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The Global Liveability Index 2018

A free overview

A report by The Economist Intelligence Unit



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The findings of the latest liveability survey

After years of destabilisation, a return to relative global stability

For the first time in this survey's history, Austria's capital, Vienna, ranks as the most liveable of the 140 cities surveyed by The Economist Intelligence Unit. A long-running contender to the title, Vienna has succeeded in displacing Melbourne from the top spot, ending a record seven consecutive years at the head of the survey for the Australian city. Although both Melbourne and Vienna have registered improvements in liveability over the last six months, increases in Vienna's ratings, particularly in the stability category, have been enough for the city to overtake Melbourne. The two cities are now separated by 0.7 of a percentage point, with Vienna scoring a near-ideal 99.1 out of 100 and Melbourne scoring 98.4.

Two other Australian cities feature in the top-ranked places: Sydney (5th) and Adelaide (10th), while only one other European city made the top ten. This is Copenhagen in Denmark, in 9th place, after its score increased by 3.3 percentage points since the last survey cycle. The rest of the top-ranked cities are split between Japan (Osaka in 3rd place and Tokyo in joint 7th, alongside Toronto) and Canada (Calgary in 4th, and Vancouver and Toronto in 6th and 7th respectively). Osaka stands out especially, having climbed six positions, to third place, over the past six months, closing the gap with Melbourne. It is now separated from the former top-ranked city by a mere 0.7 of a percentage point. Osaka's improvements in scores for quality and availability of public transportation, as well as a consistent decline in crime rates, have contributed to higher ratings in the infrastructure and stability categories respectively.

Upwards movement in the top ranked cities is a reflection of improvements seen in stability and safety across most regions in the past year. Whereas in the past, cities in Europe have been affected by the spreading perceived threat of terrorism in the region, which caused heightened security measures, the past six months have seen a return to normalcy. Yet, during this period, 116 cities of the 140 surveyed have experienced changes in their ranking position. This rises to 128 cities when looking at changes over the past year.

It must be noted that ranking movements do not necessarily arise from a change in liveability in the cities themselves, but reflect how cities compare with one another. Although four cities have fallen from the top ten over the past year—Auckland (from 8th to 12th), Perth (from 7th to 14th), Helsinki (from 9th to 16th) and Hamburg (from 10th to 18th)—none of these have seen a fall in their overall scores during this period. New Zealand's Auckland has in fact registered a minor improvement. Changes in liveability elsewhere can therefore have a significant impact on the rankings of individual cities.

Of the 140 surveyed cities, 49% registered negative changes in their overall liveability rank in the past six months and 34% experienced positive movements (the rest did not record any change). Yet, despite the total number of negative movements outweighing the positive ones, the rankings show that overall liveability across all cities surveyed increased by 0.7% in the past six months and 0.9% in the past year. Improvements were recorded across all five categories measured—infrastructure, stability, education, healthcare, and culture and environment—but especially in stability, which increased by 2.5% overall.

This trend reflects positive developments in this category, despite threats of terrorism and unrest that cities around the world continue to grapple with. Only ten cities have registered a decline in their liveability ratings over the past six months, largely reflecting an impact on cultural and environmental indicators.

The prolonged period of relative stability has resulted in the stabilisation of terrorism threat scores in several cities, especially in Western Europe. The only cities that have seen a fall in their stability indicators over the past six months are Abu Dhabi (71st) and Dubai (69th) in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Colombo (130th) in Sri Lanka and Warsaw (65th) in Poland. In Abu Dhabi and Dubai, the threat of military conflict has increased owing to the UAE's recent interventions extending its military reach in Yemen and Somalia. The UAE's deployment of armed forces in Yemen, as well as political hostility with Iran, continue to pose a threat in the country and the region. Sri Lanka's declaration of a temporary nationwide state of emergency in March, following clashes between Sinhalese Buddhist and Tamil Muslim communities, impacted Colombo's civil unrest score. The threat of civil unrest also increased in Warsaw as an estimated 60,000 people joined a nationalist march on the occasion of Poland's Independence Day in November 2017. Nevertheless, these changes have caused a decline in the overall stability rating only in Colombo's case. Warsaw, for instance, has experienced a decline in the threat of terrorism to counteract the fall in the civil unrest score, while Abu Dhabi and Dubai saw improvements in their crime and civil unrest ratings.

The impact of improving stability is most apparent when a five-year view of the global average scores is taken. Overall, the global average liveability score has increased by 0.15%, to 75.7%, over the past five years, while the average stability rating has increased by 1.3%. Although the threat of terrorism has indeed caused a decline in liveability over a longer period—the global average liveability score has decreased by 0.4% in the past decade—an improvement in scores over the past five years suggests a gradual return to relative stability.

