

11 Position last year: **9**
Melbourne

Melbourne is a bustling metropolis on track to become Australia’s largest city by 2030. Despite its booming population it has shunned some of the less charming hallmarks of global cities, namely chains and uninspiring megamalls. The result is a city that is refreshingly quirky in everything that it offers, from its boutique shopping, markets and food to its architecture.

Did we mention the world-class café culture? Melbourne has one of the highest concentrations of coffee roasters per capita in the world. This is also a city that embraces the outdoors. Its location on a bay means that there are plenty of beaches, while the surf of the Great Ocean Road is a few hours’ drive away. But the city is still grappling with how to maintain its high quality of life in the face of its rapidly growing population, rampant urban sprawl and climbing house prices. Faster, more reliable public transport that links the outer fringes and the airport to the CBD, better roads and safer city bike lanes would go a long way. — WH

Metrics:

Population: 170,000 in the city; 5 million in the metropolitan area.
Murders: 29.
Unemployment: 5%.
Average age of residents: 35.
Culture: 125 art galleries, 144 libraries and 22 cinemas.

12 Position last year: **11**
Stockholm

Stockholm is happening like never before. Look around from any vantage point along one of its waterfronts and the view will be dotted with cranes in all directions. New housing and infrastructure projects are humming along, including the overhaul of a major transit interchange at Slussen and a number of new metro lines.

The building boom is to address one of the city’s problems: a rapidly growing population. But in warmer months especially, Stockholm feels increasingly vibrant – global talent continues to arrive, lured by the city’s abundant nature and charming neighbourhoods.

An enviable work-life balance also feeds this growth, as companies can attract young families with the promise of flexible working hours and government protections for those needing to spend more time at home. All of that has been good for business, with an increasing number of successful start-ups and creative enterprises calling this city home, from Spotify to fintech app Tink, and more joining the ranks by the day. — LL

Metrics:

Population: 949,000 in the city; 2.3 million in the metropolitan area.
Murders: 28.
Unemployment: 5.9%.
Cost of a monthly travelcard: €80.
Electric-car charging points: 1,651.

13 Position last year: **13**
Sydney

Endlessly sunny and surrounded by sparkling ocean, there are few cities as picturesque as harbourside Sydney. But it’s not just good looks that appeal down under: crime is low, locals are friendly and the cuisine, a mish-mash of European and Asian, is exciting, with myriad alfresco bars and restaurants spilling onto pavements. This is the city to come to for an outdoor lifestyle: think early-morning surfing and swims at the beach straight after work.

And though Sydney’s Achilles heel is its public transport (this is a car city, first and foremost) the New South Wales state government is injecting AU\$14.4bn (€8.9bn) into new infrastructure, including a metro and light rail. Meanwhile key thoroughfares such as George Street – which connects transport hub Circular Quay with the city –

are being pedestrianised. Come night time, however, the city’s strict lockout laws remain a strangle on late-night revelry. — CSM

Metrics:

Population: 240,000 in the city; 5.7 million in the metropolitan area.
Murders: 37.
Unemployment: 3%.
Average age of residents: 30.
Parks: 400.

14 Position last year: **16**
Amsterdam

Amsterdam’s transformation from an international village to a thriving metropolis continues apace. Still small enough to comfortably get around by bike, the city offers world-class music, theatre and museums, as well as a continuously changing restaurant scene. The opening of the north-south metro line has finally linked up the rest of the city with the north. Meanwhile Amsterdam is increasingly well connected, both to the rest of the country and beyond: Schiphol Airport offers routes to 327 international destinations and a new direct train to London opened last year.

It’s no surprise that a growing number of international companies are choosing to settle here, many on the heels of the European Medicines Agency that moved here as a result of the Brexit vote. It is, after all, an easy place to call home: most Amsterdammers speak English and there is a healthy work-life balance. The revival of local football team Ajax as a European force is also giving the city a boost in civic pride. — FVT

Metrics:

Population: 863,000 in the city; 2.4 million in the metropolitan area.
Murders: 14.
Unemployment: 5%
Media: 8 national papers based in the city; 1 dedicated to Amsterdam.
Culture: 180 art galleries, 26 libraries, 21 cinemas.

