

Europe's

BEST CITIES

A RANKING OF THE CONTINENT'S MOST ATTRACTIVE METROPOLITAN AREAS

2023

Where to live, work
invest and visit in a
new global reality

How we chose Europe's Best Cities in 2023 — 05

All Top 100 cities profiled — 07

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WORLDBESTCITIES.COM

A TENEMENT HOUSE IN THE OLD TOWN OF BARCELONA



We Are Place Makers

Resonance is a leading global advisor on placemaking, branding and marketing for the world's best cities, districts, developments and destinations.

WELCOME TO EUROPE'S BEST CITIES IN 2023

Resonance Consultancy is building the most comprehensive global and regional city rankings on the planet. Here's why this matters now more than ever as the world adapts to a new post-pandemic reality.



As leading advisers in tourism, real estate and economic development for more than 15 years, our team at Resonance has conducted extensive research on the rise of cities, the key trends propelling their growth and the factors that shape our perception of urban centres as desirable places to live, visit and invest. We are excited to apply our trusted ranking methodology to European cities exclusively in this report.

As our cities emerge from the pandemic that upended our perception of what we consider to be desirable in a place to live, work or play, we are seeing growing alignment in the way citizens, corporations and travellers choose cities to visit, live or invest in. Despite what you may have read during the pandemic about the decline of cities, urban centres remain as desirable as ever. What's changing is how we live and work within them. Geopolitical pressure for countries and corporations to reshore their manufacturing and operations—from microchip production to agriculture—are creating new economic opportunities, while remote work and the emergent “15-minute city” obsession among local governments is changing where consumption and production occurs within the city. New initiatives range from the humble (Strasbourg's new Solidarity Concierge, a one-stop post office, local resource centre, laundry and shoe repair for its citizens) to the monumental (the REPowerEU plan for a made-in-Europe technology solution to decarbonize).

Additionally, the ability to launch a startup anywhere that entrepreneurship strikes means enlightened cities, no matter how “secondary,” can inspire, incubate and develop homegrown talent like never before. And with that newfound freedom, many people are choosing to move to smaller—or more affordable, or more interesting—cities, taking their economic output and consumption with them.

We see it in Belfast's Titanic Quarter, one of Europe's largest urban waterfront regeneration projects, as well as the city's blazing pace of affordable housing construction.

In fact, many cities have used the pandemic pause to position themselves as ever more welcoming destinations—for tourism, for much-needed talent and for risk-averse global capital seeking new opportunities in places that have done the work to build in resilience for a changed world.

European cities are also strengthening that local resiliency with regional collaboration, seen nowhere more significantly than in the buildout of the continent's rail connections.

Overnight routes have launched in 2023 and will continue to expand. The largest infrastructure project in the Baltics in more than a century is the Rail Baltica high-speed railway, which will connect Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland with the rest of Europe by 2026. According to fDi Intelligence, we are in the era of European megaprojects, much of it focused on cities. In 2022 the continent registered an all-time peak of projects costing more than \$1 billion, at 47. Europe is also the fastest-growing tourism destination post-pandemic, according to the latest data from the United Nations World Tourism Organization: the continent hoovered up 68% of the world's 477 million international arrivals between Q1 and Q3 of 2022. That represents an astonishing 81% of tourist arrivals pre-pandemic.

Despite the recovery, urban populations across the world are dealing with fresh crises, both economic and humanitarian, and Europe is no exception. Russia's invasion of Ukraine has also scarred this year's rankings. In our view, no city can be a “Best City” that is part of a country that is taking unprovoked action against another, and we have disqualified Moscow, St. Petersburg and all other Russian cities from this year's report.

As we emerge from the depths of the pandemic, there's never been a bigger opportunity for cities to act on their ambitions and to do right by their citizens—current and future. The data we collect to produce these rankings will continue to track and monitor this pivotal transformation every step of the way, identifying the Best Cities to live, work and visit, now and in the years to come.

A stylized, handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Chris Fair'.

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HOW WE CHOSE EUROPE'S BEST CITIES IN 2023: THE METHODOLOGY

Resonance Consultancy ranks global cities (principal cities of metropolitan areas with populations of more than 500,000) by using a combination of statistical performance and qualitative evaluations by locals and visitors in 24 areas grouped into six core categories. Principal cities are defined as the largest city in each metropolitan statistical area. This year, we disqualified Moscow, St. Petersburg and all Russian cities from our list due to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Our population numbers are sourced from Eurostat and Demographia's latest available data.

THE SIX CORE CATEGORIES

Pc PLACE

Pd PRODUCT

Pg PROGRAMMING

Po PEOPLE

Ps PROSPERITY

Pm PROMOTION



Pc PLACE

Our most layered category quantifies a city's physical sense of place. To score a city within our Place category, we evaluate the perceived quality of its natural and built environments. From how walkable and bike-friendly it is to how well its parks and landmarks are reviewed, several readily measurable, oft-cited factors influence our perceptions.

Walk Score A city's ranking on Walk Score (Walkscore.com)

Biking Cycling kilometres in a city per 100,000 residents (Bikemap.net)

Sights & Landmarks Number of quality points of interest, neighbourhoods and landmarks recommended by locals and visitors (Tripadvisor.com)

Outdoors Number of quality parks and outdoor activities recommended by locals and visitors (Tripadvisor.com)



Pd PRODUCT

This is a ranking of the "hardware" of a city—often the most difficult metric for cities to get right. Our product category studies a city's key institutions, attractions and infrastructure. A city's infrastructure and institutions shape its identity via the quantity, quality and reputation of these "products." Expensive and difficult to develop and maintain, exceptional, recognisable products are often found only in large, cosmopolitan cities.

