

Living in Raleigh, NC: The Complete 2026 Guide

A community guide by Jade Derival, Realtor — Luxury Isn't a Price Point. It's an Experience.

Overview of Raleigh

Raleigh is the capital of North Carolina and the county seat of Wake County, anchoring the Research Triangle alongside Durham and Chapel Hill. Known as "The City of Oaks," Raleigh blends a fast-growing tech and biotech economy with a strong sense of Southern charm, tree-lined neighbourhoods, and a thriving downtown food and arts scene. It's consistently ranked among the best places to live in the U.S., driven by job growth, top universities (NC State University sits right in the city), and access to Research Triangle Park (RTP).

Population & Demographics

- **City population (2026 est.):** approximately 483,000–514,000 depending on source and boundary definition; Raleigh officially surpassed 500,000 residents in the 2025 Census Bureau report. [World Population Review](#) | [WPTF/Census coverage](#)
- **Metro area population (2025–2026):** roughly 1.66 million, up nearly 2% year-over-year, making it one of the fastest-growing metros in the country. [Macrotrends](#)
- **Median age:** 34.7 years. [World Population Review](#)
- **Median household income:** \$85,395. [NC Demographics](#)
- **Racial/ethnic composition:** roughly 51–53% White, 26% Black or African American, 12.6% Hispanic, 5% Asian, with the remainder multiracial and other groups. [NC Demographics](#)
- Raleigh is the **2nd most populous city in North Carolina**, behind Charlotte. [NC Demographics](#)

Best Neighbourhoods in Raleigh

Neighbourhood	Known For	Approx. Price Point
North Hills (Midtown)	Walkable, upscale, shopping/dining, close to RTP	~\$1.2M+
Historic Oakwood	Victorian-era homes, historic district charm	~\$1.1M
Hayes Barton	Grand 1920s estates, tree-lined streets	\$2.4M+

Neighbourhood	Known For	Approx. Price Point
Five Points	Family-friendly, walkable, strong schools	Wide range, \$250K–\$1M+
Brier Creek	Master-planned, close to RDU & RTP, newer construction	~\$750K
Downtown / Glenwood South	Urban, nightlife, condos & lofts	~\$525K–650K median
Cameron Village	Central location near NC State, young professionals	Moderate-high

Sources: [RaleighRealty Neighborhood Guide](#) | [AD Mortgage Neighborhood Guide](#) | [DRE Firm Family Neighborhoods Guide](#)

Cost of Living & Home Prices

- **Median/average home value (2026):** figures range from **\$400,000–\$436,000** depending on the data source and month — Zillow's ZHVI shows \$436,056 (down 2.1% YoY as of June 2026), while Houzeo reports a median of \$420,000. [Zillow](#) | [Houzeo](#)
- **Days on market:** homes are going pending in roughly 19–43 days depending on the source and month measured. [Zillow](#) | [Houzeo](#)
- **Sale-to-list price ratio:** around 98.4%, indicating a market that still favors sellers, though it has cooled from the 2022–2023 peak. [Houzeo](#)
- **Inventory:** roughly 3–3.5 months of supply, still below the 4–6 months considered a balanced market. [Angela Drum Market Review](#)
- Raleigh's median household income (\$85,395) is notably higher than the national median, helping offset a cost of living that runs moderately above the U.S. average, driven mainly by housing costs. [NC Demographics](#)

Note: home price data changes monthly — always confirm current figures with your agent or MLS before using them in a transaction.

Real Estate Market Insights

- Raleigh was ranked the **#1 hottest real estate market in the nation** by U.S. News & World Report in 2022–2023; the market has since cooled into a more balanced, sustainable pace. [SoFi/Norada](#)
- Forecasts suggest **modest price growth (3–4%)** through the rest of 2026, with mortgage rates expected to ease slightly toward 6.1%. [Norada Real Estate](#)

- Price bands to know: **entry-level** at or below ~\$340,000; **move-up** homes from ~\$340,000–\$630,000 (busiest segment); **luxury** above \$630,000, where marketing times run longer and there's more room to negotiate. [Angela Drum Market Review](#)

Schools

Raleigh is served primarily by **Wake County Public School System**, the largest school district in North Carolina, along with several highly-rated private and charter options.

