
A Sense of Place: How to Find Your Perfect Home



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If you're looking for a home in New Hampshire, you've already made one good decision. According to Morgan Quinto Press (headquartered in Lawrence, Kan.), New Hampshire ranks high as one of the safest and most livable places in the United States. According to its study, New Hampshire is the second safest state, behind North Dakota, and the fifth most-livable.

This study — and others like it — weigh very specific criteria when evaluating cities and neighborhoods, factors such as crime rates, cost of living indexes, weather, health care facilities, city services, unemployment rates ... and even more obscure statistics like the number of books in libraries.

Of course, finding the perfect place for you is a more personal and subjective matter. And narrowing down your search demands that you ponder your lifestyle preferences and how you would prefer to spend your time. Ask yourself how far you're willing to commute. Do you prefer rural, suburban, or urban settings? Do you like wildlife or "the wild life?" Do you prefer farmers markets or grocery stores? Are you looking to work the land or the ability to land a job easily if you ever get laid off?

Most people base their home purchase on their commute. And that's important.

Some things you should consider are access to major roads, public transportation and the likelihood that your company may move.

Commutes, however, are much more than a matter of miles. Consider the condition of the roads you'll need to travel. For example, a seemingly quiet road can turn into gridlock during rush hour, adding many minutes to your commute. Perfectly fine roads on sunny days may be impassable in winter because of severe frost heaves or poor snow removal.

You may want to make the drive a few times at different times of day and experience a simulated commute for yourself before you make an offer on a home.

Two other factors you should consider when choosing a neighborhood are safety and the school system. This is important for obvious reasons; after all, you want a safe and beneficial environment for your family. But even if you don't have children take a close look at the school system. Why? Because safer neighborhoods with good schools generally

retain or increase their property values.

To research schools, examine the pupil-to-teacher ratios, academic scores and ranking, high-school graduations rates, the percentage of the population who graduated from high school, the percentage who graduated from college, spending per student, and property taxes. Many sources on the Internet will give you this information. For example, you can get a detailed school report at www.bradshomes.com.

If you don't have access to the Internet (or the inkling to use it), your real estate agent should be able to give all this information in one convenient report.

Considering safety is a broader issue. Indeed, you can surf the Web for reports detailing crime rates and FBI statistics for various cities and towns. Or go directly to the local police or sheriff's departments and ask for an honest assessment or official report. Indeed, as a safety issue, check out the quality of local police, fire, and emergency services.

You can also make some educated safety guesses on your own. For example, houses on busy streets pose more of a traffic-safety risk, especially for children and pets. That much is obvious. But also be wary of side streets that act as shortcuts. They may pose a threat too, as hurried motorists try to cut a few minutes from their commute.

As a matter of safety, houses in the middle of developments are generally more secure than those on the edge. Not only do they get less traffic, they may be less of a target for would-be criminals.

While considering the human threat, also consider relative environmental threats — both natural and man-made. Is the neighborhood in a flood plain?

Are there EPA Superfund or hazardous waste sites nearby?

This can be a lot of information to digest. But then again, finding the perfect place to spend your life will be one of the most important decisions you make. Don't do it alone. Ask your agent for help.

Good agents are very knowledgeable and subjective about the neighborhoods they cover. They know what prices are reasonable, where the good schools are, and many of the intangible considerations that not only make a town more livable ... but make it perfect for you.