Airport Connectivity Number of direct destinations served by the city's airports (Google Flights, FlightConnections.com and FlightsFrom.com)

Convention Center Size of the largest convention centre (10Times.com)

Museums Number of quality museums and arts institutions recommended by locals and visitors (Tripadvisor.com)

University Score of the top local university (QS World University Rankings)



Pg PROGRAMMING

This category measures the experiential pillars of a great visit: food, shows, shopping and nightlife. If our Product category is the “hardware” of cities and destinations, the mosaic of cultural programming and lifestyle experiences they offer is the “software” that makes them run.

Culture Number of quality performing arts and cultural experiences recommended by locals and visitors (Tripadvisor.com)

Nightlife Number of quality nightlife experiences recommended by locals and visitors (Tripadvisor.com)

Restaurants Number of quality restaurants and culinary experiences recommended by locals and visitors (Tripadvisor.com)

Shopping Number of quality shopping experiences recommended by locals and visitors (Tripadvisor.com)

Family-Friendly Activities Number of quality family-friendly activities recommended by locals and visitors (Tripadvisor.com)



Po PEOPLE

The more diverse a city’s population, the more it produces global ideas... on a local scale. Human capital is often a city’s most valuable resource and, for many cities, is increasingly in short supply. To evaluate the relative strength of human capital from one city to the next, we look at both the educational attainment level of the city’s population and the percentage of people participating in the labour force.

Labour Force Participation The percentage of citizens participating in a city’s labour force (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development)

Educational Attainment Percentage of the population with a bachelor’s degree or higher (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development)

Foreign-Born Residents Share of the city’s population born outside of the country in which they currently reside (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development)



Ps PROSPERITY

A well-paid, economically secure citizenry facilitates stewardship and innovation. In general, beliefs about the wealth and prosperity of a city are shaped by statistics such as the income of citizens, the standard of living and the presence or absence of large, recognisable corporations—despite the fact that startups and innovation increasingly drive a city’s development and economic growth.

Global 500 Number of Fortune Global 500 corporate headquarters (Fortune.com/global500)

Disposable Household Income A city’s residents’ disposable household income (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development)

Poverty Rate A measure of citizens living below their city’s national poverty rate (Eurostat)



Pm PROMOTION

A city’s ability to tell its story (and help others do the same) depends on how it incentivises and rewards the sharing of experiences by locals and visitors. The number and frequency of media coverage, online articles, references and place-based recommendations influence our perception of cities, whether the news is good or bad. Today, residents, businesses and visitors promote a city to the world more than city marketers or chambers of commerce. Resonance ranks a city’s Promotion performance based on the number of stories, references and recommendations shared online about that city.

Facebook Check-ins Number of Facebook check-ins (Facebook.com)

Google Search Number of Google search results (Google.com)

Tripadvisor Reviews Number of Tripadvisor reviews (Tripadvisor.com)

Instagram Hashtags Number of Instagram hashtags (Instagram.com)

Google Trends Popularity on Google Trends in the past 12 months (Trends.Google.com)



Europe's

TOP 100 CITY PROFILES

Europe's cities are the engines of their regional, national and, increasingly, global economy. For centuries, they've been badges of human ingenuity.

Yes, they've been hobbled over the past three years, exposing the long-ignored foundational and institutional problems that manifested on their streets and in their hospitals. But they're also leading—like they always have—the recovery and future-defining next stages of our innovation, livability and sustainability.

Given the new rules of post-pandemic migration, the rise of remote work and the never-ending search for housing affordability, more cities are catching the imagination of global talent more frequently, with urban wealth and vibrancy created in more places than ever before. Europe's urban citizens are gathering again, once more colliding and creating the culture, wealth and energy that defines the zeitgeist and path forward for their countries, regions and the planet. The 100 cities that we profile over the next 50 pages are, in each of their distinct ways, at the heart of that renewal in 2023.



KING'S CROSS AND ST. PANCRAS INTERNATIONAL

POPULATION

METRO 11,120,000

HIGHLIGHTS

1 RESTAURANTS

1 MUSEUMS



PEDESTRIAN-FRIENDLY VILLIERS STREET

1 LONDON UNITED KINGDOM

As the “capital of capitals” (both in Europe and globally) deftly negotiates the uncharted, perilous terrain of a post-Brexit and pandemic world, London reigns as Europe’s best city.

London is back. Despite crippling Covid lockdowns and economic devastation. Despite Brexit. Despite a war in Europe. The city is more indomitable than ever (much more on that in a bit). But given the year the city has had, have citizens even noticed?

Just consider last summer’s firehose alone: the Queen’s Platinum Jubilee, Royal Ascot, RHS Chelsea Flower Show, Wimbledon, Boris’s resignation and, in the worst kind of end to the summer, the Queen’s death and weeks of mourning.

Then the fall brought chaotic drama to 10 Downing Street that finally calmed down with Rishi Sunak becoming prime minister in late October.

Of course the eyes of the world were fixed on London more than any other place throughout all the tumult—save for maybe Kyiv—reminding everyone that London is spectacular and it’s been a really long while since they visited. Not that the city’s promotion engine was waning. London still tops our Promotion category, coming out in front for Insta hashtags, Facebook (or is it Meta?) check-ins and Tripadvisor reviews.