- Wake County Schools rank among the **top school districts in North Carolina** (#4 statewide) and are competitive nationally for diversity and athletics. [Niche](#)
- Notable public/magnet schools include **Enloe High School** and **Raleigh Charter High School**, both consistently ranked among the top public high schools in Wake County. [Niche Wake County High Schools](#)
- Notable private options include **Saint Mary's School** and **Trinity Academy of Raleigh**, both highly rated. [Niche](#)
- Families in North Hills often reference **Douglas Magnet Elementary** and **LeRoy Martin Magnet Middle School** as strong nearby options. [ExtraSpace Family Neighborhoods Guide](#)

School ratings and boundaries change; always confirm current school assignment by address at [wcpss.net](#).

Parks, Greenways & Recreation

Raleigh is known for its extensive greenway system connecting neighborhoods across the city, along with numerous city and regional parks. Highlights commonly cited include North Hills Park, Pullen Park, William B. Umstead State Park, and the Neuse River Greenway Trail, offering hiking, biking, and family recreation throughout the metro.

Shopping & Dining

Raleigh's dining and retail scene centres around North Hills (upscale shopping and restaurants), Downtown Raleigh/Glenwood South (nightlife and eclectic dining), Cameron Village (boutique shopping), and Five Points (local restaurants and cafes). The city has a growing reputation as a Southern food destination, blending traditional Southern cuisine with a diverse, internationally-influenced restaurant scene tied to its growing population.

Healthcare

Raleigh is home to major health systems including **WakeMed Health & Hospitals** and **UNC Health Rex**, along with numerous specialty clinics and access to **Duke University Health System** and **UNC Health** facilities in nearby Durham and Chapel Hill — giving residents access to some of the top-ranked hospital networks in the Southeast.

Commute Times

- Raleigh is centrally located to Research Triangle Park (RTP), with most in-town neighborhoods being a **15–25 minute drive**.
- **RDU International Airport** is roughly 15 minutes from central Raleigh neighborhoods like North Hills. [Houzeo](#)
- Major commuter routes include I-40, I-440 (the Beltline), and I-540, connecting Raleigh to Cary, Durham, and surrounding suburbs.

New Construction Communities

Newer construction is concentrated in areas like **Brier Creek** (near RDU/RTP) and outer suburbs including Wake Forest, Fuquay-Varina, and Clayton, where master-planned communities continue to expand to meet demand from Raleigh's population growth.

Is Raleigh a Good Place to Live?

Yes — Raleigh consistently ranks among the best U.S. cities to live in, thanks to a strong job market (tech, biotech, healthcare, and education anchored by RTP and three major research universities), relatively high median incomes, top-ranked schools, extensive parks and greenways, and a still-growing but more balanced housing market compared to the frenzy of 2021–2023. It's an especially strong fit for professionals, families, and relocating buyers who want big-city amenities with a lower cost of living than many coastal metros.

Frequently Asked Questions

Is Raleigh a good place to raise a family? Yes. Wake County Public Schools rank among the top districts in North Carolina, and neighborhoods like North Hills, Five Points, and Brier Creek are specifically known for family-friendly amenities and strong schools.

Is Raleigh's housing market a buyer's or seller's market in 2026? It's currently balanced-to-slightly-seller-favored, with roughly 3–3.5 months of inventory and a sale-to-list ratio around 98%, per [Houzeo](#) and [Angela Drum's market review](#).

How far is Raleigh from Research Triangle Park? Most Raleigh neighborhoods are within a 15–25 minute drive of RTP, depending on traffic and specific location.

What's the median home price in Raleigh right now? Roughly \$400,000–\$436,000 depending on the data source and month — always confirm current figures with your agent, since prices shift monthly.

Thinking About Your Next Move in Raleigh?

Whether you're relocating for work, upgrading to your forever home, or exploring investment opportunities in one of the fastest-growing metros in the country, I'd be honored to help you navigate the Raleigh market with confidence.

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