

By Kendra Todd, winner of "The Apprentice 3"

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I've worked with a lot of people to locate and buy their ideal retirement home, and I don't think any one factor leads the pack in determining if a locale is great for retirement. From my experience, it's a blend of four factors:

- 1. Cost of living - Can retirees buy a nice house without taking on a mortgage, and can they live comfortably on their investments?
- 2. Climate - Most people want someplace warm, which is why Florida and Arizona attract retired folks like Disney World attracts kids.
- 3. Things to do - Most retirees I work with are dynamos who want to travel, learn to surf and swing dance in their spare time. They need to live in a place with scheduled onsite activities, a surrounding area where they can find arts, culture, sports and entertainment, or both.
- 4. Community - Not all retirees want to hang out only with people their age, but most want a social network. I don't find too many older couples looking to move to a cabin deep in the woods of British Columbia.

Typical Great Retirement Spots

The problem with Florida and Arizona is that because they are the hot spots, they're mostly overpriced. Look for cities and counties that are off the beaten path but still offer you what you want. In his Retirement Migration in America, Robert F. Longino suggests these communities as examples of up-and-coming retirement areas that are not yet on the national radar:

- **Charleston, S.C.** If you can put up with the humidity, this Southern belle of a city offers very low housing prices in a seaside location with tons of history.
- **Asheville, N.C.** Known as the Paris of the South, this western North Carolina town of about 70,000 is renowned as a spot for the arts, culture and diversity. The housing costs and cost of living are below average.

- **Cedar City, Utah.** Cedar City is a great small western town, home to very reasonable home prices, Southern Utah University, the Utah Shakespearean Festival and a great climate.
- **Boerne, Texas.** An undiscovered spot not far from San Antonio and Austin's cultural scene. Low housing prices, lots of outdoor activities, a historical downtown and a relaxed, ranching lifestyle make this a prime spot.

My Choices for Great Retirement Areas

Those are some good examples from another source. Based on my own research, here are my five primo retirement cities:

- **Prescott, Ariz.** CNNMoney.com and I agree on this one. Prescott is a wonderful Southwestern town where you'll still find a leafy center courthouse park, lots of restaurants, great neighborhoods of old homes and a location near numerous outdoor and cultural activities, including the funky hillside artists colony of Jerome. Housing costs are moderate and taxes are low.
- **Fort Collins, Colo.** OK, it gets cold, but this Rocky Mountain city of 128,000 has so much to offer. First of all, housing prices are just over \$200,000, so you can probably land a terrific house and still have money left over for your savings. It's got a strong economy and moderate taxes. Finally, it's close to outdoor splendor.
- **Beaufort, S.C.** Ninety minutes south of Charleston lies this city of about 13,000 on Port Royal Island. Surrounded by tidal wetlands and small islands and steeped in military culture, Beaufort is distinguished by having its entire downtown designated a historic treasure. Health care is plentiful and homes with a view of the changing marshlands can start as low as \$275,000.
- **Lawrence, Kan.** Lawrence, home to Kansas University, is an island of culture in the eastern prairie, and a fantastic place to get the most for your retirement dollar. Average home prices range about \$180,000, in a happening university town of about 80,000 with sports, a rollicking downtown, tons of history, great health care and weather that, surprisingly, isn't so bad.

- **Paso Robles, Calif.** The Golden State has a reputation for being overpriced, but some places are worth it. With an average price around \$380,000, you can get a great old home in a comfy town of 29,000 that's right in the middle of one of the premium wine growing regions. Recreational opportunities abound, the coast is an hour away, and you're halfway between Los Angeles and San Francisco.

There are many other opinions about what constitutes the perfect retirement spot. These are some of mine, but they're based on general requirements. Ask yourself what you want most out of your retirement and shop accordingly.

Kendra Todd is the first and only woman to win Donald Trump's smash hit NBC show, "The Apprentice" on NBC. Additionally, she is Broker of Florida-based The Kendra Todd Group, host of the popular HGTV Show "My House Is Worth What?" and a regular real estate contributor on Fox News Live. Her first book "Risk and Grow Rich: How to Make Millions in Real Estate" has been an instant success.

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