



VALDOSTA STATE UNIVERSITY

CENTER *for* BUSINESS & ECONOMIC RESEARCH

Cost of Living Comparisons: Valdosta, Georgia, and the Nation: First Quarter of 2026

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 61 different items ranging from housing, utilities, grocery items, transportation, health care and miscellaneous goods and services from communities across the U.S. The first quarter of 2026 survey comparing relative costs of living for professional and managerial households among U.S. metropolitan areas and cities shows that it costs 9.4 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 90.6 cents.

Valdosta's cost of living is slightly lower than the Georgia state average, with Valdosta residents required to spend about 88.4 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 99.1 which is slightly below 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 shows the ten most and least expensive urban areas that participated in the first quarter of 2026 Cost of Living Index. As shown in Table 1, among the 250 urban areas that participated in the first quarter 2026 Cost of Living Index, 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 more than 20 percent below the national average in Tupelo, MS. Not surprisingly, there is very little change in the top ten most expensive urban areas when compared with the previous periods. The list includes the "usual suspects", such as New York, Honolulu, San Francisco, etc. Since the national average cost of living index equals 100, the cost to live in Manhattan, for example, is 227.6% of the national average.

Table 1 tabulates the ten least expensive urban areas participating in the cost-of-living index survey. Similarly, to previous quarters, Decatur, IL and Harlingen, TX continue to hold their places in the top 10 places with the lowest cost of living in the U.S. Consistent with the previous quarters, no metropolitan area from Georgia appears on either the 'Least Expensive' or 'Most Expensive' list. Valdosta ranks as the 193rd out of 250, placing it among the less expensive metropolitan areas.

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

First Quarter in 2026				
National Average for 250 Urban Areas = 100				
Ranking	Most Expensive	COL	Least Expensive	COL
	Urban Areas	Index	Urban Areas	Index
1	New York (Manhattan) NY	227.6	Tupelo MS	79.3
2	Honolulu HI	184.8	Harlingen TX	80.0
3	San Jose CA	180.4	Richmond IN	80.7
4	New York (Brooklyn) NY	166.8	Decatur IL	81.0
5	San Francisco CA	165.6	Oklahoma City OK	81.0
6	Orange County CA	164.1	Salina KS	81.1
7	New York (Queens) NY	155.3	Anniston-Calhoun County AL	81.3
8	Los Angeles-Long Beach CA	152.1	Ponca City OK	81.5
9	Boston MA	147.8	Kokomo IN	81.8
10	Seattle WA	146.8	Pittsburg KS	82.0

What Do Groceries Cost?

The C2ER grocery index draws 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 grocery items priced come from a variety of surrogate categories to represent the grocery 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)

First Quarter 2026				
National Average for 250 Urban Areas = 100				
Ranking	Most Expensive	COL	Least Expensive	COL
	Urban Areas	Index	Urban Areas	Index
1	Honolulu HI	136.3	Grand Forks ND	90.3
2	Juneau AK	128.9	Minot ND	91.1
3	Fairbanks AK	125.9	Jonesboro AR	91.1
4	Anchorage AK	125.1	Ponca City OK	91.4
5	Oakland CA	119.0	Joplin MO	91.6

The Most Expensive and Least Expensive Cities for Gasoline

With the cost of gasoline seemingly increasing every day, [up to a national average of \\$4.56 per gallon in May of 2026 according to Newsweek](#), it can be prudent to reflect on the trajectory of this universal cost. The Cost of Living Index captures price data for

the most prominent metros in the US, showing that \$2.79 is the average cost per gallon of gasoline in January of 2026. Digging a little deeper, we can see the top four most expensive urban areas for a gallon of gasoline are in California with prices that exceed \$4.30. Conversely, the least expensive urban areas for this item are mainly located in the Midwest, being \$2.20 or cheaper. Since urban areas in the Midwest tend to be closer to major oil refineries and pipelines, it's not surprising that these places have the cheapest gas. Using COLI data from the most recent Quarterly Index alongside the data reported by Newsweek, we can see that the national average cost for a gallon of gasoline is now roughly as expensive as the most expensive gallon of gasoline back in January.

Table 3: The Five Most and Least Expensive Places for A Gallon of Gasoline

First Quarter in 2026 National Average for 250 Urban Areas = \$2.79				
Ranking	Most Expensive	COL	Least Expensive	COL
	Urban Areas	Index	Urban Areas	Index
1	Redding CA	\$ 4.55	Broken Arrow OK	\$2.14
2	San Diego CA	\$ 4.47	Des Moines IA	\$2.14
3	Los Angeles-Long Beach CA	\$ 4.37	Pueblo CO	\$2.19
4	Orange County CA	\$ 4.37	Joplin MO	\$2.20
5	Honolulu HI	\$4.34	Ardmore OK	\$2.20

Results for the Valdosta Metropolitan Statistical Area

Table 4 suggests that Valdosta has a cost of living that is approximately 9.4 percent below the national average. Valdosta's cost of living remains relatively low, primarily because of its relatively low housing costs. 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 73.4 suggesting that housing costs are 26.6 percent less than the national average house price (\$548,258.60) for all urban areas in this survey.

