

How To Avoid New Home Surprises

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Ready to buy that new home? Learn how to avoid some common surprises.

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It's funny but no fun to buy a new home and then discover that snakes are regular visitors in the living room. And you don't want to move into a house with a leaky roof or a wet basement. Or discover that you picked the worst neighborhood in town - after you buy. To avoid surprises like these when buying a new home, you have to learn about the town, the neighborhood and the house. Here are some ways to do that - before you make that offer.

Your New Town

{bot_wrgoogle}An online search by city and state (Fresno California) will usually lead you to an official city site, or a chamber of commerce website. These sites can provide a lot of useful information, but they are "selling" the city. For the good and the bad, find a local newspaper online as well. See what's going on in town, and check the classified advertising section to get an idea about home prices too.

Detailed statistics on almost every town and city in the U.S. can be found at city-data.com. Click on a state, then find the city you want on the list (it covers towns of 6,000 people or more). You'll find more statistics than you can possibly use, ranging from population, average income, crime statistics, maps, photos and much more.

Visit weatherbase.com for climate information on almost every city in the U.S. Click on a state, choose the city you want, and see how many inches of rain or snow they get each year, how hot or cold it gets, etc. You'll also find a link to the current weather forecast for the town.

Call somebody from the Chamber of Commerce or a local real estate agent. Their phone numbers can be found online at realtor.com or at a Chamber Of Commerce website. Make a list of questions, and ask about stores, libraries, jobs, crime and anything else that is important to you. We asked many people in many towns, "Do you own a snow shovel?" before choosing to move to Tucson, Arizona.

Your New Neighborhood

Once you have a local realtor or city official on the phone, ask about the various neighborhoods in town. If they hesitate to label areas as "good" or "bad," ask more specific questions, like where older parts of town are, and where the most rental units are. If you listen well and read between the lines you should learn something about where you might want to buy a house.

Visit the town before buying a house, of course, and visit a good local bar. Residents there will tell you which employers are about to move in or out of the town, how fast or slow homes are selling, whether there are criminal gangs, and more. But verify what they tell you, since people do sometimes exaggerate a bit. For best results, choose a bar with customers who are most like you (income level, interests, etc.), to get the information most relevant to your needs.

Drive around town. It will help you get a good feel for where you might want to live. Stop to ask questions when you see people out in their yards, and take notes.

Your New Home

Realtor.com has a lot of information on the homes they list. You can search for other real estate listing sites. They won't mention things like whether a house is in an area with scorpions or street flooding, but answers to these questions can also be found on the internet. Google the name of the town and "forum," and if there is one, sign up (they're usually free). Read the posts, and ask about the specific area you are thinking of moving to. People usually respond, as they did when

we visited a community forum and discovered that a good cat will take care of scorpions.

When you have a good idea of the problems which might be associated with a certain neighborhood, you know what to ask when you start looking at houses. Carry a home inspection checklist with you when you do look at homes, and work your way through it. Pass on your notes to the professional inspector once you decide to buy a house.

When you're sure you like a home, walk around the area. Find a person or two out in their yards, and talk to them for a few minutes. Ask about noisy neighbors, recent crime and other things that will help you decide if this neighborhood is the right one for you. Do this and take the precautions above and your new home shouldn't have too many unpleasant surprises for you.

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