

The Least and Most Stressful Cities Index 2021

Data study determines the least, and most, stressful cities in the world, analysing a variety of indicators across governance, environment, finance and health to compare how stressful the living conditions are for citizens.

- The **least stressful city is Reykjavik, Iceland**, ahead of **Bern**, Switzerland and **Helsinki**, Finland. **Mumbai, India**, ranks as the **most stressful city** in the study, followed by **Lagos**, Nigeria and **Manila**, the Philippines.
- **Manila** is the **most densely populated city** in the study, ahead of **Doha**, Qatar and **Kabul**, Afghanistan.
- People living in **Reykjavik, Iceland** have the **best air quality**, followed by **Edinburgh**, United Kingdom and **Wellington**, New Zealand. The worst air quality was found to be in **New Delhi**, India, followed by **Riyadh**, Saudi Arabia and **Karachi**, Pakistan.
- Citizens in **Oslo**, Norway have the **best access to healthcare**, ahead of **Sydney**, Australia and **Tokyo**, Japan.
- **Tokyo has the highest score for its Covid-19 response**, meaning that it had the **lowest stress impact** on its citizens. **Bangkok** and **Montreal** ranked second and third.
- Houston, USA ranks 25 out of 100 cities.

Berlin, Germany, June, 2021— [VAAY.com](https://www.vaay.com), the CBD and well-being brand, has released a study which ranks cities by assessing how stressful their environments are for their inhabitants. As part of its mission to promote inner balance and mindfulness, the company decided to look into common external factors that make city-living stressful for urbanites. During this process, VAAY realised that it could directly compare multiple stress indicators in cities around the world to determine which cities are the least, and most, stressful for their citizens. The resulting index shines a light on the ever-present factors that influence a person's stress levels, and gives insight into which global cities perform best in different areas and can be an example for their peers.

“Our objective with this study is to show what cities can achieve for their citizens through effective governance, robust environmental policies and well-resourced social welfare systems. The aim is not to single out the cities which may lag behind in any of these areas, but rather highlight those which are leading examples of what can be done to improve the wellbeing of their inhabitants,” comments Finn Age Hänsel, Co-Founder of VAAY. “We hope that the results of the study serve as a useful barometer for cities

and citizens alike to reassess their environments and work together towards developing cities that are less stressful places to live.”

How the study was conducted:

To begin the study, VAAY considered which macro factors contribute to stress, narrowing them down to four broad categories. Next, over 500 global cities were assessed against a number of stress indicators in these categories, before those without reliable data were removed, leaving a final line-up of 100 cities.

The study started with factors related to governance - assessing safety and security, and socio-political stability as indicators of how comfortable someone can feel in a city. In order to include stress indicators for all segments of society, levels of gender and minority equality were also scrutinised, as these demographics often have a higher chance of experiencing stress due to societal frameworks shaped by local laws and policy decisions.

Following this, VAAY compared how stressful each city’s urban environment is by looking at population density statistics in addition to air, light, and noise pollution levels, the amount of traffic congestion and weather conditions. These indicators were included in order to capture the stress-inducing effect of atmospheric contamination and extreme weather conditions, for example wildfires, heatwaves, and periods of extended darkness, which are strongly associated with both physical and mental health conditions.

Next, a number of financial factors were evaluated, including unemployment rates, social security structures and local purchasing power. These indicators were included to reflect that economic problems are a cause of significant stress for many people, and have become increasingly widespread since the beginning of the pandemic.

Data regarding the quality and accessibility of healthcare in each city was then collated, including the level of mental healthcare access. Finally, a Covid Response Stress Impact score was calculated by analysing how stressful the pandemic response of each government has been for its citizens in addition to its effectiveness. The study reveals which cities have the most stressful environments for their citizens, and which lead by example as the least stressful cities.