Fortunately the city is almost back to pre-pandemic capacity, if the Tube is any indication. The London Underground Night Tube reopened last summer with the city’s other lines mostly up and running as they were before Covid. There are even new metro stops as part of the transformational Elizabeth line buildout, with trains now running



directly from Reading and Heathrow to Abbey Wood and from Shenfield to Paddington. The brand-new Bond Street Elizabeth line station, at the heart of London's West End, also opened late last year. Returning transit aficionados won't believe the direct journeys now possible across the city. Just as well, given the need to accommodate all the tourists: London ranked third on the planet (and tops in Europe) for cities with the biggest international travellers' spend in 2022, with \$16.07 billion, almost tied for second with Doha. (Dubai was the runaway winner.) Pedestrians are also excited by the 2025 opening of the Camden Highline, the 1.2-kilometre greenway just north of Central London that will transform an unused train track into an elevated path similar to the famous urban landmark in New York.

Speaking of attracting people, the hand-wringing about the flight of talent and capital due to the pall of Brexit (and the follow-up spectre of an airborne pandemic), while warranted, now seems excessive. London's resilience has been buoyed by a sinking currency that has attracted investment and, of course, previously priced-out tourists. And new residents. New wealthy residents who can now afford to check off a big item on the multi-millionaire bucket

list: property in the best city on the planet. (London also topped Resonance Consultancy's World's Best Cities ranking in November.)

An astonishing 61 luxury London properties—each worth US\$11.5 million or more—were sold in the first six months of 2022. That's the highest number in a decade.

Despite the rest of the U.K. sinking into the steepest property price slump since the 2008 financial crisis as a result of inflation-fighting interest rate hikes, London's luxury residences are riding high. In Mayfair and St James's in December and January alone, 15

properties valued at £5 million or higher were sold—63% higher than the pre-pandemic average, according to research network LonRes.

The highest-profile new residents span the globally super-rich, from Middle Eastern buying activity hitting a four-year high in the second half of 2022 to the arrival of tech royalty. A case in point is Instagram CEO Adam Mosseri, who may have come for the most #1 rankings of any city in our Top 100—from Culture to Nightlife—but who stayed for another of London's assets: some of the best-educated citizenry on the planet (#5) and the most global (the city tops our Foreign-Born subcategory). And available at a relative discount to Silicon Valley or New York—that much is confirmed by salary site Glassdoor, which estimates the salary of the average Meta software engineer in London at just over \$102,000 versus \$169,000 in San Francisco. The tech giant is in the process of building its largest global engineering base in two offices in London's King's Cross neighbourhood. The first, at 11-21 Canal Reach, opened in early 2022 after a three-year build designed by Bennetts Associates with interiors by TP Bennett based on a concept design by Gehry Partners. A second building opened a few months later to bring the new office space to almost 40,000 square metres. Plus, of course, a 3,900-square-metre rooftop park for what will likely be almost 10,000 employees in a few years.

Another reason for Meta's entrenchment? Mortal enemy TikTok has prioritised London for years and started a 15-year lease on an entire office block at the Farringdon Crossrail station last year.



SKY GARDEN, LONDON'S HIGHEST PUBLIC GARDEN



That Google is set to open their 11-storey London HQ for 7,000 staff in 2024 between King's Cross station and the King's Boulevard has been almost lost in the torrent of investment and construction. No wonder the city trails only Paris for Global 500 head offices on the continent.

These seismic moves have dislodged the pandemic blockage for global investment into London. According to fDi Markets, the *Financial Times'* foreign investment tracker, London has pulled in the most foreign direct investments into tech from international companies since 2018, ahead of New York, Singapore and Dubai.

Of course none of this happens without the sustained facilitation of London & Partners, London's official publicity arm, and the economic development organisation that works to offer financial perks for all that relocation.

Recent tax incentives have included the lowest corporate tax rate among G7 countries and a cornucopia of research and development tax credits.

A recent report from real estate firm Cushman & Wakefield illustrated the run

on London: of the 398 Central London leasing transactions over 450 square metres in 2021, 59 were new businesses setting up for the first time or those relocating from outside London—the highest number recorded since tracking began in 2013.

And another, more disturbing metric of tech and foreign investment into the city? An electricity shortage, specifically pressure on the grid in West London, made worse by energy-sucking data centres being built along the M4 corridor in the past few years. According to the *Financial Times*, "major new applicants to the distribution network ... including housing developments, commercial premises and industrial activities will have to wait several years to receive new electricity connections."

If all those newcomers can't cook at home, they came to the right place, especially these days, when the culinary industry is being reborn after dozens of the city's most iconic restaurants shuttered over the pandemic. The city with the #1-ranked restaurants in Europe is buzzing again with big-name openings like Dubai-based izakaya-style restaurant Kinoya in Harrods.



BATTERSEA POWER STATION SEEN FROM THE NORTH SIDE OF THE RIVER THAMES

There are hundreds of other rooms soon joining this increasingly daring culinary destination serving—and welcoming—the world once more. Fortunately for them, dozens of newly opened and equally daring hotels await, none more exciting than the urban reimagining of the Art'otel, with its 164 art-inspired rooms on the top levels of the just-reopened Battersea Power Station, a mid-1900s husk that today is stuffed with shops, restaurants, cinemas and theatre. Or the OWO Raffles in the Old War Office Building in Whitehall—it's the first time the neo-Baroque building, used by the Ministry of Defence until the 1960s, will open to the public.



