



VALDOSTA STATE UNIVERSITY

**CENTER *for* BUSINESS
& ECONOMIC RESEARCH**

Overview

Each quarter, the Council for Community and Economic Research (C2ER, formerly known as ACCRA) reports the Cost of Living Index data based on more than 90,000 prices covering 60 different items ranging from housing, utilities, grocery items transportation, health care, and miscellaneous goods and services from communities across the U.S. The second quarter of 2024 survey comparing relative costs of living for “middle management” households among U.S. metropolitan areas and cities shows that it costs almost 9.1 percent less to live in Georgia communities, on average, than it does to live in the rest of the U.S. Therefore, for each dollar that is required to maintain the average standard of living across the country, Georgia residents are only required to spend about 90.9 cents.

Valdosta’s cost of living is slightly higher than the Georgia state average, with Valdosta residents required to spend about 91.5 cents for each dollar required to maintain the living standards of the average U.S. household. Among Georgia metropolitan areas and cities surveyed, Athens has the highest cost of living with a composite index of 98.32, slightly lower than the national average of 100.

Cost of Living Comparisons for the Nation

The Cost-of-Living Index measures regional differences in the consumer goods and services excluding taxes and non-consumer expenditures, for professional and managerial households in the top income quintile. Table 1 presents the ten most and least expensive urban areas that participated in the 2024 Cost-of-Living Index. Among the 251 urban areas surveyed, the after-tax cost for a professional/managerial standard of living ranged from more than twice the national average in New York (Manhattan) NY to almost 20 percent below the national average in Ponca City, OK. Unsurprisingly, the top ten most expensive urban areas have seen little change compared to previous periods, featuring familiar locations like New York, Honolulu, and San Francisco. With the national average cost-of-living index set at 100, living in Manhattan, for instance, costs 226.0% of the national average.

In Table 1, the ten least expensive urban areas included in the cost of living index survey are highlighted. Ponca City appears for the first time as the least expensive place to live, while Harlingen maintains its position among the top ten least expensive places in the U.S., consistent with previous quarters. Valdosta is ranked as the 160th most expensive metropolitan area (out of 251) with a composite index of 91.5. Notably, in the second quarter of 2023, Valdosta ranked 222nd (out of 251) with a composite index of 90.00.

Cost of Living Comparisons: Valdosta, Georgia, and the Nation
Second Quarter of 2024

Table 1: The Ten Most and Least Expensive Urban Areas in the Cost of Living Index (COLI)

Second Quarter in 2024 National Average for 251 Urban Areas = 100				
Ranking	Most Expensive	COL	Least Expensive	COL
	Urban Areas	Index	Urban Areas	Index
1	New York (Manhattan) NY	226.0	Ponca City OK	79.4
2	Honolulu HI	188.4	Decatur IL	79.7
3	San Jose CA	180.8	Richmond IN	80.9
4	San Francisco CA	167.4	Oklahoma City OK	81.3
5	New York (Brooklyn) NY	160.2	Amarillo TX	82.5
6	Orange County CA	155.3	Jonesboro AR	82.8
7	Los Angeles-Long Beach CA	148.6	Pittsburg KS	83.0
8	New York (Queens) NY	148.1	Harlingen TX	83.0
9	Seattle WA	146.3	Florence AL	83.1
10	San Diego CA	145.6	Tupelo MS	83.1

What Do Groceries Cost?

The C2ER grocery index is drawing data from over 320 million grocery prices derived from 1.5 trillion historical data points collected across the country to generate the most accurate data possible. Datasembly’s weekly collection covers 200 national and regional retailers and quick service restaurants representing over 150,000 brick and mortar locations across 30,000 zip codes. With food prices still being a big part of the national conversation, C2ER decided to feature those communities once again with the most and least expensive food costs as measured by the grocery item index number. The twenty-six items priced come from a variety of surrogate categories to represent the grocery item component of the index. With food prices still being a big part of the national conversation, C2ER decided to feature those communities once again with the most and least expensive food costs as measured by the grocery item index number. The twenty-six items priced come from a variety of surrogate categories to represent the grocery item component of the index.

Table 2: The Five Most and Least Expensive Places for Grocery Items by Index Number in the Cost of Living Index (COLI)

Review of Second Quarter 2024 Average for 251 Urban Areas = 100				
Ranking	Most Expensive	COL	Least Expensive	COL
	Urban Areas	Index	Urban Areas	Index
1	Juneau AK	132.7	Grand Forks ND	91.5
2	Fairbanks AK	131.5	Thibodaux-Lafourche Parish LA	91.7
3	Anchorage AK	130.3	Minot ND	91.9
4	Honolulu HI	129.1	Pierre SD	92.0
5	San Francisco CA	126.6	Joplin MO	92.2

Cost of Living Comparisons: Valdosta, Georgia, and the Nation
Second Quarter of 2024

The Most Expensive and Least Expensive Cities for Olive Oil

Olive oil prices are heating up faster than your frying pan. Cities with traditionally high grocery costs, such as those in California and Alaska, are seeing prices exceed \$10. In contrast, a more varied range of areas is experiencing lower prices, around \$8.00. Nonetheless, even areas with lower prices experienced price increases. Only 9 of the 251 places collected for quarter two experienced a decrease in olive oils prices. CNBC reports that this is largely due to shortages. Spain, which supplies over 40% of the world’s olive oil, has recently seen a significant decline in production. This downturn, largely attributed to the impacts of climate change, has also been accompanied by a rise in olive oil theft. If you’re a foodie and want the best prices on olive oil, or just love data, be sure to check out the COLI Q2 2024 publication!

