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The Global Liveability Index 2019

A free overview

A report by The Economist Intelligence Unit



The world leader in global business intelligence

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The findings of the latest liveability survey

Vienna remains the most liveable city in the world, just ahead of Melbourne

Vienna remains the most liveable of the 140 cities surveyed by The Economist Intelligence Unit. After displacing Melbourne from the top spot in 2018, ending a record run of seven consecutive years, Vienna retained its position at the head of the survey in 2019. The two cities continue to be separated by 0.7 percentage points, with Vienna scoring 99.1 out of 100 and Melbourne 98.4.

Two other Australian cities feature in the top ten: Sydney (in third) and Adelaide (tenth), while only one other European city, Copenhagen in Denmark (ninth), scores among the best. The other top-ranked cities are split between Japan (Osaka in fourth and Tokyo in joint seventh) and Canada (Calgary in fifth, and Vancouver and Toronto in sixth and joint seventh, respectively).

The cities within the top ten remain unchanged from our previous update, but there has been some movement in their ranking. Sydney has risen from fifth to third, thanks to an improvement in its culture and environment score, reflecting an increased focus on combating and mitigating the impacts of climate change, as outlined by the city's "Sustainable Sydney 2030" strategy. However, Sydney remains behind its great rival, Melbourne. With both cities already scoring very highly across all categories, there is only limited potential for Sydney to displace either Melbourne or Vienna at the top of the rankings. No other city in the top ten saw a change to its score.

Over the past year we have observed that average scores for stability have risen, reflecting, in very general terms, a slight diminishing of the perceived threat of terrorism, after a period of acute concern. Some of these improvements have been considerable but from a very low base (such as Tripoli in Libya and Jakarta in Indonesia), while others have seen smaller improvements to already acceptable scores (such as Seattle and Houston in the US, and Seoul in South Korea). Paris in France is the highest ranked city to have seen a deterioration in its stability score, owing to the ongoing anti-government gilets jaunes protests that began in late 2018. In the emerging world, the Easter Sunday bombings in Sri Lanka triggered a downgrade for Colombo, while the growing instability between the US and Iran was behind a reduction in the stability score for Tehran.

Among the other categories, a deterioration in culture and environment scores is of concern. A slew of cities in emerging markets that are among the most exposed to the effects of climate change have seen their scores downgraded. These include New Delhi in India, which suffers from appalling air quality, Cairo in Egypt (where air quality is also a major issue) and Dhaka in Bangladesh. A lack of a concerted global effort to tackle climate change risks further downward revisions in these scores, threatening to offset improvements in the other categories, such as education and infrastructure, which remain on a broadly upward trend.

Despite the risk to future scores posed by climate change, a longer-term view suggests that overall liveability has been improving in recent years. In our sample of global cities, the average liveability score has increased by 0.5 percentage points, to just under 76, over the past five years, driven primarily by higher scores in the stability category. Devastating terrorist attacks in New Zealand and Sri Lanka in the past year are a reminder that threats to security are still apparent, but perceptions of the danger posed by terrorism have diminished in recent years.

Among the 56 cities that have registered improvements to their overall liveability rankings over the past five years, four cities stand out. Abidjan in Côte d'Ivoire, Hanoi in Vietnam, Kiev in Ukraine and Belgrade in Serbia have seen increases of 5 percentage points or more. In the last 12 months Belgrade has jumped further up the index, from 82nd place to 77th, as a result of upgrades to its infrastructure and healthcare scores; it is now mid-ranked among cities in Eastern Europe. Hanoi has seen improvements almost across the board this year, with higher stability, culture, education and infrastructure scores. However, in a diverse region, it remains in the bottom third of Asian cities.

Following largely peaceful and democratic presidential and parliamentary elections in Ukraine in 2019, we have upgraded Kiev's stability rating relative to a year ago, enabling a small rise in its ranking; however, the legacy impact of the city's previously low stability scores (due to the ongoing conflict with Russian-backed rebels in eastern Ukraine) continues to weigh on Kiev's overall ranking. Finally, Abidjan's upward trajectory has stalled in the past year, but Côte d'Ivoire's diversifying economy and strengthening governance have driven upgrades in previous years.

