

TOP 10 MOST SUSTAINABLE CITIES IN THE WORLD



It is estimated that 70% of people will soon live in cities. The challenge for the large city centers is not providing shelter for more population but doing so under a sustainable model. Based on the social, environmental and economic aspects of cities (the People, Planet and Profit pillars) a Sustainable Cities Index (SCI) is compiled annually by a consultancy firm Arcadis. Tourism-Review.com presents to top sustainable cities around the world according to the ranking.

1. London, UK

A balance between social and economic development

The British capital stands out for its high score on the well-being of citizens (health, education, low crime rate), working life (low-income inequalities, working hours and dependency ratio), and urban living itself (transport accessibility and connectivity).

Additionally, its economic position allows the city to face future growth while offsetting challenges of affordability and possible congestion. Although the Planet pillar London's score is lower, it remains in the upper quartile thanks to its work with air quality and waste management which stands out next to other large cities.

2. Stockholm, Sweden

The greenest city in the world

The most important city in Sweden leads the ranking of environmental management thanks to its investment in sustainable infrastructure, low emissions, and good air quality. Both Stockholm and Frankfurt have successfully managed to combine economic development with demanding environmental standards, making the quality of life of their communities among the best in the world. As for the top 10 cities in the Planet pillar, what they have in common is significant green spaces, below-average pollution, and effective waste management. In addition, they have made larger investments in bicycle infrastructure than other cities.

3. Edinburgh, UK

Citizens first

While Stockholm bets on the environmental agenda, Edinburgh is more committed to the social one, where it leads the world rankings. The most decisive variables in the position of the People sub-index, in which there are major differences between cities, are the affordability of city life, access to public transport and income inequality.

The Scottish capital is ranked first in this sub-index due to a workforce with high educational and health levels, a low crime rate, and reasonable wage equality. According to the Arcadis' report, Edinburgh belongs to the cluster of 35 cities under the profile of "balanced innovators". They are

defined by having the necessary infrastructure to be a connected city (digital accessibility) without disruptive elements, which generates a citizen's experience of comfort and safety.

4. Singapore

Economy and employment capital

The island city-state enters the top five thanks to its undisputed leadership in the Profit pillar, in which it obtains a score followed by London and Hong Kong, in second and third places respectively. Ease of doing business, connectivity, and transport infrastructure are the three variables that these cities have in common. But additionally, Singapore stands out remarkably in employment, which in turn generates very high production levels. Also, Singapore, London, and Hong Kong get a very good score in digital connectivity and university technology research. In the long term, cities with strong income and investment flow can reinvent themselves faster than the rest, while sustaining their current performance.

5. Vienna, Austria

Smart and eco-friendly metropolis

The consulting firm Mercer already ranked it as the best city to live in its Quality of Life Survey, and UN-Habitat described it as the most prosperous city center in the City Prosperity Index of 2013. In addition to its cultural activity, and the economy based on science and technology, the City Council launched a program to transform the city into a smart city by 2050, with the goal of reducing the carbon footprint from 3.1 tons to 1 ton per person.

6. New York, USA

The best in the U.S.

Although large coastal cities in the United States, like New York, San Francisco, or Seattle are ranked in the top 20, most U.S. largest cities can be found only in the second half of the ranking. Since the trend is to have a more or less balanced score in each of the three pillars, these cities face serious sustainability challenges in environmental, economic and social aspects.

New York's grid system, as well as the London sewer or Copenhagen's green infrastructure, are examples of a long-term vision that has helped mitigating current and future city problems. Digital connectivity and investment in technology research are other strengths of New York, apart from its economic performance.

7. Madrid, Spain

Connectivity and commitment to people

The Spanish capital together with Edinburgh, Amsterdam, Barcelona, London, Hong Kong, and San Francisco, is part of the "balanced innovators" cluster and one of the most sustainable cities. The aspect where Madrid still struggles is the economic one, being ranked 49th in the Profit pillar mainly due to the low investment in university technology research, its unemployment rate, and the tourist exploitation, significantly below other large cities.

Efforts to improve traffic management and environmental pollution, as well as its green areas, rank

it 15th in the Planet sub-index, with large space for improvement in negative emission technologies, natural disaster monitoring, clean energy, infrastructure for bicycles, and green areas. Without a doubt, the strongest point of Madrid is the social one, in which it ranks 10th, especially thanks to the connectivity and affordability of city life, although there is room to improve in terms of demographics, public transport, education, cultural offerings, and work-life balance.

8. Vancouver, Canada

From industry to the environment

As a post-industrial city, Vancouver faces the challenge of adapting to digital innovation, as happens to other cities under the same category of the SCI report, such as Washington, Moscow, Los Angeles, Chicago, and Budapest. The growing dynamism of these cities also poses a challenge for community integration and work-life balance. Proof of this is the latest competition between several U.S. cities to house the second Amazon headquarters, with Crystal City (Arlington, Virginia) and Long Island City (Queens, New York City) being selected after announcing a split into two locations. On the environmental level, Vancouver stands out for its natural disaster monitoring and low pollution.

9. Barcelona, Spain

Tourism as an economic engine

With more university technology research than Madrid and greater use of tourism as an economic engine, Barcelona (47th) is two ranks above the Spanish capital in the Profit pillar, although its employment and economy are less developed.

On the social level, the Catalan capital, ranked 24th, stands out for its health and education, although it has room for improvement in connectivity and economic development. Its lowest score is in transport infrastructure. Finally, in the environmental aspect, it surpasses Madrid in drinking water and sanitation but falls below in air quality and green spaces, where it is ranked 22nd.

10. Tokyo, Japan

Leader in education

Tokyo, 10th among the most sustainable cities, stands out above all in the People pillar, with great challenges ahead in the Profit and Planet ones. Just below Madrid in social sustainability, Tokyo provides better education and greater cultural offerings, but worse public transport accessibility, and progressive aging of the population that is combined with a high density in city centers.

The lack of green spaces in the Japanese capital, the need to improve waste management, and the pending work on clean energy, negative emission technologies, and bicycle infrastructures rank it 63rd in the Planet sub-index. On the economical aspect, Tokyo is ranked 28th, with good transport and connectivity infrastructures, and reasonably high employment.

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