Please find the full table of data and complete methodology on the results page:

<https://vaay.com/en/pages/stressful-cities-index>

Findings:

The tables below reveal a sample of results for the **20 least, and 20 most, stressful cities in the index:**

The 20 least stressful cities

The 20 most stressful cities

City	Score	City	Score
1. Reykjavik	100.0	1. Mumbai	1.00
2. Bern	96.6	2. Lagos	19.9
3. Helsinki	95.0	3. Manila	29.4
4. Wellington	95.0	4. New Delhi	31.5
5. Melbourne	94.2	5. Baghdad	31.7
6. Oslo	93.9	6. Kabul	34.3
7. Copenhagen	92.6	7. Moscow	36.1
8. Innsbruck	92.2	8. Karachi	36.6
9. Hanover	92.0	9. Jakarta	41.8
10. Graz	90.0	10. Kiev	42.8
11. Liverpool	89.9	11. Istanbul	44.9
12. Montreal	89.9	12. Bogota	46.1
13. Vienna	88.5	13. Cairo	49.5
14. Auckland	88.2	14. Bangkok	50.0
15. Amsterdam	87.5	15. Tehran	50.6
16. Montevideo	87.5	16. Lima	53.6
17. Zurich	87.1	17. Dakar	53.8
18. Cologne	87.1	18. Shanghai	54.3
19. Sydney	86.7	19. Beirut	54.3
20. Stockholm	86.3	20. Mexico City	54.4

Houston,USA ranks #25 out of 100.

N.B. This is a sample of the full results, which you can find here: <https://vaay.com/en/pages/stressful-cities-index>

The tables below reveal a sample of results for the **cities with the best scores for Safety and Security, and Air Pollution**, meaning they have the cleanest air:

Safety and Security

Air Pollution

City	Score
1. Doha	100.0
2. Reykjavik	98.8
3. Singapore	97.2
4. Abu Dhabi	96.7
5. Helsinki	94.4
6. Copenhagen	88.6
7. Oslo	85.7
8. Bern	83.3
9. Zurich	83.0
10. Stockholm	81.4

Houston ranks #81 out of 100 for Safety and Security.

City	Score
1. Reykjavik	100.0
2. Edinburgh	99.8
3. Wellington	99.3
4. Auckland	98.9
5. Liverpool	98.5
6. Seattle	98.2
7. Helsinki	97.9
8. Vancouver	97.7
9. Bern	97.1
10. Dublin	96.9

Houston ranks #30 out of 100 for Air Pollution.

The tables below reveal a sample of results for the cities with the highest, and lowest, levels of Gender Equality:

Gender Equality	
City	Score (out of 10)
1. Reykjavik	10
2. Oslo	9
3. Helsinki	9
4. Wellington	8
5. Stockholm	8
6. Hanover	8
7. Frankfurt a. M.	8
8. Bern	8
9. Geneva	8
10. Dublin	7

Gender Equality	
City	Score (out of 10)
1. Baghdad	1
2. Karachi	1
3. Beirut	2
4. Casablanca	2
5. Tehran	3
6. Doha	3
7. Algiers	4
8. Kuwait City	4
9. Kabul	4
10. Riyadh	4

The tables below reveal a sample of results for the cities with **the highest, and lowest, levels of Minority Equality**, representing the degree to which minorities have equal opportunities:

Minority Equality	
City	Score (out of 10)
1. Montevideo	10
2. Stockholm	10
3. Helsinki	10
4. Oslo	10
5. Tokyo	9
6. Ulaanbaatar	9
7. Taipei	9
8. Buenos Aires	9
9. Warsaw	9
10. Melbourne	9

Minority Equality	
City	Score (out of 10)
1. Riyadh	1
2. Shanghai	1
3. Baghdad	1
4. Moscow	1
5. Tehran	1
6. Doha	2
7. Karachi	2
8. Abu Dhabi	2
9. Hanoi	2
10. Casablanca	3

The tables below reveal a sample of results for the cities with **the least Financial Stress**, and the cities with **the best Access to Healthcare scores**:

Financial Stress	
City	Score
1. Bern	100.0
2. Houston	97.9
3. Hanoi	97.5
4. Hanover	96.8
5. Liverpool	96.7
6. Zagreb	94.2
7. Singapore	93.0
8. Hong Kong	93.0
9. Dakar	93.0
10. Graz	91.4

Access to Healthcare	
City	Score
1. Oslo	100.0
2. Sydney	97.3
3. Tokyo	97.0
4. Melbourne	96.6
5. Reykjavik	96.3
6. Bern	96.3
7. Zurich	96.2
8. Toronto	95.8
9. Vancouver	95.8
10. Liverpool	95.7

Houston ranks #2 out of 100 for Financial Stress.

