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From Supervisor Frenzen



<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/travel/destinations/north-america/united-states/happiest-cities-united-states-2017.html>

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# These Are the Happiest Cities in the United States

National Geographic Explorer and best-selling author Dan Buettner searched for the happiest Americans. Where he found them will surprise you.



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ographic Gallup Special Index—is best  
Check Out Our Top 25 With  
America

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By **George Stone**

Who are the happiest Americans? Ask this question anywhere from Montauk to Maui and you're bound to pique interest (you may even pick a fight). While fans of the film *Moana* might sing the lyrics "Happiness is where you are," for scientists studying the roots and fruits of happiness, location-specific qualities of place, community, and opportunity powerfully inform the way we feel about our lives.

National Geographic bestselling author Dan Buettner and Gallup's social scientists teamed up to develop an index that assesses measurable expressions of happiness and identifies where Americans are living their best lives. Designed by Gallup senior scientist Dan Witters, the study established 15 metrics—from eating healthy and learning something new every day to civic engagement, financial security, vacation time, and even dental checkups—that signal happiness. The National Geographic Gallup Special/Blue Zones Index draws on nearly 250,000 interviews conducted with adults from 2014 to 2015 in 190 metropolitan areas across the U.S.

The winner: Boulder, Colorado. Bolstered by a sense of community, access to nature, sustainable urban development and preservation policies, and perhaps even that clean mountain air, Boulderites overwhelmingly feel "active and productive every day," according to Buettner's research. Per capita, more people walk to work in Boulder than in any other city in the U.S.

satisfaction locals feel. Life is not always easy in the Rockies—stress is on the rise; on average, 49 percent of locals surveyed reported feeling stress—but the qualities that keep Boulder on top make this city America’s happiest.

National Geographic’s list of the 25 Happiest Places in the United States includes cities from Ann Arbor to Austin, San Diego to Charlottesville. At the bottom of the index (not included in our list) are America’s least-happy places, according to the study: Charleston, West Virginia; Fort Smith, Arkansas; and Hickory-Lenoir-Morganton, North Carolina. Research indicates that the variabilities of place play an important role in whether locals feel happy. In happier places, according to Buettner, locals smile and laugh more often, socialize several hours a day, have access to green spaces, and feel that they are making purposeful progress toward achieving life goals. For our index, it tracked factors that are statistically associated with doing well and feeling well; these include feeling secure, taking vacations, and having enough money to cover basic needs.

Buettner reports on the qualities that make Boulder a happy place in November’s National Geographic cover story. His article focuses on three strands of happiness—pleasure, pride, and purpose—that lead to a resilient sense of well-being in cities around the world, from Europe, to Asia, to Central America. His new book, *The Blue Zones of Happiness* advances his premise that improved environments lead to increased happiness.

A “happiness planner” by trade, Buettner is also a passionate traveler. His work unites his zeal for exploring new places and asking questions with his skill in statistical research and adroitness at weaving compelling stories. The same qualities of place that inform our list of the 25 Happiest Places in

locals tend to be hospitable places for visitors.

“There’s a high correlation between bikeability and happiness in a city. In Boulder you’re more likely to hear the whoosh of a cyclist than the shrill of a siren compared to places like Dallas, Tallahassee, or Los Angeles. Cities like Boulder question the unquestioned virtues of development,” says Buettner. “This benefits visitors, who can experience an emphasis on greenery, a high-quality culinary community, limited marketing onslaught and no billboards.”

Among the surprises Buettner turned up while drilling down into his place-based research: “There’s a strong correlation between quality of water and happiness. And places where people frequent their dentists report being more satisfied with their lives,” he says.

The greater message, for locals and travelers alike, is that happiness doesn’t just happen. “There’s a genesis to it. Enlightened leaders make conscious decisions to favor quality of life over economic development or political expediency,” Buettner notes.

For visitors eager to take their own measure of America’s happiest places, Buettner’s advice is simple: linger longer, stay in a B&B, and walk a lot (though perhaps not to the dentist’s office). “My findings indicate that if you want to get happy, don’t try to change your belief system. Change your environment,” Buettner says. A call to action for travelers everywhere.

*[Read the November cover story](#) and join the conversation on the world’s happiest places by visiting [#QuestForHappiness](#).*