15 Position last year: **15**
Vancouver

It has been a year of change in Vancouver. In October, Kennedy Stewart became the first independent mayor to be elected to city hall for more than 30 years. He may only be halfway through his first year in office but early signs that he’s tackling some of the city’s tougher problems are promising. Vancouver’s housing market has cooled and new sectors are reinvigorating its economy, from its celebrated, nascent technology hub to a growing number of independent firms producing modular housing, technical fabrics for Vancouver’s fine roster of outerwear and sports brands, and handsomely designed lighting fixtures.

Not all of the city’s challenges have been tackled, homelessness in particular. But the quality of life here remains high thanks to assets such as its proximity to British Columbia’s breathtaking natural landscape and its longstanding liberal approach to social issues, from same-sex marriage to immigration. — TLE

Metrics:

Population: 673,000 in the city; 2.6 million in the metropolitan area.
Murders: 15.
Unemployment: 4.4%.
Parks: 240.
Culture: 148 art galleries, 12 museums, 29 cinemas.

16 Position last year: **14**
Hong Kong

The ease of getting around efficiently and inexpensively at any time of day or night is what sets Hong Kong apart from its competitors: London and New York. Between speedy public transport and cheap but efficient taxis, zipping around the city is a breeze. And although Hong Kong may be known for its spectacular cityscape, locals zealously

guard public parks, the green lungs of the densely populated city. Luckily the Hong Kong government has put considerable effort into developing green corridors and recreational spaces. A recent success is Jordan Valley Park on the city’s Kowloon side.

Hong Kong continues to blossom in its arts and culture sector with more visual and performing artists passing through and more globally renowned galleries setting up permanent outposts in the city. That being said, the cost of renting an art space, or any space for that matter, is more expensive than ever. Residents may find that they are able to budget on food and transport but property prices are rising exponentially. — KTS

Metrics:

Population: 7.4 million.
Murders: 48.
Unemployment: 2.8%.
Parks: 26 major parks; more than 1,500 small parks and gardens.
Culture: 218 art galleries, 19 museums, 55 cinemas.

17 Position last year: **17**
Kyoto

It’s easy to be seduced by Kyoto’s beauty: old temples, manicured gardens, wooden townhouses and narrow back streets. Residents still live by old-fashioned rules of decorum and neighbourhood ties. But the city also has a modern side, with ambitious plans – and subsidies – to nurture start-ups and small manufacturing ventures into world-class businesses.

Mayor Daisaku Kadokawa has delivered on his promise to expand public daycare services for young families and has led successful citywide campaigns to reduce food waste and energy use. Kyoto is also stepping up efforts to protect its wooden townhouses, with rules that require developers to give city hall a chance to prevent historical buildings being razed. Tourism has lifted the economy but it has also been a curse.

There is overcrowding in the city centre and markets, forcing residents and chefs to abandon longtime relationships with retailers in the busiest districts. — KH

Metrics:

Population: 1.5 million in the city.
Murders: 8.
Unemployment: 2.3%.
Cost of a monthly travelcard: €120.
Culture: 140 art galleries, 200 museums and 20 libraries.

18 Position last year: **19**
Barcelona

The past four years have seen a massive shift in city hall’s priorities. Barcelona spends less time promoting itself as a global paragon and more energy on trying to reclaim the allure of its much-romanticised heyday. This noble yet arguably naïve mission has seen some progress. The city’s clampdown on Airbnb (first through hefty fines, now by sharing data with authorities to temper unregistered tourist accommodation) is a battle keenly watched by other cities. This year the city gained a subsidised dental service but lost its zoo (a phased plan will relocate animals from cruel enclosures to nature reserves).

However, emotional and ideological fissures connected to Catalanian secessionism have hampered progress. The failed bid for the European Medicines Agency is one example; the way a new tramline became a political lightning rod is another. One cause for celebration is the Glories redevelopment: the infernal intersection turned peaceful park is finally taking form. — LA

Metrics:

Population: 1.6 million in the city; 3.2 million in the metropolitan area.
Murders: 28.
Unemployment: 9.4%.
Parks: 96.
Culture: 57 museums, 41 libraries and 24 cinemas.