During this period, 103 of the 140 cities surveyed have seen some change in overall liveability scores. Of these, 60 have seen improvements in liveability. Four cities in particular—Abidjan in Côte d'Ivoire, Hanoi in Vietnam, Belgrade in Serbia and Tehran in Iran—have seen increases of 5 percentage points or more. Over the past twelve months Kiev has also seen a significant improvement in liveability, reflecting a pick-up in economic growth and relative political stability despite the Donbas conflict.

Although the cities ranked among the most liveable in the world remain largely unchanged, there has been pronounced movement within the top tier of liveability. Of the 66 cities with scores of 80 or more, which are considered as the top tier, 40 have seen a change in score in the past twelve months. Changes in overall scores have been positive for all cities except Houston, which saw a decline in its infrastructure rating. An improvement in stability has been the underlying factor affecting movements in the most liveable cities, with the top tier registering an overall increase of 3.4% in its average stability score. Of the top-ranked cities, Paris in France and Manchester in the UK recorded the biggest improvements over the past 12 months, both in overall scores and stability ratings. Although they have been subject to high-profile terrorist attacks in recent years, which have shaken stability and led to cumbersome security measures, both cities have shown resilience in the face of adversity. Nevertheless, with such high scores already in place, the impact of these improvements has not been enough to significantly affect liveability in any of the top-tier cities. In fact although, 19 percentage points separate Vienna in first place from Nouméa in New Caledonia in 66th place, all cities in this tier can lay claim to being on an equal footing in terms of presenting few, if any, challenges to residents' lifestyles.

Nonetheless, there does appear to be a correlation between the types of cities that sit at the very top of the ranking. Those that score best tend to be mid-sized cities in wealthier countries. Several cities in the top ten also have relatively low population density. These can foster a range of recreational activities without leading to high crime levels or overburdened infrastructure. Six of the top ten scoring cities are in Australia and Canada, which have, respectively, population densities of 3.2 and 4 people per square kilometre. These densities compare with a global (land) average of 58 and a US average of 35.6, according to the latest World Bank statistics, from 2017. Austria and Japan buck this trend, with respective densities of 106.7 and 347.8 people per square kilometre. However, Vienna's city-proper population of 1.9m and Osaka's population of 2.7m are relatively small compared with metropolises such as New York, London and Paris.

It may be argued that violent crime is on an upward trend in the top tier of cities, but these observations are not always correct. Although crime rates are perceived as rising in Australia and Europe, cities in these regions continue to boast lower violent and petty crime rates than the rest of the world. Some of the lowest murder rates in the world were recorded in Austria and Japan. The murder rate in Austria was just 0.61 per 100,000 people in 2017, and in Japan it was 0.72 per 100,000 people. This compares with a murder rate of 3 per 100,000 people in New Delhi in 2016 and an estimated homicide rate of 104 per 100,000 people in Caracas—according to the Venezuelan Observatory of Violence—in 2017.

Global business centres tend to be victims of their own success. The “big city buzz” that they enjoy can overstretch infrastructure and cause higher crime rates. New York (57th), London (48th) and Paris (19th) are all prestigious hubs with a wealth of recreational activities, but all suffer from higher levels of crime, congestion and public transport problems than are deemed comfortable. The question is how much wages, the cost of living and personal taste for a location can offset liveability factors. Although many global centres fare less well in the ranking than mid-sized cities, for example, they still sit within the highest tier of liveability and should therefore be considered broadly comparable, especially when contrasted with the worst-scoring locations.

Five biggest improvers (last five years)

City	Country	Rank (out of 140)	Overall Rating (100=ideal)	five year movement %
Abidjan	Cote d'Ivoire	124	52.2	6.3
Hanoi	Vietnam	107	59.7	5.5
Belgrade	Serbia	82	72.2	5
Tehran	Iran	128	50.8	5
Ho Chi Minh City	Vietnam	116	57.1	4.4

Five biggest decliners (last five years)

City	Country	Rank (out of 140)	Overall Rating (100=ideal)	five year movement %
Kiev	Ukraine	118	56.6	-12.6
San Juan	Puerto Rico	89	69.8	-8.9
Damascus	Syria	140	30.7	-7.7
Caracas	Venezuela	126	51.3	-5.1
Asuncion	Paraguay	102	64.3	-4.5

Civil war and terrorism in the worst performing cities have been globally destabilising

Of the poorer-scoring cities, eleven occupy the very bottom tier of liveability, where ratings fall below 50% and most aspects of living are severely restricted. Damascus has seen a stabilisation in its dramatic decline in liveability but remains ranked at the bottom of the 140 cities surveyed, with a liveability score that is 7.3% lower than the second lowest ranking city in the survey, Dhaka in Bangladesh.