Houston ranks #41 out of 100 for Access to Healthcare.

Further findings - highest and lowest results in the index:

Socio-Political Stability (Score)

- Wellington and Auckland, New Zealand, have the best Socio-Political Stability score (both 100), followed by Reykjavik, Iceland (97.8) and Bern, Switzerland (96.8).
- Kabul, Afghanistan has the lowest Socio-Political Stability score (1.0), followed by Baghdad, Iraq, (2.4) and Karachi, Pakistan (15.4).

Population Density (persons/km²)

- Manila, the Philippines, has the highest population density (20,784), followed by Doha, Qatar (18,045) and Kabul, Afghanistan (16,126).
- Sofia, Bulgaria has the lowest population density (156), followed by Bern, Switzerland (174) and Oslo, Norway (179).

Weather (Score)

- São Paulo, Brazil, has the highest Weather score (100), meaning it has the least stressful weather conditions, followed by Los Angeles, USA, (89.6) and Cape Town, South Africa (88.8).
- Mumbai, India, has the lowest Weather score (1.0), meaning it has the most stressful weather conditions, followed by Lagos, Nigeria (2.1) and Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia (6.0).

Traffic Congestion (Score)

- Abu Dhabi, UAE, has the highest Traffic Congestion score (100), meaning it has the lowest amount of congestion, followed by Madrid, Spain and Boston, USA (both 88.8).
- Moscow, Russia, has the lowest Traffic Congestion score (1.0), meaning it has the highest amount of congestion, followed by Manila, Philippines and Mumbai, India (both 3.3).

Noise Pollution (Score)

- Reykjavik, Iceland has the highest Noise Pollution score (100), meaning the least noise pollution, followed by Helsinki, Finland (90.6) and Zurich, Switzerland (83.6).
- Lagos, Nigeria has the lowest Noise Pollution score (1.0), meaning the most noise pollution, followed by Lima, Peru (3.5) and Cairo, Egypt (9.3).

Light Pollution (Score)

- Bern, Switzerland has the highest Light Pollution score (100), meaning the least light pollution, followed by Munich, Germany (98.9) and Stuttgart, Germany (98.7).
- Doha, Qatar has the lowest Light Pollution score (1.0), meaning the most light pollution, followed by Kuwait City, Kuwait (32.8) and Cairo, Egypt (53.0).

Unemployment Rate (%)

- Bucharest, Romania, has the lowest Unemployment Rate (1.2%), followed by Bangkok, Thailand (1.8%) and Warsaw, Poland (1.9%).
- Lagos, Nigeria, has the highest Unemployment Rate (37.1%), followed by Johannesburg, South Africa (35.1%) and Cape Town, South Africa (26.0%).

Social Security (Score)

- Brussels, Belgium, has the best Social Security score (100), followed by Paris, France (98.0) and Munich, Germany (97.8).
- New Delhi, India has the lowest Social Security score (1.0), followed by Mumbai, India (1.0) and Hong Kong (17.4).

Mental Health (Score)

- Singapore has the highest Mental Health score (100), meaning the lowest prevalence of mental health disorders, followed by Jakarta, Indonesia (97.2) and Tokyo, Japan (97.1).
- Athens, Greece has the lowest Mental Health score (1.0), followed by Lisbon, Portugal (10.5) and Madrid, Spain (14.1).

Covid Response Stress Impact (Score)

- Tokyo, Japan, has the highest Covid Response Stress Impact score (100), indicating the response with the lowest stress impact on its citizens, followed by Bangkok, Thailand (96.5) and Toronto, Canada (92.8).
- Prague, Czech Republic, has the lowest Covid Response Stress Impact score (1.0), indicating the response with the highest stress impact on its citizens, followed by Buenos Aires, Argentina (43.0) and Boston, USA (47.1).