19 Position last year: 20

Paris

It hasn't been an easy year for the city of light. The past 12 months will probably be best remembered for the *gilets jaunes* wreaking havoc in the streets and the blaze that decimated Notre-Dame. But everyday life goes on unchanged in the French capital, and it's not a bad life either. Rain or shine, packed tables still spill out on to pavements outside bars and cafés, and in the summer months the banks of the Seine and Canal Saint-Martin teem with Parisians enjoying the sunset over a bottle of wine.

The city's charm is undeniable and, unlike many other European capitals that are overrun by chain stores, Paris maintains its unique character by protecting its many independent businesses through rent caps.

Preparations for the Olympic Games in 2024 have also prompted vast investment in the city's infrastructure. The Grand Paris Express will bring 200km of new metro lines, while architect Bjarke Ingels' Europa City promises a colossal, beautifully landscaped mixed-use development north of the centre. — HU

Metrics:
Population: 2.2 million in the city; 10.8 million in the metropolitan area.
Murders: 41.
Unemployment: 8.8%.
Parks: 421.
Media: 2 papers dedicated to the city.
Culture: 107 museums, 96 cinemas and 72 libraries.
Cost of a monthly travelcard: €75.20.
Electric-car charging options: 832.

20 Position last year: 18

Düsseldorf

Though Munich, Hamburg and Berlin often steal the spotlight, Düsseldorf has plenty of pluck if

you're looking for fine dining, a vibrant nightlife and world-class architecture. With reasonable living costs, a central European location and constantly improving international connections, the state capital of North Rhine-Westphalia is an attractive proposition; foreigners account for some 20 per cent of the population. Alas, those who are used to 24/7 shop-opening times are in for a bit of a shock on a Sunday; the city should rethink its opening times to serve an increasingly international populace.

Düsseldorf has consciously cultivated a friendly business environment: it is straightforward to set up shop here, whether you're in digital start-ups, telecoms or manufacturing, and there is a big pool of well-educated and qualified employees. Although people work hard they also play hard: the Altstadt (old town) is known as the "longest bar in the world" thanks to its main pub and club drag. Despite healthy growth, Düsseldorf has retained a convivial atmosphere and remains an easy-to-navigate, "be there in 10 minutes" kind of city. — SZ

Metrics:
Population: 640,000 in the city; 11.4 million in the metropolitan area.
Murders: 26.
Unemployment: 6.9%.
International destinations from airport: 179.
Culture: More than 100 galleries, 26 museums and 9 cinemas.
Average age of residents: 42.

21 Position last year: 23

Auckland

Auckland's had a good year. Recent restrictions on foreign ownership of property has levelled off, if not cooled, in an overheated market. Perhaps it's not enough to completely solve the city's affordable-housing conundrum but it's a start.

The airport's international departures hall has been given a much-needed overhaul and now

passengers have a direct motorway link to the city via a new tunnel, bypassing a lengthy journey through residential streets. Gearing up to host the 2021 America's Cup, Auckland's downtown waterfront is experiencing a multibillion-dollar makeover, with Commercial Bay – a NZ\$700m (€409m) retail and office complex – expected to open later this year.

Smarter hotel options are finally here, with this year's Park Hyatt opening and next year's The Hotel Britomart under way. While traffic remains an ongoing problem, the Auckland City Rail Link – a NZ\$4bn (€2.3bn) infrastructure project to be completed in 2024 – will help address this. Waiheke Island, just a 40-minute ferry ride from downtown Auckland, remains an ever popular getaway for locals, with a slew of new dining options dotted between the island's pristine beaches and picturesque vineyards. — AGL

Metrics:
Population: 54,620 in the city; 1.7 million in the metropolitan area.
Average ambulance response time: 8 minutes.
Unemployment: 4.4%.
Outdoor pools and beaches: 24 pools and 160 beaches.
Culture: 158 art galleries, 7 museums, 27 cinemas.

22 Position last year: 22

Fukuoka

Fukuoka has solidified a spot in our annual ranking with an agenda focused on improving residents' lives. This mid-sized city of 1.6 million residents – among the fastest-growing in Japan – has plans to add a new riverside area of cafés and bars and alfresco dining to its central park this summer; it's also getting communities involved in its flower-planting initiative. Young talent continues to head to Fukuoka for its excellent public transport, round-the-clock dining and bicycle-friendly streets.

