

## Boise, Idaho - An Affordable Place to Live

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### New Book Says Boise is One of 150 Best Low-Cost Places to Live

Ken Dey - *The Idaho Statesman*  
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Boise can add another adjective to the words to describe itself — cheap.

And in this case, that word is meant as a compliment. Boise is one of 150 cities across the country named as the best "cheap places" to live, according to a new book written by Forbes magazine publisher Rich Karlgaard. Karlgaard's book — "Life 2.0. How People Across America Are Transforming Their Lives by Finding the Where of Their Happiness" — looks at the growing trend of business professionals across the country who are leaving the expensive population centers and moving to places like Boise.

Boise isn't the only Idaho sanctuary for people escaping the big-city life — McCall and Sandpoint also make the list. Other cities cited as top "cheap" places to live are as large as Las Vegas and as remote as Fargo, N.D.

The book describes Boise as "one hot potato." Karlgaard cites Boise for its relatively low housing costs, as well as its strong economic base. "You don't have to search far in Boise to see evidence of this city's economic health," Karlgaard writes in his book. "Just look around you. Microchip plants, commercial strips, and even a few high rises have squeezed their way into Boise's otherwise leafy landscape."

Karlgaard lists Boise under the category of "Porch-Swing communities," a category he says is for families and others in search of "the Norman Rockwell hometown feeling." Besides its strong economy, Boise is cited for its museums, ballet, opera and philharmonic orchestra, which Karlgaard writes "will keep your highbrow membership valid." He also talks about the ample opportunities within an hour's drive of Boise for outdoor activities, including fishing, skiing, hiking and whitewater rafting. Karlgaard told *The Idaho Statesman* that he wrote the book to show people there could be a better life away from the big cities.

"My mission is to try and provide some insight that will improve some lives," Karlgaard said. "There are millions of families caught in that area between middle and upper-middle class who are worrying about whether their ends are meeting. "Their professional-class aspirations are becoming harder and harder to obtain. The bonuses and raises are not there, and the cost of housing is sucking up all their available money."

Karlgaard, who also writes a column for *Forbes*, said the idea for his book came after he wrote a column soliciting responses from readers who had transformed their lives by moving to smaller cities across the United States. He said the response was overwhelming. Karlgaard, a pilot, spent two years crisscrossing the country in a Cessna 172SP Skyhawk, visiting people who have changed their lives in some very unexpected places.

David Hale of Boise is one of those people who sent in an e-mail and is featured in the book. Hale, 31, is the owner of Hale Development Co., a firm that focuses on in-fill development — the process of building new homes on empty lots within established city neighborhoods. In 1997 at age 24, Hale said he sold everything he owned and moved from his home city of Portland to Boise to start his own building company. "A lot of my decision was based on my personal happiness outside of work," said Hale, who had often visited Boise and Idaho as a child.

Hale, an avid mountain biker, also was drawn to the area's outdoor recreation opportunities. "I live five minutes from my office. I'm within five minutes of some of the best mountain biking trails," he said. "The quality of life matters to me. I'm not having to spend an hour driving. It allows me another hour to recreate."

Karlgaard narrowed his list of places by starting first with the price of housing. The list compares cities across the country for what it would cost to buy a "median professional-class home," which the author defines described as being at least 2,500 square feet, on a quarter-acre lot with all the modern amenities. In Boise, such a home averages \$260,000. A similar home in the San Francisco Bay area would run about \$1.5 million.

Karlgaard said today's price gap between homes on the more populated East and West coasts and the rest of the nation is "enormous." From the people he's met who have moved to Boise, Karlgaard said the price of housing is one of the big attractions. "Everybody I've ever met from Hewlett Packard who moved from the Bay area to Boise says it's been the greatest decision they've ever made," he said. "There are no crushing

commutes, and everyone can afford a nice house." Besides lower housing costs, the cities on the list also enjoy other similarities, including low crime rates, quality education systems and plenty of recreational and cultural activities.

Shirl Boyce, vice president of the Boise Metro Economic Development Council, said housing costs are an important factor for individuals and companies looking to relocate, but the area's quality of life is also a major factor. "The reasonableness of home prices is one thing," Boyce said. "But this is also a great place to raise a family, and the recreation venues we have are pretty hard to beat."

The movement to cities like Boise is one that Karlgaard doesn't see ending soon. In addition to the exodus of professionals looking for a better life, Karlgaard expects that when the Baby Boom generation starts retiring, they'll look for places like Boise where the quality of life is better and their dollar goes further.

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