



Location, Location, Location

Intrigued by the idea of a 'liveable' city, we find out what it takes to make the cut.

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WHAT MAKES A DESTINATION A GOOD PLACE TO LIVE?

If you're a pensioner looking forward to your work-free years, your answer to that question might focus on the quality of healthcare, community groups and pleasantness of the climate. If you're middle-aged, then schools, property taxes, and cultural offerings would bear some weight in your thinking. Just starting out? The prospective job market, social scene and apartment rental market would probably be important to you. Of course everyone would agree that low rates of crime and pollution, a strong infrastructure and a lack of overcrowding are desirable factors – but it is likely that different people would put different emphasis on these criteria.

With so many varied opinions about what makes a particular location more attractive than another, it would seem next to impossible to provide a definitive ranking to a locale's liveability factor. But that doesn't stop organisations from trying.

The Economist's 2008 Liveability Ranking awarded the top spot on their list to 2010 Winter Olympic Games host, Vancouver, Canada. Rather than starting with what they think makes a city attractive, *The Economist's* "Intelligence Unit" research arm says that it examines the challenges that a city would present to a resident. These challenges are arranged in five basic categories – stability, healthcare, culture and entertainment, education and infrastructure – and include 30 different criteria.

Vancouver may have been champ according to *The Economist*, but on the *Mercer Quality of Living* report, it was unseated by three European powerhouses: Vienna, Zurich and Geneva. The Mercer report is primarily concerned with evaluating cities as relocation destinations for expats. The survey ranks cities according to 39 criteria spread across 10 main groups such as political and social environment, socio-cultural environment, natural environment, consumer goods, recreation and housing.

When asked why European cities dominated the top spots in their survey, Slagin Parakatil, senior researcher at Mercer said: "First of all, there is a long tradition of political stability... secondly, most of the cities



have a very high level of infrastructure."

In this year's special-focus category of infrastructure, Singapore took the prize – ranking first in the world out of all 215 cities evaluated. Mr Parakatil says in determining this ranking, the Mercer group looked at criteria such as the quality of electrical services, mail, public transportation, airports, and water availability. Singapore also had the distinction of being the Asian city that was most improved in 2009, moving up six places to 26th from its spot at 32 last year in the overall study.

Singapore also showed significant movement on MasterCard's 2008 index of 75 worldwide centres of commerce, hitting the fourth spot from its previous post at number six. But on this list, the biggest climber was Shanghai, which rose from 32 to 24 and, along with the appearance of five other Chinese urban centres, and three cities in India, heralds a shift in the global marketplace from west to east.

The MasterCard report ranks cities by measuring legal and political framework; economic stability; ease of doing business; financial flow; viability as a business centre; knowledge creation and information flow; and liveability. The last of these was added

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The various studies have different ideas of what makes a liveable city - from the basic availability of water and transportation, to the eco-friendliness of citizens and even heritage management.

as a new category in 2008. The report states: "The liveability dimension has growing importance in economic growth and development. This is especially true in the creative sectors where it enhances the synergies between performing arts, design, media and culture, and creates an environment conducive to attracting and retaining the talent that drives the knowledge economy."

If your idea of what makes a city truly liveable has more to do with parks and people than dollars and cents, you might find the *International Awards for Livable Communities* (LivCom) report valuable. Endorsed by the United Nations Environment Programme and launched in 1997, the LivCom website states that: "LivCom is the world's only awards competition focusing on best practice regarding the management of the local environment. The objective of LivCom is to improve the quality of life of individual citizens through the creation of liveable communities."

In sussing out their liveable cities, the judges evaluate criteria in categories such as enhancement of the landscape, heritage management, environmentally sensitive practices, community sustainability, healthy lifestyles and planning for the future.

LivCom's 2008 winners included the Guanda Community in Dongguan, China, a garden-rich enclave arranged according to the principles of feng shui, New Plymouth,

New Zealand where 75 per cent of waste are diverted from the local landfills thanks to a "Towards Zero Waste" project; Ogema in Saskatchewan, Canada where inkjet cartridges and cell phones are dropped off at an office in town to raise money for a baby formula and milk supply programme for children; and Broadland, England where a pioneering "Stairway Out Of Crime" project helps young people who've committed crimes to avoid re-offending through Acceptable Behaviour Contracts.

"If your idea of the perfect city is one where you can have a driveway full of cars that can whisk you to a number of air-conditioned malls, where the best schools are private and good citizens are best tucked into bed by 22:30, then our quality of life survey is not for you." So begins *Monocle* magazine's 2008 survey of the world's most liveable cities. While *Monocle*'s method of arriving at the list is seemingly less than scientific, it does have some 'traditional' measures such as global transport connections, communications systems, environmental initiatives, public services and crime rate analysis. But in the words of the authors, it "reshuffles the deck by also questioning how fun these places might be on a Tuesday evening."

Top on *Monocle*'s 2009 hip list was Zurich, followed by Copenhagen, and Tokyo. Singapore again made the cut, and even climbed four places (from 2008's rankings), to take the #18 spot. Why? As the report explains: "As a microcosm of Asia, Singapore has always had something to offer everyone... it has abundant green spaces, a great airport, world-beating medical facilities, varied nightlife and excellent connections to the world, making it a pleasant home for people of all backgrounds."

This sentiment was echoed by National Development Minister Mah Bow Tan in an interview with *The Straits Times* on April 24, 2009. In response to the question, "What kind of place do we want Singapore to be?", he said: "A place that people can really feel connected to, rooted to, bonded to." He added: "Everything we do as a government is really about how we make this place a better home."

Singapore's President S R Nathan, in his May 18 address to parliament, outlined the changes that can be expected in the city's urban landscape: "Over the next few years, Singapore will be transformed physically... We are building park connectors, and new sports and leisure facilities all over the island. Our reservoirs, canals and drains are being transformed into recreational spaces through the Active, Beautiful and Clean Waters programmes. We are protecting nature and greenery even as we grow as a dense, urbanised city."

Clearly, with Singapore's unstinting focus on future improvements and strong showing on so many surveys, what it all means is this: If you call Singapore home, you already reside in one of the most liveable cities on earth. **LM**

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