Mayor Soichiro Takashima, who won a third term last year, is working

on making life easier for start-ups and is attempting to relax restrictions on visas for entrepreneurs from overseas (we'll be watching). He's spending on new nurseries and free childcare, and has thrown support behind marriage and family benefits for the city's LGBTQ community.

To cope with a record number of visitors and influx of businesses, Fukuoka has ambitious infrastructure upgrades planned: a new port extension for large cruise ships, a ¥40bn (€330m) waterfront redevelopment, an expanded international airport and dozens of new hotels and downtown office towers. — KH

Metrics:
Population: 1.6 million.
Murders: 9.
Unemployment: 2.9%.
Cost of a monthly travel card: €117.
Parks: 1,684.
Culture: 49 art galleries, 19 museums and 30 libraries.

23 Position last year: 24

Brisbane

Last year was a significant one for Queensland's subtropical capital. For close to a decade government, business leaders and residents have been aggressively agitating for change in the city and working to build Brisbane's brand. The effect of their labour has become apparent. Plans for major infrastructure projects were finalised – including a AU\$944m (€587m) metro and AU\$5.4bn (€3.3bn) under-river rail link with an additional three stations – while the airport's second runway steamed ahead and is nearing its 2020 completion date. The ninth instalment of the Queensland Art Gallery and Gallery of Modern Art's highly influential Asia Pacific Triennial exhibition welcomed record crowds.

Meanwhile, the city's hospitality scene continues to develop apace. Brisbane's sharpest shopping strip,

James Street, ushered in sleek dining spot and hotel The Calile, while riverside brewery and restaurant precinct Howard Smith Wharves opened to much fanfare. This striking increase in cracking amenities, combined with warm, sunny climes and the low cost of living (southern neighbours are catching on and migrating here), saw residents relax into their city's hard-earned good fortune. — MKA

Metrics:
Population: 1.2 million in the city; 2.4 million in the metropolitan area.
Murders: 9.
Unemployment: 5.5%.
Outdoor pools and beaches: More than 30.
Parks: 2,000 (including public parks).
Cost of a monthly travelcard: €95.

24 Position last year: 25

Oslo

Oslo continues to push an ambitious green agenda as the 2019 European Green Capital and has so far managed to balance CO2 cuts with rapid growth. It's also one of the healthiest cities in the world, with good air and water quality and plenty of parks and forests within easy reach.

The Norwegian capital scores highly when it comes to cities where you can set up a business with minimal red tape. As a result it is also fast becoming a thriving start-up hub for young entrepreneurs from all over the world, feeding future technology businesses, which are sorely needed to plug the gap as Norway's fossil-fuel industry gradually fades away.

Entertainment during those long near-Arctic summer nights keeps improving too: more than 150 new restaurants have opened in the past 12 months. For the outdoorsy types, more than 2,600km of cross-country ski tracks can be reached in less than 30 minutes on public transport. And the surprisingly warm summers still make a dip in the Oslo fjord a tantalising proposition. — LB

Metrics:
Population: 680,000 in the city; 1.6 million in the metropolitan area.
Murders: 7.
Unemployment: 2.7%.
Media: 8 national papers based in the city; 4 newspapers dedicated to Oslo.
Cost of a monthly travelcard: €77.50.
Culture: 55 museums, 23 libraries and 8 cinemas.

25 Position last year: 21

Singapore

Clean, green, prosperous and comfortably safe, Singapore has always been an attractive city. Tech investors find its regulatory framework supportive; culture lovers enjoy the healthy sprouting of independent bookshops and blossoming gallery scene. But Singapore's greatest virtue is in how it reinvents itself. Jewel Changi Airport, Jurong Lake Gardens and the upcoming Mandai Project are all boosting civic pride.

As land use on the tiny island intensifies, an impressive subterranean Singapore is being built. A deep-tunnel sewerage system is in the works, as are plans to locate reservoirs deeper underground, all while older residential estates are being upgraded. But continual improvement works in this dense city mean that residents are subject to incessant construction noise and dust. Policy attention needs to be given to the considerable health and social impacts of the pace of works and the need to balance urban renewal with the conservation of built heritage. — YX

Metrics:
Population: 5.6 million.
Murders: 9.
Unemployment: 2.1%.
Parks: 372.
Culture: 99 art galleries, 56 museums and 27 libraries.
Average ambulance response time: 11 minutes.