FAMILY SELFIE TIME IN FRONT OF THE ARC DE TRIOMPHE DE L'ÉTOILE

POPULATION

METRO 11,027,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 1 SIGHTS & LANDMARKS
- 1 SHOPPING



THE EIFFEL TOWER

2 PARIS FRANCE

Paris attacked the pandemic not only with its doctors and health-care workers, but also with its urban planners. Just in time to welcome the world for the 2024 Summer Olympics.

For all the talk of learning from the pandemic, only one European capital appears to be going all-in on the hard lessons it taught and their application to molecular urban change.

While the face of Paris's pandemic evolution is Mayor Anne Hidalgo and her aggressive empowerment of self-propelled mobility—from a city-wide speed limit of 30 km/h introduced in 2021 to the obsessive addition of bike paths, with the promise of 700 kilometres reaching across most arrondissements

by 2026—it's the citizenry's embrace of this boldness that is changing the city's fabric for good.

While the city has been wracked by unemployment and economic calamity since 2020 (Paris, while much improved from 2021, still ranks #27 in our Poverty Rate subcategory that tracks residents living under the national poverty line), the walkable city ambition has aligned with the need for natural therapy and outdoor social distancing.

Of course, being able to enjoy a city ranked best in Europe in our Sights & Landmarks subcategory, as well as #2 in our Museums subcategory (the city has well over 100), has a tendency to distract one from the perils of the modern world.

Almost as soon as the pandemic started, Parisians poured out of their close quarters onto the iconic Rue de Rivoli, the famed artery that intersects the



heart of the capital, when it became off-limits to cars. Cars were also banned from the banks of the River Seine and pretty much all of the other world-favourite spots in this city, where, surreally, flâneurs found themselves able to take a deep breath of air without a hint of exhaust while actually hearing birdsong in what many say felt like a walk back in time.

Especially the fact that there was nary a selfie stick or sudden-stopping tourist to run into.

All that has changed, of course, with France's removal of health measures in late 2021 and tourism rushing back into the de-motorised streets, injecting much-needed revenues and, in some cases, exceeding pre-pandemic levels, according to government estimates. Almost three years without Paris certainly drove the voraciousness, but so did the euro being on par with the U.S. dollar over the past year.

According to French government estimates, tourists actually spent 10% more

in France this past summer than they did in 2019, which itself was one of the highest tourism-spending years on record. Not surprisingly, the single biggest beneficiary was the City of Light.

In fact, Paris has just been crowned the world's most powerful tourist destination city for 2022 by the World Travel & Tourism Council, with the city's travel and tourism industry worth \$35.6 billion last year. And it's projected to grow to \$49 billion by 2032.

Good thing Paris-Charles de Gaulle Airport used the past three years of lower volume to invest €250 million into a renovation of Terminal 1. Just reopened, it now has a 36,000-square-metre junction building and a central lobby full of the latest tech to improve the traveller experience.

Rail access and infrastructure is also unprecedented. A seven-hour direct Berlin to Paris TGV line launches next year, with more ambitious directs like the Venice to Paris Midnight Trains coming in 2025.

No matter how they arrive, what Paris visitors new and returning find is a city that has codified pedestrianism and alfresco living.



THE LUXEMBOURG GARDENS IN PARIS



To ensure that cars didn't take back control of Paris streets as pandemic urban pilot projects waned—as was the case in many other cities—Mayor Hidalgo legislated that the 60,000 parking spots loaned to restaurants for outdoor seating simply remained as that outdoor seating. The same went for closing off lesser-driven streets entirely for public walking and seating for local businesses in need of additional outdoor space.



MONTMARTRE DISTRICT HAS LOST NONE OF ITS VILLAGE ATMOSPHERE

Nowhere is the transformation more dramatic than along the Seine in the heart of Paris's tourist district, near Notre-Dame Cathedral and city hall itself. With the reduced car traffic, this is now Paris's town square (in a city with dozens of historic spots worthy of the honour). The riverside promenade hosted thousands night after night, even after Paris's Right Bank summer event wrapped up. The Paris Plages urban beach initiative welcomes picnicking and other low-cost access to a city long criticised as pricey and exclusive.

And speaking of Notre-Dame, its reopening in 2024 aligns with what will be a vital year for Paris, when it also hosts the Olympic Summer Games, with many events integrated right into the revered urban fabric. And nothing would go further to demonstrate the city's efficacy in achieving a cleaner, healthier Paris than being able to host swimming events for athletes and the general public post-Games. After wild Atlantic salmon first returned to the Seine 14 years ago, it is today home to more than 30 species of fish, like trout, perch and

eel. Considering Paris's plan to hold the 2024 opening ceremonies not in a stadium but on stages that will float down its sacred river, nursing it back to health would be incredibly poetic, even in a town that invented poetic gestures. Those Paris heatwaves would certainly become more tolerable.

The Champs-Élysées is next on the city leadership's list, set to be transformed for the Games into a massive garden, with vehicle access cut in half and millions of euros invested in pedestrian-focused amenities.

The flood of new and renovated hotels in the city is also doubling down on coveted, elevated perches from which to meditate on the iconic views. The new Kimpton St Honoré and Hôtel Rochechouart are both topped by outdoor terraces, while the just-opened and Philippe Starck-designed Too Hôtel that soars above the city higher than any other is crowned with a giant, 350-square-metre glass cube with a bar and restaurant that serves up a view worthy of this enchanting *cité*.