The relatively small number of cities in the bottom tier of liveability partly reflects the intended scope of the ranking—the survey is designed to address a range of cities or business centres that people might want to live in or visit. For example, the survey does not include locations such as Kabul in Afghanistan or Baghdad in Iraq. Although few would argue that Damascus in Syria and Tripoli in Libya are likely to attract visitors at present, despite them registering recent improvements, their inclusion in the survey reflects cities that were deemed relatively stable before the 2011 Arab Spring. With the exception of crisis-hit cities, the low number of cities in the bottom tier also reflects a degree of convergence, where levels of liveability are generally expected to improve in developing economies over time. This long-term trend has been upset by the heightened, widespread reach of terrorism over the past five years.

The rankings of cities like Damascus, Karachi and Tripoli suggest that conflict is responsible for many of the lowest scores. This is not only because stability indicators have the highest single scores but also because factors defining stability can spread to have an adverse effect on other categories. For example, conflict will not just cause disruption in its own right, it will also damage infrastructure, overburden hospitals and undermine the availability of goods, services and recreational activities. Unavailability of adequate infrastructure is also responsible for many of the lowest scores. This is particularly visible in the ranks of cities like Dhaka (Bangladesh, 139th), Harare (Zimbabwe, 135th), Douala (Cameroon, 133rd) and Dakar (Senegal, 131st). Nevertheless, the impact of stability indicators, especially those related to crime, cannot be understated for some of these cities. The Middle East, Africa and Asia account for the ten lowest-scoring cities in the survey where violence, whether through crime, civil insurgency, terrorism or war, has played a strong role.

The top and bottom ten cities

Below is a ranking of the top and bottom cities surveyed, accompanied by the liveability rating for every city. The liveability score is the combination of all the factors surveyed across the five main categories. Scores are also given for each category. The full ranking report can be purchased at store.eiu.com/product/global-liveability-survey/

THE GLOBAL LIVEABILITY INDEX 2018

A FREE OVERVIEW

The ten most liveable cities

Country	City	Rank	Overall Rating (100=ideal)	Stability	Healthcare	Culture & Environment	Education	Infrastructure
Austria	Vienna	1	99.1	100.0	100.0	96.3	100.0	100.0
Australia	Melbourne	2	98.4	95.0	100.0	98.6	100.0	100.0
Japan	Osaka	3	97.7	100.0	100.0	93.5	100.0	96.4
Canada	Calgary	4	97.5	100.0	100.0	90.0	100.0	100.0
Australia	Sydney	5	97.4	95.0	100.0	94.4	100.0	100.0
Canada	Vancouver	6	97.3	95.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	92.9
Canada	Toronto	7	97.2	100.0	100.0	97.2	100.0	89.3
Japan	Tokyo	7	97.2	100.0	100.0	94.4	100.0	92.9
Denmark	Copenhagen	9	96.8	95.0	95.8	95.4	100.0	100.0
Australia	Adelaide	10	96.6	95.0	100.0	94.2	100.0	96.4

The ten least liveable cities

Country	City	Rank	Overall Rating (100=ideal)	Stability	Healthcare	Culture & Environment	Education	Infrastructure
Senegal	Dakar	131	48.3	50.0	41.7	59.7	50.0	37.5
Algeria	Algiers	132	44.1	50.0	45.8	45.4	50.0	30.4
Cameroon	Douala	133	44.0	60.0	25.0	48.4	33.3	42.9
Libya	Tripoli	134	42.9	45.0	41.7	40.3	50.0	41.1
Zimbabwe	Harare	135	42.6	40.0	20.8	58.6	66.7	35.7
PNG	Port Moresby	136	41.0	30.0	37.5	47.0	50.0	46.4
Pakistan	Karachi	137	40.9	20.0	45.8	38.7	66.7	51.8
Nigeria	Lagos	138	38.5	20.0	37.5	53.5	33.3	46.4
Bangladesh	Dhaka	139	38.0	50.0	29.2	40.5	41.7	26.8
Syria	Damascus	140	30.7	20.0	29.2	40.5	33.3	32.1

About The Economist Intelligence Unit's liveability survey

How the rating works

The concept of liveability is simple: it assesses which locations around the world provide the best or the worst living conditions. Assessing liveability has a broad range of uses, from benchmarking perceptions of development levels to assigning a hardship allowance as part of expatriate relocation packages. The Economist Intelligence Unit's liveability rating quantifies the challenges that might be presented to an individual's lifestyle in any given location, and allows for direct comparison between locations.

Every city is assigned a rating of relative comfort for over 30 qualitative and quantitative factors across five broad categories: stability, healthcare, culture and environment, education, and infrastructure. Each factor in a city is rated as acceptable, tolerable, uncomfortable, undesirable or intolerable. For qualitative indicators, a rating is awarded based on the judgment of in-house analysts and in-city contributors. For quantitative indicators, a rating is calculated based on the relative performance of a number of external data points.

