champlain. The largest city in state, Burlington has managed to combine the benefits of larger city size while still maintaining a small-town feel, particularly in its lively commercial district. The University of Vermont is one of the city's largest employers (is it any



platforms to and from New York City on the New Haven Line, with velocity. The #4 largest city in Connecticut (and the

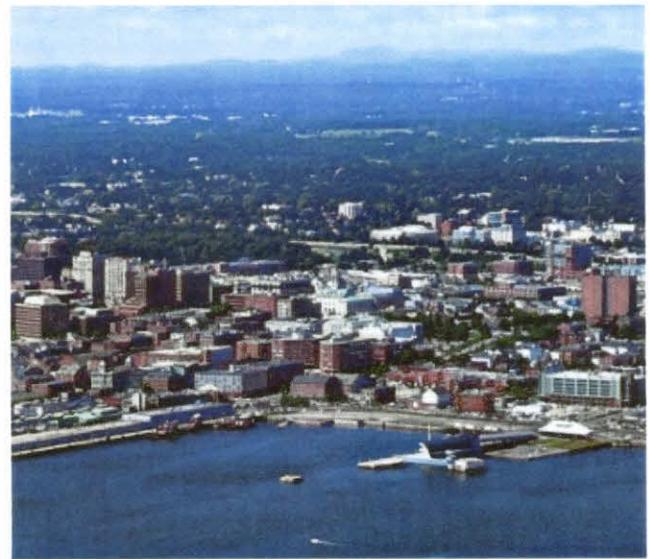
rural character while developing a home for IBM's chip manufacturing plant as well as a nationally recognized school system and ample parks and recreational spots.

#5 Portland, ME

Population: 66,194

This beloved historic city perched on a peninsula jutting into Casco Bay rounds out the Top 5 with its beautiful cobblestone downtown full of independent boutiques and restaurants, a top-flight museum, and solid numbers across the board on quality of life issues from prosperity to environment. The largest city in Maine is also one of the most wired cities on the regional list, coming at #4 on the list for wifi hotspots per capita.

Portland also boasts one of the most educated



wonder than more than 50% of the population has an Bachelor's Degree?), along with Fletcher Allen Health Care, but perhaps more street cred comes from other corporate headquarters that include Burton Snowboards, Bruegger's Bagels, Seventh Generation, Inc., and Lake Champlain Chocolates.

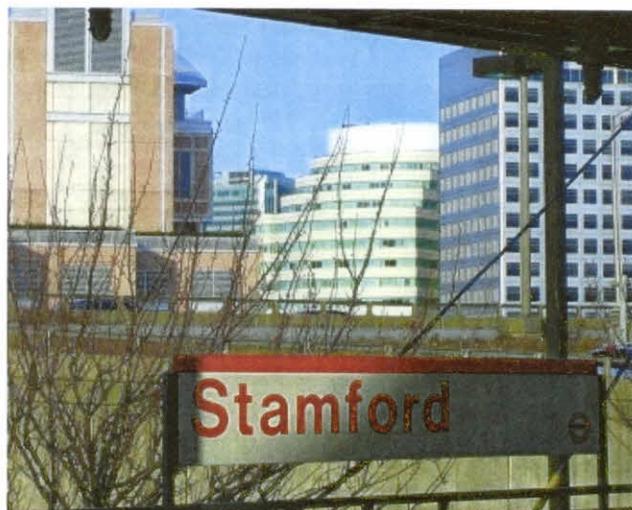
Sharing the lowest unemployment rates on our list with South Burlington, this city has one of the brighter outlooks as New England continues to struggle during the national recession. And with clean air and one of the lowest average commute times on the list at 16 minutes (#2 overall), life is good here.

#7 Stamford, CT

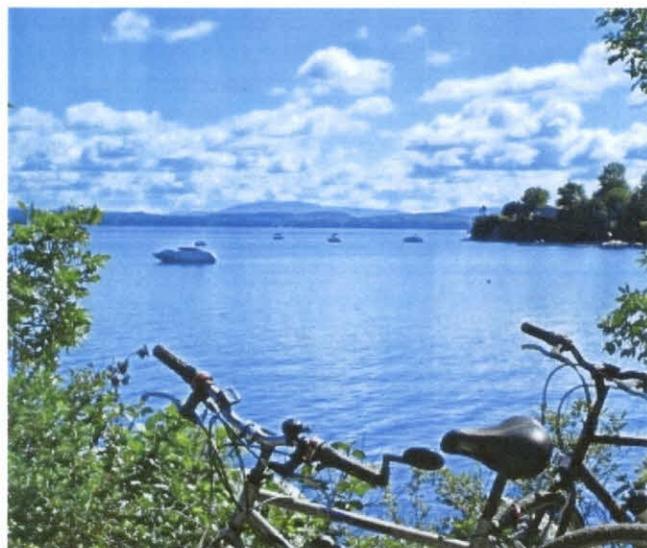
Population: 122,643

The first Southern New England city to crack the Top 10, Stamford arrives, like the many trains that criss-cross its

#8 largest in New England) boasts top-notch economic indicators that place it among the Best Cities of 2012. Consider that the city's median household income is \$75,579, #1 on the list for 2012. The population, not surprisingly, is one of the highest educated on the list at #5 for % of BAs. The reason? Just look at the signs downtown: a cluster of corporate headquarters that include a number of Fortune 500 companies, as well as high-profile World Wrestling Entertainment, Tasty Bite, and Pitney Bowes. Although Stamford enjoyed a heyday as a 19th-century summer enclave for New Yorkers (and still retains beautiful architecture from that era), its dynamism owes much to the late-20th century relocation of corporate headquarters. Now, residents enjoy the best of both worlds.