A SIGHTSEEING CRUISE ALONG THE CANAL

POPULATION

METRO 1,157,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 5 AIRPORT CONNECTIVITY
- 7 MUSEUMS



THE RAI CONVENTION CENTRE

3 AMSTERDAM NETHERLANDS

The small but mighty Netherlands capital has caught the continent's imagination, led by visionary Mayor Femke Halsema (literally visionary: she's also a filmmaker), the first non-interim female mayor in the city's history.

Mayor Halsema's administration's practical stewardship of a place (and citizens) often abandoned to the tourist euro is coauthoring a future of accountability by everyone who calls the magnetic Dutch capital home. Take last year's approach to a refugee accommodation crisis that led to hundreds of unhoused migrants, many fleeing Russia's invasion of Ukraine, sleeping outside the city's overflowing resource

centres: accommodate more than 1,000 on a moored cruise ship for six months, buying vital time to find other arrangements. Not surprisingly, this care for others and willingness for locals to do the work is represented by the city's tied #27 ranking in our Poverty Rate subcategory.

The sometimes out-of-control nightlife (ranked #8 among European cities) that the city was known and often marketed for—despite the attendant human trafficking—was another opportunity to educate frustrated but powerless citizens, who were invited to workshops and given copies of a free book exploring the city's role in the organisation and management of the global slave trade from a local perspective and what they could do to help the fight. And the city is fighting, going so far as to move the red-light district out of the famed De Wallen neighbourhood to the outskirts of Amsterdam while banning non-residents



from cannabis cafés and ditching tours that glorify the city's baser side. Things escalated this spring, with the city banning all smoking of cannabis in public as of May 2023, and launching a "stay away" campaign targeting tourists seeking drugs, alcohol and sex.

The plan is for restaurants and bars to close by 2 a.m. on Fridays and Saturdays and to allow no new visitors into the old city district after 1 a.m.

Stepping in for vice are tours and programmes focusing on the city's enviable livability and Dutch history. And getting tourists (who numbered 22 million in 2019) away from the city centre and out to the #6-ranked shopping and #7-ranked museums that pepper the city.

After all, Amsterdam ranked second only to London among European cities for biggest international travellers' spend in 2022, at \$13.59 billion. And it is in the top five globally.

One district in particular is Amsterdam-Noord, accessible via a free five-minute ferry from Central Station, the city's main transport hub.

Noord has become a sort of second downtown, with factories that once produced cargo ships today housing daring kitchens, some of Europe's coolest galleries and hungry tech startups eager to draw talent with a buzzy address. The proximity to a smouldering nightlife that

doesn't infringe on sleeping families helps, too. It's not like the district has nowhere to sleep: the new Sir Adam Hotel, occupying the first eight floors of the landmark A'DAM Tower, has access to the city's highest observation deck to really wake up groggy guests.

The city is also embracing corporate Brexit refugees, who are setting up shop after leaving London, drawn by new overnight rail connections—for which Amsterdam is a growing hub—and air connectivity (#5).

Want proof that Amsterdam's business clout is soaring? The city's stock

exchange, called Euronext, recently overtook the London Stock Exchange to become Europe's biggest trading venue.

All of this is creating a looming housing crisis, which is why Mayor Halsema and other city leaders are aiming to get out ahead of it with the Haven-Stad (Port City) residential neighbourhood that will eventually see up to 70,000 homes imagined as "a metropolitan mixed-use area." Unsurprisingly, incumbent pillars of industry already using the area don't share the vision.

Another new residential initiative announced earlier this year plans to build an entire neighbourhood out of wood, a renewable resource that local leaders hope will help their goal of reducing building emissions. It's also a nod to Dutch ingenuity from hundreds of years back, when the city was building largely wood structures. Named Mandela Buurt (meaning "Mandela neighbourhood" after the nearby Nelson Mandela Park), the district, located in a relatively low-income area south of the city centre, will break ground in 2025 if everything goes to plan.

Buildout will feature 10 new apartment blocks, local amenities and even an elementary school. More than 2,100 residents are projected to live in the 700 new apartments, 80% of which will be offered as affordable or public housing at below-market rents and prioritised for citizens who have called the area home for six years or more.



THE RIJKSMUSEUM IS DEDICATED TO DUTCH ARTS AND HISTORY

POPULATION

METRO 4,735,000

HIGHLIGHTS

2 NIGHTLIFE

3 OUTDOORS

The defiant Catalan capital is as coveted as ever. The difference post-pandemic? It has taken a breath and is welcoming the world on its own terms.

Barcelona is an almost ideal European city, one with near-perfect weather year-round, five kilometres of beaches within city limits, iconic parks, striking architecture and colourful neighbourhoods that march to their own beat—artistic, sophisticated, bohemian. No wonder it ranks #8 in our Place category, which measures both the natural and built environments of a city, powered by its #3 finish in our Outdoors subcategory. Can you blame the 12 million annual tourists who flocked here pre-pandemic, more than doubling the city's population?

Barcelona responded with some of the strictest vacation rental restrictions anywhere, aimed at controlling the effects of runaway tourism—like real estate investors who snatch up apartments only to rent them on Airbnb, depleting an already limited supply. The city also elected Mayor Ada Colau, the first woman to hold the role, on a Barcelona-for-citizens platform. Ultimately the pandemic took care of “the tourist problem,” with devastating results. Local sources estimate that almost 40% of the shuttered bars and restaurants may never reopen. For a city with the second-best nightlife in Europe (trailing only London), this has been catastrophic.