The scores are then compiled and weighted to provide a score of 1–100, where 1 is considered intolerable and 100 is considered ideal. The liveability rating is provided both as an overall score and as a score for each category. To provide points of reference, the score is also given for each category relative to New York and an overall position in the ranking of 140 cities is provided.

The suggested liveability scale

Companies pay a premium (usually a percentage of a salary) to employees who move to cities where living conditions are particularly difficult and there is excessive physical hardship or a notably unhealthy environment.

We have given a suggested allowance to correspond with the rating. However, the actual level of the allowance is often a matter of company policy. It is not uncommon, for example, for companies to pay higher allowances—perhaps up to double our suggested level.

Rating	Description	Suggested allowance (%)
80-100	There are few, if any, challenges to living standards	0
70-80	Day-to-day living is fine, in general, but some aspects of life may entail problems	5
60-70	Negative factors have an impact on day-to-day living	10
50-60	Liveability is substantially constrained	15
50 or less	Most aspects of living are severely restricted	20

How the rating is calculated

The liveability score is reached through category weights, which are equally divided into relevant subcategories to ensure that the score covers as many indicators as possible. Indicators are scored as acceptable, tolerable, uncomfortable, undesirable or intolerable. These are then weighted to produce a rating, where 100 means that liveability in a city is ideal and 1 means that it is intolerable.

For qualitative variables, an “EIU rating” is awarded based on the judgment of in-house expert country analysts and a field correspondent based in each city. For quantitative variables, a rating is calculated based on the relative performance of a location using external data sources.

Category 1: Stability (weight: 25% of total)

Indicator	Source
Prevalence of petty crime	EIU rating
Prevalence of violent crime	EIU rating
Threat of terror	EIU rating
Threat of military conflict	EIU rating
Threat of civil unrest/conflict	EIU rating

Category 2: Healthcare (weight: 20% of total)

Indicator	Source
Availability of private healthcare	EIU rating
Quality of private healthcare	EIU rating
Availability of public healthcare	EIU rating
Quality of public healthcare	EIU rating
Availability of over-the-counter drugs	EIU rating
General healthcare indicators	Adapted from World Bank

Category 3: Culture & Environment (weight: 25% of total)

Indicator	Source
Humidity/temperature rating	Adapted from average weather conditions
Discomfort of climate to travellers	EIU rating
Level of corruption	Adapted from Transparency International
Social or religious restrictions	EIU rating
Level of censorship	EIU rating
Sporting availability	EIU field rating of 3 sport indicators
Cultural availability	EIU field rating of 4 cultural indicators
Food & drink	EIU field rating of 4 cultural indicators
Consumer goods & services	EIU rating of product availability

Category 4: Education (weight: 10% of total)

Indicator	Source
Availability of private education	EIU rating
Quality of private education	EIU rating
Public education indicators	Adapted from World Bank

Category 5: Infrastructure (weight: 20% of total)

Indicator	Source
Quality of road network	EIU rating
Quality of public transport	EIU rating
Quality of international links	EIU rating
Availability of good quality housing	EIU rating
Quality of energy provision	EIU rating
Quality of water provision	EIU rating
Quality of telecommunications	EIU rating

Liveability products available to purchase from The EIU

The Liveability Survey

Liveability Survey provides a full report of The EIU's liveability ratings for 140 cities around the world. This includes a one-page overview for each of the 140 cities covered as well as The EIU's ratings for each city on the full set of over 30 qualitative and quantitative factors. In this ranking:

- Each of the 30 factors in each city is rated as acceptable, tolerable, uncomfortable, undesirable or intolerable.
- The categories are compiled and weighted to provide an overall rating of 1–100, where 1 is considered intolerable and 100 is considered ideal.
- The liveability ranking considers that any city with a rating of 80 or more will have few, if any, challenges to living standards. Any city with a score of less than 50 will see most aspects of living severely restricted.

Purchase the [Liveability Survey](#).

Liveability Ranking and Overview

This report provides a complete overview of The EIU's liveability ratings for 140 cities around the world. This includes:

- A summary of findings and a description of the methodology used.
- Tables listing the ranking position, overall liveability score and average scores for all cities across each of the five categories: stability, healthcare, culture and environment, education and infrastructure.

Purchase the [Liveability Ranking and Overview](#).

Liveability Matrix

The Liveability Matrix is an interactive Excel workbook that ranks all 140 cities on over 30 qualitative and quantitative factors across the five categories.

Purchase the [Liveability Matrix](#).

Related Reports

Worldwide Cost of Living

The Worldwide Cost of Living Survey contains a ranking of 133 cities on their relative expensiveness, based on a survey which compares more than 400 individual prices across 160 products and services. In addition to the ranking table, the report looks at the key trends affecting the cost of living in different cities across the world.

Find out more at: eiu.com/wcol

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