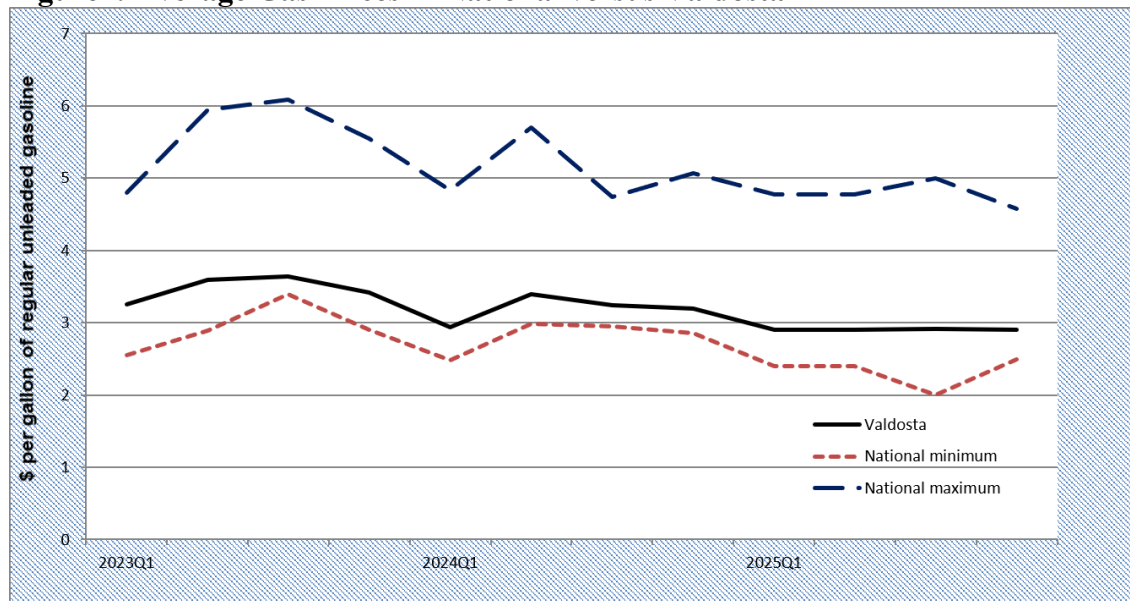
**Table 4: Indices for Georgia Metropolitan Statistical Areas
(Listed alphabetically by city name)**

	<i>Composite Index</i>	<i>Grocery</i>	<i>Housing</i>	<i>Utilities</i>	<i>Transportation</i>	<i>Health Care</i>
Athens GA	99.1	99.0	98.4	100.4	103.7	102.9
Atlanta GA	93.0	101.3	79.0	100.6	103.5	107.9
Dalton GA	87.5	95.4	70.7	85.5	86.8	90.0
Dublin-Laurens County GA	88.4	94.9	72.2	107.3	96.5	100.9
Savannah GA	90.9	101.8	73.2	98.5	99.6	102.5
Statesboro-Bulloch County GA	86.5	92.6	76.5	99.0	86.4	101.5
Valdosta GA	88.4	93.5	73.4	99.0	97.8	91.1
Average	90.6	96.9	77.6	98.6	96.3	99.6

The Price of Gasoline: Average National versus Average Valdosta period from 2023-2025

Gas prices are obviously a concern for many people. Figure 1 shows the recent movement in the quarterly average price for a gallon of regular unleaded gasoline for Valdosta (the solid black line), comparing it to the national minimum and maximum prices. The wide variation of gasoline prices is also apparent from the graph. However, Valdosta gas prices consistently stay within the minimum-maximum range, quite a bit closer to the minimum average price than the maximum average.

Figure1: Average Gas Prices - “National versus Valdosta”



Methodology and Data Limitations

The data presented in this report are based on a national survey analyzed by the Center for Business and Economic Research (CBER) at Valdosta State University. CBER conducts applied research for the business community and serves as a bridge between local businesses and the faculty expertise of the Langdale College of Business Administration. The survey itself is administered by the Council for Community and Economic Research (C2ER), a nonprofit professional organization based in Arlington, Virginia. Since 1968, C2ER has published quarterly measures comparing living costs across communities.

In the first quarter of 2026, 250 U.S. communities participated by submitting local price data. The average index value for all participating communities is set at 100. Each community's cost of living index reflects how its prices compare to this national average—expressed as a percentage. This index measures relative prices of consumer goods and services among the participating locations only; it does not reflect inflation or general changes in price levels over time. For details on the methodology, visit <https://www.coli.org/>

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 relatively low prices may mean that the area is depressed, and jobs and individuals are moving out of the area.

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