The tide of tourists is once again washing over the city and its increasingly self-propelled, non-vehicular infrastructure. Mayor Colau has delivered on her promise

4 BARCELONA SPAIN

CASA MILA (LA PEDRERA) HOUSE BY ANTONIO GAUDI



to build 200+ kilometres of bike lanes, with another 50 to be completed this year. Given its dismal ranking in our Biking subcategory (#123), there's still lots of room for improvement. The city has also moved forward with aggressive car traffic restrictions as part of the mayor's superblock initiative, replacing parking and roads with playgrounds and public seating.

As of this year, citizens who choose to get rid of an older and less efficient car don't just pocket the cash from the sale, but also a free transit pass valid for three years, courtesy of Barcelona's transit agency.

See the streetscape future for yourself at Passeig de Sant Joan, recently named one of the world's best streets by Time Out. Sant Joan is one of Spain's first green corridors, designed for self-propelled mobility and exploration with its bicycle lanes, expansive sidewalks, greenery and sprawling outdoor seating. Extra bonus: it's also home to the city's beloved food market, Mercat de l'Abaceria Central (at least until it moves into more permanent digs later this decade).

That top 3 Outdoors ranking should move even higher after this renewal. And the ability to get to the city's #8-ranked Sights & Landmarks by bike or foot will also help visitors discover more of its streets. And those are reopening, too. The iconic La Rambla boulevard is also in the midst of

ambitious renos to make it more walkable with fewer cars while elevating the area's architecture and art heritage—all culminating with the reopening of the stunning 17th-century Teatre Principal next year. The Sagrada Família is also moving towards its glacial completion, with the towers of John and Matthew expected to be open by this Christmas.

Business is also accelerating, with local investment promotions agency Barcelona and Partners reporting more than 2,000 startups in the city, a 6.3% increase from 2021. Barcelona attracted €1.6 billion in startup investment in 2022, according to Catalonia Startup Hub. Access is facilitated by Spain's official launch of a digital nomad visa in February, requiring that applicants pull in a minimum annual income of \$33,000. Additionally, the city's “Workation” programme supports digital nomads looking to work remotely from Barcelona. The city's tech ecosystem will only heat up as Intel and the Barcelona Supercomputing Center open their massive microchip design laboratory.

Meanwhile, the city is doubling down on its top 5 Promotion ranking (including #4 in each of our Instagram Hashtags, Facebook Check-ins, and Tripadvisor Reviews subcategories) by launching an interactive installation called *Plaça de Barcelona* across European cities, including virtual reality experiences of this sensory city.

POPULATION

METRO 1,369,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 2 DISPOSABLE HOUSEHOLD INCOME
- 3 UNIVERSITY

Often ranking among the world's most liveable cities, Zürich is exactly the kind of place you'd want to call home: efficient, clean, educated and safe.

Switzerland's financial centre and largest metropolis is a magnet for foreigners who, along with multilingual Swiss nationals, enjoy one of the world's highest standards of living—the city ranks #2 on the continent in our Disposable Household Income subcategory (trailing only fellow Swiss city Bern), and #3 for Fortune Global 500 headquarters (trailing only Paris and London), with major European players like Migros and UBS AG based here. Given the city's emergence post-pandemic, it's no wonder unemployment has plummeted to under 3%, meaning the city is today the second most prosperous on the continent based on our data.

Zürich also ranks #3 in our vital People category, which includes the Educational Attainment (#7) and Labour Force Participation (#5) subcategories. Other data also lauds the city: Zürich ranked third globally—and first in Europe—in Insead Business School's latest Global City Talent Competitiveness Index. ETH Zürich (or Swiss Federal Institute of Technology) trails only the University of Oxford and Imperial College London in our ranking and acts as a vital and reliable pipeline for the city and nation's envied economic development advantage.

All that talent is getting on corporate site selector radars, as evidenced by Microsoft's opening of a new technology centre at the Zürich Airport to "deliver

5 ZÜRICH SWITZERLAND

immersive industry experiences and deep technical engagement focused on business outcomes to customers," according to the company. With its almost surgical quality of life and affluence, Zürich may seem like a bourgeois and reserved kind of place for the uninitiated, but under the buttoned-down oxford you'll find a thriving arts landscape, an adventurous restaurant scene (including Bridge, a soulful market and food hall with local purveyors) and plenty of vintage finds that won't break the (Swiss) bank account. Like other visionary cities, Zürich has allowed its restaurants to keep their expanded, pandemic outdoor spaces for good. Combined with a 30km/h speed limit on many local roads, strolling the city has never been more interesting.

An increasingly adventurous restaurant scene is cooking here as well (ranked #39 but sure to improve in the coming years), especially in Zürich-West, the once industrial area that produced ships and motors but today crafts everything from elevated street food to Michelin-level cuisine that will make you forget all about the cheese-and-chocolate clichés you arrived with. Insider tip: try the pumpkin gnocchi with celeriac and forest herbs

at the Michelin-starred yet approachable Maison Manesse. Not hungry? Then hit up Geroldstrasse, an edgy street lined with galleries, art studios and recycled furniture shops, including Walter, which stocks everything from Hermes typewriters to metal file cabinets, retro vases and leather accessories.

The city has the highest concentration of creative-industry companies in Switzerland and they tend to cluster in and around Zürich-West, nurtured and inspired by the Global 500 biggies.