#8 Colchester, VT



Population: 17,067

The fourth Vermont city to make the Top 10, Colchester brings its own mix of culture and lifestyle to the shores of Malletts Bay (more Lake Champlain magic) just north of Burlington, and is home to St. Michael's College, Vermont Public Radio, and the Vermont Youth Orchestra. Also officially a town, Colchester is nonetheless the fourth-largest municipality in the state and therefore competes with fellow cities for its #8 spot in 2012.

A popular summer getaway for New Yorkers and other Southern New Englanders, the town's year-round residents enjoy a low unemployment rate (#2 on the list, after Burlington/South Burlington), highly-rated public schools (#2 behind #1 ranked South Burlington), and a high ratio of physicians (462.3 per 100K residents--#2 on the list behind Boston).

#9 Concord, NH

Population 42,695

New Hampshire's proud entry onto the 2012 Top 10 is one of two state capitals to make the list. With its glistening dome anchoring the city full of historic buildings and revived mill complexes on the Merrimack River, Concord is also home to one of the nation's most prestigious prep schools--St. Paul's School, as well as University of New Hampshire School of Law (New Hampshire's only law school), and the Granite State Symphony Orchestra.

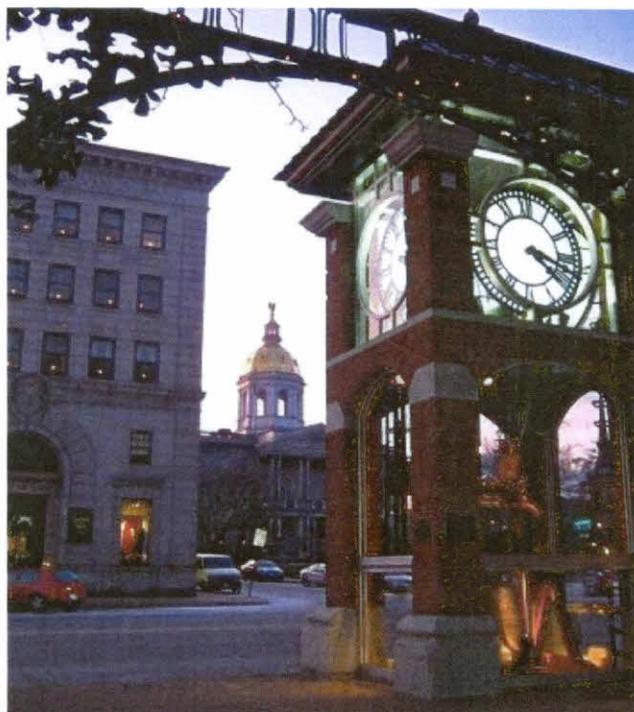
In a region rife with financial hardship, Concord has managed to keep its unemployment low and has a median household income of \$51,412. From its beginnings as a center of furniture-making and granite-quarrying, Concord maintains its economic drive with the engines of healthcare and insurance. It's also home to Concord Litho, one of the largest independently-owned commercial printing companies in the country.

#10 Boston, MA

Population: 617,594

It remains a beacon of culture and refinement to the world, and the fascinating capital city of Massachusetts takes the #10 spot on this year's Best Cities ranking. What makes Boston so fantastic is evident in the data: prosperity driven by the enormous wealth of technology and innovation that surrounds the metropolitan area (keeping Boston's median household income at a remarkable \$50,684, considering the socio-economic diversity of the city), as well as a highly-educated population (44.9% with a BA or higher).

What hurts Boston's overall ranking is a high crime rate relative to its New England competitors, a mediocre score of 4 out of 10 on GreatSchool's public school rankings, and the lowest air quality index score outside of Connecticut's southern cities and Springfield, MA. Boston also has the #2 worst average commute time of 27 minutes, average (only Derry, NH ranked lower at 28 minutes). If the formula factored in hometown sports pride, it's no doubt this city that loves its teams would soar to the #1 spot. Still, Boston remains for many the pride of New England. No matter how the Red Sox do.



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Monday, April 02, 2012

What is New England's Best City? On Tuesday, GoLocal unveils the first comprehensive head-to-head comparison of the cities of New England. The analysis was developed over the past few months, utilizing thousands of data points to compare the largest 30 cities in the region.

Inspired by national rankings from media outlets such as [US News & World Report](#), [Forbes](#), and [Business Week](#), GoLocal's evaluation compares each state's five largest cities, from Bangor, ME to Boston, MA, in five general areas: Economics/Prosperity, Safety, Culture, Health, and Overall Quality of Life. With metrics ranging from median household income, unemployment, school quality and crime rates to arts-related employment, wifi hotspots and walkability among others, the GoLocal proprietary formula quantifies the many qualities that go into a city's fabric. Tuesday's ranking will name New England's Best City for 2012, profile the region's Top 10 cities, and reveal the entire ranking list, from #1 to #30. You may be surprised at what cities emerge as tops in the region, and which ones fall to the bottom of the list.

GoLocal's team of eight researchers and analysts spent two months developing the formula, as well as gathering and crunching the data. It provides a fresh glimpse at life in New England of its kind. Come back tomorrow to see what the numbers say.

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