Conflict and economic crisis define the cities that have struggled in our index over the past year. We have downgraded scores in four of the five categories for Caracas in Venezuela, as the government's fight for legitimacy has impeded its ability to provide basic services for its citizens. Its stability score has not moved, but only because it was very low a year ago. The effect has been to pull the city down another five places in the index, to 131st place. New Delhi has also fallen down the index because of downgrades not just to its culture and environment score, but also stability, owing to rising crime rates. Detroit in the US is another city that continues to struggle, with major depopulation and urban decay resulting in a high incidence of crime, a collapse in local government tax revenue, swathes of vacant homes and inadequate infrastructure.

Overall, our index remains dominated by medium-sized cities in wealthy countries. These cities have well-funded public healthcare systems, compulsory and high-quality education, and functional road and rail infrastructure. The provision of these services is assisted by the presence of fully democratic electoral systems and generally low levels of corruption. The presence of Tokyo in the top ten demonstrates that it is possible to scale up these characteristics, but maintaining these levels of performance in cities with two, three or four times as many people is challenging, especially when such cities also tend to be greater magnets for crime and terrorism. This is why other large "global" cities in advanced economies, such as London and New York, score lower than Vienna and Melbourne (and Tokyo) for stability and infrastructure but are able to match (or exceed) them for culture and environment.

We note the continued gradual improvement of cities in emerging markets in infrastructure, education and healthcare, as well as, in many cases, stability. However, these gains appear to be coming under threat from the effects of climate change, which in the index is reflected in the culture and environment category. The incidence of extreme weather events, such as flooding and heatwaves, is rising around the world, and cities in emerging markets are often the most directly affected and the least resilient. That said, we see climate change as a global phenomenon, which threatens the liveability of cities at the very top of the index too. Only a co-ordinated global effort to limit the rising temperature of the planet will succeed in maintaining current levels of liveability across the world.

THE GLOBAL LIVEABILITY INDEX 2019

A FREE OVERVIEW

Five biggest improvers (last five years)

City	Country	Rank (out of 140)	Overall rating (100=ideal)	Five-year movement
Moscow	Russia	68	80	4.9
Belgrade	Serbia	77	74.5	6.4
Hanoi	Vietnam	107	59.7	5.5
Kiev	Ukraine	117	56.6	5.2
Abidjan	Côte d'Ivoire	123	52.2	6.3

Five biggest decliners (last five years)

City	Country	Rank (out of 140)	Overall rating (100=ideal)	Five-year movement
Detroit	US	56	86.3	-4.4
Asunción	Paraguay	99	65.6	-3.2
Tunis	Tunisia	106	59.8	-2.8
Caracas	Venezuela	131	46.9	-4.4
Tripoli	Libya	137	40.4	-3.8

The ten most liveable cities

Country	City	Rank	Overall Rating (100=ideal)	Stability	Healthcare	Culture & Environment	Education	Infrastructure
Austria	Vienna	1	99.1	100	100	96.3	100	100
Australia	Melbourne	2	98.4	95	100	98.6	100	100
Australia	Sydney	3	98.1	95	100	97.2	100	100
Japan	Osaka	4	97.7	100	100	93.5	100	96.4
Canada	Calgary	5	97.5	100	100	90	100	100
Canada	Vancouver	6	97.3	95	100	100	100	92.9
Canada	Toronto	7	97.2	100	100	97.2	100	89.3
Japan	Tokyo	7	97.2	100	100	94.4	100	92.9
Denmark	Copenhagen	9	96.8	95	95.8	95.4	100	100
Australia	Adelaide	10	96.6	95	100	94.2	100	96.4

The ten least liveable cities

Country	City	Rank	Overall Rating (100=ideal)	Stability	Healthcare	Culture & Environment	Education	Infrastructure
Venezuela	Caracas	131	46.9	35	33.3	56.3	66.7	53.6
Algeria	Algiers	132	44.1	50	45.8	45.4	50	30.4
Cameroon	Douala	133	44	60	25	48.4	33.3	42.9
Zimbabwe	Harare	134	42.6	40	20.8	58.6	66.7	35.7
PNG	Port Moresby	135	41	30	37.5	47	50	46.4
Pakistan	Karachi	136	40.9	20	45.8	38.7	66.7	51.8
Libya	Tripoli	137	40.4	35	41.7	40.3	50	41.1
Bangladesh	Dhaka	138	39.2	55	29.2	40.5	41.7	26.8
Nigeria	Lagos	139	38.5	20	37.5	53.5	33.3	46.4
Syria	Damascus	140	30.7	20	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. Our 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 judgement 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

The 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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