



LOVING LIFE IN NZ'S BIGGEST CITY

## Auckland Wants to Be the World's Most Livable City

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By CHRIS WRIGHT

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Times are tough for livability these days. "Since 2009 average liveability across the world has fallen by 0.7 percent, led by a 1.3 percent fall in the score for stability and safety", declares [The Economist Intelligence Unit's 2014 Liveability Report](#), with a hint of a doomsday scowl. War in the Ukraine and Syria has been a leading culprit of un-livability, along with the financial crisis in Greece. Average quality of life worldwide hovers at a 75.33 out of 100. That's a solid C. We can expect a parent-teacher conference soon, at that rate.

But who decides how “livable” a city is, and just how accurate can they possibly be? There are actually three big names in livability ratings: the aforementioned **EIU**, **Monocle** magazine and **Mercer**. They all use a variety of quantified criteria, weighted and scored; for example, the EIU scores multiple sections in the categories of Stability (weighted 25 percent), Healthcare (20 percent), Culture & Environment (25 percent), Education (10 percent) and Infrastructure (20 percent). There are obvious issues with quantifying these nebulous realities, be they as simple as personal judgement (why should healthcare matter for twice the amount of education, or ignore cost of living entirely?) or more complicated (as *The New York Times* has argued, “*The Economist* clearly equates livability with speaking English”; *Forbes* points out that there is but one truly cosmopolitan city — Tokyo, near the top of the lists).

These qualms can also be pointed at who the livability reports are aimed at: businesses and businesspeople, who use them to compute hardship allowances for job relocation. They also make for great headlines. Check out some of the “Best Places to Live in America” lists and you’ll get the gist. **Madison** sure looks *nice*, but who’s seriously considering packing up and moving to Wisconsin?

In spite of these qualms and the question of what these scores actually stand for, one city that’s made the top ten in 2014 is using its laurels as a catalyst for actual, tangible change.

That would be Auckland, New Zealand, which placed 10th in the EIU ratings, 12th in *Monocle*’s and 3rd overall in Mercer in 2014, after launching its “**Auckland Plan**” in 2012 with the explicit goal of moving to the top of livability ratings worldwide by 2040.

It stands to reason that they could top the list, whatever that may mean for residents and visitors. The city is already New Zealand’s biggest with a population of 1.4 million, over a quarter of the country’s citizens, dwarfing the capital of Wellington and its 200,000. Its location on the northern coastline of the North Island makes it both temperate and beautiful; its port is a major trade and commerce hub; it has five museums, five universities and a number of important music and film festivals throughout the year; 70 percent of its land is rural, but 90 percent of its citizens live in urban areas; stunning beaches, great food and world-class **coffee** are all within walking distance. If that’s not livable enough for you, you might be high maintenance.

## EIU’s Most Liveable Cities, 2014

### Best cities

Based on liveability index\*

Rank	City	Country
1	Melbourne	Australia
2	Vienna	Austria
3	Vancouver	Canada
4	Toronto	Canada
5	Calgary	Canada
5	Adelaide	Australia
7	Sydney	Australia
8	Helsinki	Finland
9	Perth	Australia
10	Auckland	New Zealand

\*Based on 30 factors spread across five areas: stability, infrastructure, education, health care and environment  
Source: Economist Intelligence Unit

[Economist.com/graphicdetail](http://economist.com/graphicdetail)

[See More From The EIU](#)

The Auckland plan, created by the Auckland City Council and the Auckland Unleashed summit of 500 “great minds” from the Auckland area, begins with a surprising tone, considering the city’s recent accolades: it identifies current problems and deficiencies. Housing development is lagging far behind population expansion, and since the financial crisis, Auckland’s per capita growth has been slower than New Zealand’s as a whole.

In one massive document, the plan puts those problems in its sights. At the forefront is catching up to the city’s fast growth, which will add an estimated 1 million residents by 2040. That means adding 330,000 to 400,000 housing buildings, bulking up infrastructure and creating a major railway link in the city centre while also decreasing waste (sending no trash to landfills by 2040) and maintaining a “compact city” that reins in urban sprawl. The plan declares a goal of 90 percent renewable energy sources by 2025 and 40 percent fewer greenhouse gasses by 2040. Mayor Len Brown called it a plan for the “environmental, economic, social, and cultural transformation” of the city. That might be political hyperbole, but the plan truly does reach for some soaring benchmarks.

Now it’s just a matter of implementing these enormous changes for the next 25 years. It’s going to be a difficult effort. Specific plans for funding are few and far between, and the city council will likely have to look to the private sector. Yet this remains a good place for any city to be in: considered one of the best places in the world, truly and not just quantitatively, and still reaching for massive improvements. You don’t have to take livability ratings at anything beyond face value to understand that the future is bright for New Zealand’s biggest city.