

JOBS, AFFORDABILITY AND RECREATION ARE BIG DRAWS FOR THE MID-ATLANTIC'S SMALLEST STATE

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Courtesy of Moonloop Photography, Walking and biking along the Wilmington riverfront in Wilmington, Delaware.

Georgette Lang never expected to live in Delaware. A Louisiana native who spent eight years earning a Ph.D. in chemistry at Texas A&M University, she took a call three years ago from a recruiter from Adesis, a chemical research firm based in New Castle, Delaware. A few months later, she accepted the role, and Lang and her fiancé flew out to Wilmington to find a place to live. The couple now live in a house in the city's Trolley Square neighborhood. Lang is a 15-minute drive to Adesis headquarters but only a hundred yards from the parks along Brandywine Creek where she likes to walk her dog.

"It's really a gem," Lang said. "There's always something happening here, whether it's an arts festival or a flea market or a concert. And it feels like there's a lot of opportunity right now. I see my friends in the science community posting new jobs several times a day."

Delaware has been welcoming thousands of new residents every year, including 9,647 people in 2019, many of whom arrived to take jobs in the state's growing industrial and financial sectors. From 2014 to 2019, Delaware's population grew 8.4%, well above the national average rate of 6.1% and faster than any other state in the Northeast or Mid-Atlantic.

While great job prospects may have brought them there, transplants to Delaware often cite other reasons for staying. First, the state is far more affordable than many of the major employment centers on the East Coast.

Wilmington, Delaware's largest city, boasts a cost of living 29%

lower than Washington, D.C., and 54% lower than Manhattan. The state doesn't charge sales tax, and WalletHub ranks Delaware as the No. 6 state for lowest property taxes and No. 2 for the lowest personal tax burden.

New Delawareans have recreation opportunities that are at their fingertips, from exploring colonial history in New Castle County to the beaches and coastal state parks in the southern part of the state. And many say they have found a community that quickly embraced them as newcomers and is primed for more growth.

For Melissa Marlin, Delaware feels much bigger because of its small size.

After growing up in Illinois and going to college in Washington state, Marlin became a fiscal analyst for the state of Delaware. Since she first moved in 2015, she has lived in each of the state's three counties. She spent her first months in the central Delaware town of Smyrna but said her favorite place to live was Lewes, a beach town next to the 5,200-acre Cape Henlopen State Park, which features a World War II-era battery and miles of oceanside that have been public land for centuries.

"I really got a full-state view and learned so much about every part of Delaware, which is really important for me as a state employee," Marlin said. "Even in the winter in Lewes, there was still so much going on, with nightlife, restaurants and amazing music."



Wikimedia Commons/Art Anderson, Cape Henlopen State Park in Delaware

Marlin has lived in Wilmington for the last two years. She has joined the leadership of the Junior League of Wilmington, a women's

community service organization, and plays with a rugby travel league. Especially this past year, Marlin said, being able to easily access the outdoors has been a huge benefit, and she plans to visit all of Delaware's 17 state parks this summer.

"I love my job," Marlin said. "If I can work it out with them to move back to the beach, I might."

Kimberly Richardson spent time in Delaware long before she ever thought she would live there. As an avid nature photographer, Richardson said that she fell in love with Cape Henlopen, which she visited every year while she lived and worked as an attorney in Washington, D.C. She regularly got calls from recruiters from around the country, but when she was offered a job as a counsel at DuPont in Wilmington, she was eager to listen.

Richardson now lives in a house a few miles outside of downtown Wilmington, near Arden Woods Park. She said that she loves seeing foxes walk out of the forest into her yard and mused that if she still lived in D.C., she probably would have spent the last year cooped up in a one-bedroom condominium instead of having a private office where she can keep her work confidential.

"It gives me the best of both worlds," Richardson said. "This is a plot of land I couldn't afford in D.C. But I can still get so many places so easily and visit friends in D.C. or New York or Philly whenever I want to."



Courtesy of Moonloop Photography. The Clifford Brown Jazz Festival in downtown Wilmington

Wilmington's small-town feel has helped Richardson and Lang build communities of their own despite not being from Delaware. Lang has numerous Adesis co-workers within walking distance with whom she has been able to spend time in her backyard during the pandemic, while Richardson is active in the communities for animal rescue and birding around Wilmington.

"Everybody has been so kind and welcoming," Lang said. "It sounds silly, but in the South, I grew up around stereotypes of people from the Northeast, but everyone made us feel right at home from the moment we got here."

As the city has continued to grow, the culture around Wilmington has changed too. Richardson listed Merchant Bar, a gastropub, and

local bistro La Fia as her favorite spots in downtown Wilmington and said that the food quality competes with any other East Coast city she has been to.

"Even in the seven years I've been here, I've seen changes," Richardson said. "The evolution of the downtown area and the construction makes me excited. It used to be pretty quiet here after 5 o'clock, but now you can go downtown and see The Queen theater jumping and everybody outdoors at the restaurant. It makes me really happy for Wilmington."

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