The next gen of entrepreneurs has set up shop in west-end 'hoods like districts 4 and 5, which are increasingly becoming cultural destinations, too. Don't miss Frau Gerolds Garten, a cool hangout spot in an industrial area where cargo containers retrofitted as bars and eateries offer locally grown food served in earth-friendly—and oh-so-grammable—takeout boxes.

New districts aside, summertime in the city is when Zürich truly comes alive, with everyone heading to the river or the lake's edge for picnics, swims and drinks. The coveted good life doesn't get more visceral than during these sweet moments.



THE HISTORIC CITY CENTRE ALONG THE LIMMAT RIVER

POPULATION

METRO 6,006,000

HIGHLIGHTS

4 RESTAURANTS

4 GOOGLE TRENDS

Spain's kinetic capital is applying its pandemic lessons to a people-powered rebirth.

Madrid suffered greatly early on in the pandemic, when it was one of the planet's hardest-hit capitals. But the city has bounced back deftly, continuing a much-needed investment in its bounteous (but long-dormant) infrastructure and public assets that is fuelling the Spanish capital's city-building legacy like few eras before.

In Madrid, it starts with focusing on existing assets and the conviction that everything old can be new again. Many of the 20 recently opened and coming-soon high-end hotels are committed to reuse—from the Madrid Edition by Marriott International, housed in the old Monte de Piedad de Madrid building, to the stunning Metrópolis building's new life as a boutique hotel, spa, private club and home of multiple restaurants. Speaking of restaurants, more than 50 opened last year, with close to the same amount scheduled to open by the end of 2023, ensuring that the city's already impressive #4 ranking in our Restaurants subcategory is safe.

Madrid's city leaders are also doubling down on a modern reinvention focused on its citizenry. The Buen Retiro ("pleasant retreat") park in the city centre joined Madrid's tree-lined Paseo del Prado boulevard on UNESCO's World Heritage list three years ago. It occupies 340 hectares in the centre of the city, and Paseo del Prado, which includes a promenade for pedestrians, runs parallel to it, connecting the heart of the nation's art world, flanked by the Prado Museum, with the Thyssen-Bornemisza National Museum and the Reina Sofía art centre.

6 MADRID SPAIN

THE METROPOLIS BUILDING, DESIGNED BY JULES AND RAYMOND FÉVRIER



Appropriately, both have been extensively expanded during the pandemic and this UNESCO honour will only add much-needed magnetism to Madrid's #11-ranked Sights & Landmarks. It's an essential piece of infrastructure for a city that needs plentiful outdoor space, now more than ever. Madrid's #23 ranking in our Place category is well-earned and will only improve in the future, given long overdue big-budget projects—like making the central Gran Vía boulevard far more pedestrian friendly.

Perhaps the biggest news is Madrid's beautiful measures to combat climate change and pollution, by way of a 76-kilometre urban forest network with nearly half a million new trees that will connect the city's existing forest masses and reuse derelict sites between roads and buildings. Upon completion, this "green wall" is projected to help absorb 175,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide per year, and mitigate heat generated by urban human activity. The investment in the city's outdoor realm will improve Madrid's #17 ranking in our Outdoors subcategory, especially combined with how safe the city became over the pandemic.

Madrid, sometimes overlooked for Barcelona's beaches and parties, is

confidently telling its story these days, ranking #6 in our important Promotion category (one spot behind its party girl sibling), including #4 for Google Trends and #5 for Tripadvisor Reviews. Where it pulls ahead slightly is appeal to investors, in which it ranks #5 in CBRE's 2023 European Investor Intentions report. (Barcelona ties Lisbon for sixth place.)



AERIAL VIEW OF THE CITY AT SUNRISE

POPULATION

METRO 4,026,000

HIGHLIGHTS

2 GOOGLE SEARCH

4 CULTURE

No other German city embodies the country's sentiments of tolerance and acceptance quite like its capital.

Berlin is a city where remnants of a fragile history mingle with a present in which being whatever you want simply comes with residency. These days, the city is welcoming waves of Ukrainians fleeing Russia's invasion, just like it has for decades—with mixed success—for newcomers seeking a new life from all over the world. It's a big reason why the city ranks #16 in our People category, including #15 in the Educational Attainment subcategory. Its #36 ranking for Foreign-Born Residents will climb as more immigrants seeking a better life arrive in the coming months and years.



INSIDE THE BERLIN MALL

7 BERLIN GERMANY

CYCLISTS AT BRANDENBURG GATE



The result of Berlin's relative hospitality: raw, unabashed urbanity and self-expression. That admittedly atrophied under pandemic restrictions over the past 30 months, but as public health measures ease (and the sun comes out), the entire city is back gathering in the parks, in the beer gardens and, increasingly, in the street parties and parades.

And given Berlin's #4 ranking in our Culture subcategory (which includes festivals and concerts) and its #5 Nightlife ranking, the city is ready to party. February's Berlinale was epic and, in mid-June, the Special Olympics World Games—the world's largest inclusive sports event—comes to town, with thousands of athletes competing across 26 sports.

And summer here means the annual Christopher Street Day (aka the massive Gay Pride Berlin celebration, famous throughout Europe and the world). Expect hundreds of thousands of revellers, activists and policymakers. With dance cards like these, the city's #8 ranking for Programming will improve in the coming years.

Berlin also ranks #4 for Museums, a ranking that is also set to ascend with the cascade of new openings and renovations completed, underway or scheduled to launch in 2023. Two major museums have moved into the new Humboldt Forum in the heart of

the city: the Ethnological Museum and the Museum of Asian Art. A dozen other museums are set to open, with collections ranging from the world of the samurai to video games.