Quotes

“When we consider our reasons for feeling stressed, we usually focus our attention on things in our sphere of influence that we feel we can control,” comments Finn Age Hänsel, Co-Founder of VAAY. “It is less common to truly analyse the effect of the environment in which we live on our state of mind, yet so many factors can have a significant impact. Neighbourhood traffic congestion, cars’ exhaust fumes, sirens and flashing lights from emergency services, to name a few. These are features that are part and parcel of city living, and the very things that motivate many of us to ‘escape’ the city in holiday season when in need of some R&R. As such, they should be treated as important influences on our mental state. With this study, we wanted to reveal which global cities provide a less stressful environment for their citizens in an effort to draw attention to how certain cities are succeeding in protecting the wellbeing of their citizens, and highlight those that are falling behind.”

“As humans, one of our most incredible features is our sense of danger; the way in which we subconsciously assess our surroundings for risks and react instinctively to perceived threats, with a shot of adrenaline to aid us. But the strength of this innate mechanism means that, if triggered frequently, it can lead us to distrust our surroundings, contributing to our stress levels,” comments Finn Age Hänsel, Co-Founder of VAAY. “In line with our mission to promote people’s wellbeing, we wanted to provide an analysis of which global cities are the safest for their citizens and therefore boast a less stressful environment. Along with data on crime, we incorporated economic security, domestic stability and the likelihood of natural disasters, among other factors, to reveal which cities are some of the safest cities in the world, and which are some of the most dangerous.”

“It would be remiss to release this study now, during a prolonged period of heightened stress for many people, and not factor in the coronavirus pandemic,” comments Finn Age Hänsel, Co-Founder of VAAY. “We therefore decided to include an assessment of each government’s response to the pandemic in terms of the measures they’ve implemented to protect citizens, analysing these responses from the

perspective of how stressful they have been for the country's inhabitants, as well as their effectiveness. A striking feature of the pandemic has been how quickly a country's health situation can change, going from a degree of chaos to relative calm, or vice versa, in what seems like the blink of an eye. What has become clear is that no two countries' health situations are the same, nor their responses to the crisis, and some people have experienced greater degrees of stress than others as a result."

"The coronavirus pandemic has simultaneously overshadowed and worsened another health crisis: that of mental health," comments Finn Age Hänsel, Co-Founder of VAAAY. "In an age of information overload, social media and economic fragility, people's mental health has suffered, and this trend has only been exacerbated by Covid-19. The World Health Organisation estimates that around 20% of young people around the world have a mental health condition, with depression and anxiety costing the global economy \$1 trillion each year. When putting together the study, it was impossible to overlook the importance of a person's environment on their mental health. At VAAAY, we are determined to promote mindfulness and wellbeing in our community, and we are motivated to play a part in combating this growing problem by advocating the natural health benefits of hemp-based products."

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Instructions for publication

Publishers are allowed to publish this data and graphics; we kindly ask that you give credit and link to the source:

<https://vaay.com/en/pages/stressful-cities-index>

A spreadsheet with the full data, sortable by each factor, is also available upon request.

Spokespeople at VAAAY are available for interviews. If you require an exclusive quote on a particular angle, please contact us.

About VAAAY: Founded in 2019 by a group of health enthusiasts and based in Berlin, VAAAY is a CBD and hemp-based brand focusing on collective wellbeing. The company is inspired by the ongoing research and development regarding the benefits of hemp as well as its innovative products in the U.S. and Canada. VAAAY is part of the Sanity Group, a cannabis company founded by Fabian Friede and Finn Hänsel backed by investors such as Will.i.am, Mario Götze, Atlantic Food Labs, and HV Capital. With a concentration on natural cannabinoids, terpenes and non-psychoactive properties, VAAAY's products can be reduced to a single sentence: The good side of hemp.

About SweetSpot PR: Based in Berlin, Sweet Spot PR is a team of creatives, journalists and data analysts who founded an agency in response to the growing challenges facing the media as the industry adapts to the digital world. The agency promotes fact-based, informative and compelling journalism by connecting data-driven journalists with excellent content from research agencies and industry patrons.