AARP®

PUTS ALTON IN TOP 10 PLACES TO LIVE

ALTON, ILLINOIS

26 MILES OUTSIDE ST. LOUIS

Heartland's Historic Hub

A meaningful past, a prosperous future and a tight-knit community make this river-side city a standout

Whether they're sailing, doing yoga on stand-up paddle boards, or catching catfish, residents never tire of life on the Mighty Mississippi. It's truly the soul of Alton, located not far from where the Big Muddy joins the Missouri and Illinois. Here there is plenty of history says Charlotte Johnson, age 85, an expert on the regions deep connections to the Underground Railroad. But Johnson who retired to the area with her late husband in 1991, and has family nearby, explores Alton's future too. "I love walking on Main Street, looking in shops and sitting by the river, thinking about how things have changed," she says. "It's a nice feeling." Those changes include a 4,000 seat amphitheater and an influx of antique stores. Alton's employment base is switching from manufacturing to tourism. With lovely rose gardens and venues it now bills itself as the Wedding Capitol of the Midwest. And the town recently won a competition to be included in Hulu's web-based reality series "Small Business Revolution."

Trains to St. Louis leave Alton's new Amtrak station for just $3 one way Larry Kulp and his wife, Judy, both 65, favor riverside rides via the Sam Vadalabene Bike Trail with views of bluffs and dense forrest. "Birding here is neat - we get pelicans, trumpeter swans, snow geese and bald eagles," Kulp says.

Senior Services Plus Wellness Center memberships are just $100 for those age 55 plus. Quilting, tap dancing and gardening are draws.

Population 26,900

Median housing price
$80,900

Vibe: Funky small town with big-river life.

Freebies that count
Walk back in time with Abraham Lincoln, free audio tours connect 10 historic sites

Best way to spend $10
Grab a beer and a $3.99 hot chick-on-a-stick from the legendary Fast Eddie's Bon Air Roadhouse with live music nightly.

Urban getaway
St. Louis - 26 miles

Sales tax
7.85 - 8.85%

State tax
None on pensions or Social Security

Left to Right
Justin and Kimberly Draine savor roadhouse eats;
fired up at Fast Eddies;
Microbrewery mural