Table 3: The Most Expensive and Least Expensive Places for Olive Oil
Review of Second Quarter 2024, Average for 251 Urban Areas = \$9.04

Ranking	Most Expensive		Least Expensive	
	Urban Areas	Avg. Price	Urban Areas	Avg. Price
1	Alexandria VA	\$11.14	Danville City VA	\$8.22
2	Anchorage AK	\$11.13	Billings MT	\$8.25
3	Arlington VA	\$11.05	Boise ID	\$8.31
4	Orange County CA	\$10.91	Ardmore OK	\$8.33
5	Fairbanks AK	\$10.80	San Juan-Bayamón-Caguas PR	\$8.33

Results for the Valdosta Metropolitan Statistical Area

Table 4 suggests that Valdosta has a cost of living that is approximately 10 percent below the national average. Valdosta’s cost of living remains relatively low, principally because of the low housing prices. It also must be noted that the housing index carries the largest weight in the composite index because of its relative importance in the average consumer’s budget. According to Table 4, the housing index for Valdosta is 79.0 suggesting that housing costs are 21.0 percent less than the national average house price (\$517,191) for all urban areas in this survey.

Table 4: Indices for Georgia Metropolitan Statistical Areas (Listed alphabetically)

	<i>Composite Index</i>	<i>Grocery</i>	<i>Housing</i>	<i>Utilities</i>	<i>Transportation</i>	<i>Health Care</i>
Athens	98.2	100.2	96.1	99.8	91.9	95.2
Atlanta	95.7	101.2	85.4	100.1	99.9	108.2
Douglasville-Douglas	91.4	93.7	83.0	97.4	96.2	92.3
Augusta-Aiken GA-SC	83.7	95.0	61.5	102.8	94.0	83.0
Dalton	87.7	96.2	69.7	87.2	90.1	92.5
Dublin-Laurens County	86.8	93.7	71.0	87.5	97.5	100.5
Savannah	93.6	102.1	77.7	100.8	102.1	115.6
Statesboro-Bulloch County	89.8	93.6	82.7	101.1	89.9	127.1
Valdosta	91.5	93.6	79.0	101.4	97.0	90.6
Average	90.9	97.0	78.4	97.1	95.2	101.8

Cost of Living Comparisons: Valdosta, Georgia, and the Nation
Second Quarter of 2024

Random Comparisons

The cost of living data tells us that the Composite Index for Manhattan, NY is 226 for Valdosta, GA it is 91.5. Using this information, we can answer the following questions:

1. What is the Valdosta salary that is equivalent to a Manhattan salary of \$50,000?
2. What is the Manhattan salary that is equivalent to a Valdosta salary of \$50,000?

Two jobs with identical salaries may not have identical purchasing power if one is located in a relatively high-cost city while the other is located in a relatively low-cost city. An individual would only need about \$20,243.4 in Valdosta to maintain the same standard of living as someone making \$50,000 in Manhattan, NY. On the other hand, someone having a salary of \$50,000 per year in Valdosta would need \$123,497.3 in Manhattan to maintain the same standard of living. Table 5 below shows how to calculate the equivalent salaries in these two cities. Note that the formula in Table 5 can be used to compare any of the indices presented here (i.e., health care, transportation, utilities, housing, and groceries) between cities of interest. This kind of information is very useful to households considering a move to a different urban area.

Table 5: Cost Comparison for Valdosta, GA and Manhattan, NY

Manhattan, NY to Valdosta, GA			
	$\$50,000 \times (91.5/226)$	=	\$ 20,243.4
Valdosta, GA to Manhattan Metro, NY			
	$\$50,000 \times (226/91.5)$	=	\$ 123,497.3

Table 6 compares Decatur to the Valdosta Metro area. Ponca City has a composite index of 79.4 which is ranked as the least expensive place among the 251 urban areas that participated in the second quarter 2024 Cost of Living Index.

Table 6: Cost Comparison for Valdosta, GA and Ponca City, OK

Ponca City, OK to Valdosta, GA			
	$\$50,000 \times (91.5/79.4)$	=	\$ 57,619.6
Valdosta, GA to Decatur, IL			
	$\$50,000 \times (79.4/91.5)$	=	\$ 43,387.9

According to the information tabulated in Table 6, an individual making \$50,000 per year in Ponca City would need \$7619.6 more to maintain the same standard of living as an individual making \$50,000 in Valdosta, GA. However, an individual earning \$50,000 in Valdosta area would need to make \$6,612.1 less in Ponca City, OK.

Methodology and Data Limitations

The findings presented come from an analysis of national survey data performed by the Center for Business and Economic Research (CBER) at Valdosta State University. CBER conducts applied research for the business community and provides a conduit between the community and the expertise of the Langdale College of Business

Cost of Living Comparisons: Valdosta, Georgia, and the Nation
Second Quarter of 2024

Administration faculty. The survey itself is conducted by The Council for Community and Economic Research, a nonprofit professional organization located in Arlington, VA. C2ER has been publishing quarterly measures of living cost differentials since 1968.

For the second quarter of 2024, 251 communities in the United States collected price data. The average index number for all participating communities is 100; each individual community's index should be read as a percentage of the average for all communities. This cost of living index measures *relative* prices for consumer goods and services only in the communities that participate in the process. No information on inflation (the general increase in prices over time) can be determined from these price indices. See www.coli.org for more information about the methodology behind the index.

Cost of living data are useful as indicators of local economic conditions but should be interpreted with caution. A relatively low cost of living is not necessarily a positive attribute for a community; and a relatively high cost of living is not necessarily negative. For example, relatively low prices may encourage job and population migration into the area; or relative low prices may mean that the area is depressed, and jobs and individuals are moving out of the area.

Author:

Zulal Denaux, Ph.D.

Professor of Economics

Director of Center for Business and Economics Research

Langdale College of Business

Valdosta State University

Phone: 229-219-1217

E-mail: zsdenaux@valdosta.edu