At Berlinische Galerie, a new permanent exhibit opened late last year explores the daily lives of prisoners under GDR state security oppression, including first-time access into actual working and living spaces. Its title says it all: "Forced Cooperation: The Prisoner Work Crews of Hohenschönhausen." More recently, the Charité Museum of Medical History reopened in early 2023 after an extensive expansion and modernisation and today houses 10,000 pathological and anatomical specimens that span 300 years of medical history.

Another exciting 2023 development is the ongoing cultural and creative evolution of Berlin's Tempelhof Airport, Europe's largest historic monument, with the curve of the building stretching 1.2 kilometres. The massive, unfinished building is a window into the turbulent history of this enigmatic city, and the new open-air History Gallery and public access to Tempelhofer Tower will provide views over Tempelhofer Feld and the ongoing urban development in this little-known but vital district.

In 2026, the anticipated Museum of the 20th Century will launch as one of Europe's finest.

POPULATION

METRO 3,207,000

HIGHLIGHTS

2 TRIPADVISOR
REVIEWS

3 SHOPPING

The Eternal City has always been coveted. These days, the bounty is an immersive step back in time.

Few cities serve up the ability to walk Western history like Roma. Heck, Palatine Hill *alone* invites you into two millennia's worth if you've got an hour. And that's just the stuff you can see. In recent months, construction projects in the city have turned up everything from a rare fourth-century golden glass depiction of the city, the first known artifact of its kind, to a life-size marble statue of a Roman emperor dressed as Hercules. "The millennial history of our city never ceases to amaze and enchant the world," tweeted Roberto Gualtieri, mayor of Rome, after a recent find.

Mix in underrated parks and greenways (Rome ranks #8 in our Outdoors category) and its thousands of portals back in time (Sights & Landmarks rank #3 in Europe) and it's easy to see how Rome remains an urban treasure.



THE PANTHEON AT PIAZZA DELLA ROTONDA

8 ROME ITALY

ROMAN ART AND ARCHITECTURE



Declarations of love for the city have multiplied with social media channels, of course, and Rome trails only London and Paris in our important Promotion category, including #2 for Tripadvisor Reviews and #5 for both Facebook Check-ins and Google Trends. How can it not when so many sing its praises? Take the immortal Anthony Bourdain: "If I'm in Rome for only 48 hours, I would consider it a sin against God to not eat *cacio e pepe*, the most uniquely Roman of pastas, in some crummy little joint where Romans eat." The city definitely earns its #5 Restaurants ranking.

Pulejo, named after native son Chef Davide Puleio, was one of the city's most anticipated openings last year. Chef's international experience, from Noma in Copenhagen to Milan's L'Alchimia, has made this Prati room a fast destination.

A coin-throw from Trevi Fountain is Don Pasquale, housed in the former residence of Italian composer Gaetano Donizetti, making this restaurant and cocktail bar a destination not just for Italian cuisine lovers but for interior design buffs as well. Chef Domenico Boschi riffs on classics of the Roman culinary empire (think artichoke and cod).

And believe the buzz about Romanè, opened last year by celebrity chef and restaurateur Stefano Callegari and devoutly dedicated to the approachability of Italian cuisine.

Two big upcoming hotel openings will also bring the heat later this year. The first Six Senses property to open in Italy (in a UNESCO-listed *palazzo* minutes from the Trevi and Pantheon) arrives with a restaurant celebrating organic cuisine with a classic trattoria aesthetic. The Bulgari Roma, from the Italian jewelry brand, comes home in late 2023, with Chef Niko Romito—of three-Michelin-starred Reale—running its dining room in an Abruzzo monastery from the 1500s.

Appropriately, Roma has also just opened the Garum Museum (named after the umami fish sauce loved by ancient Romans). Its documentation of Italian cuisine—recipes, ancient utensils and methods and much more—is housed in a 16th-century *palazzo*. A dozen other museums and cultural landmarks have opened or reopened over the past year, and Rome's #5 Museums ranking will rise as a result.

POPULATION
METRO 572,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 1 BIKING
- 3 FOREIGN-BORN RESIDENTS

The home of the planet’s most famous art fair is also a prosperous economic powerhouse activated by an increasingly global citizenry.

First things first: June’s Art Basel will be one for the ages. After the cancellation of its 2020 50th anniversary, the event’s months-long delay in 2021 and then the long-awaited return to a regular (albeit conservative) schedule last year, anticipation is at a fever pitch. It’s also the first for new CEO Noah Horowitz, who promised Forbes last year that the festival will “once again reaffirm its pre-eminent position as a platform for discovery and encounters that drive the art world.” The Messe Basel (ranked #28 in Europe in our Convention Centre subcategory) will host 285 galleries from 36 countries and territories in mid June.

9 BASEL SWITZERLAND

Globally impactful annual art olympics aside, Switzerland’s third-largest city is enchanting long-time citizens, new talent and curious visitors like never before. Its appeal may be due to its relative obscurity, tucked on the banks of the Rhine River in the country’s north (so much so that Basel’s northern city limits are minutes from the French and German borders). The natural boundary of the Jura Mountains has also left the city to evolve over the centuries with moderate influence from Bern.

The resulting livability is a sight to behold. From the best-ranked bike infrastructure on the continent to centuries’ worth of daring architecture, conceptual hotels and destination restaurants, few cities with just over half a million people leave you as breathless as Basel.

Locals certainly savour their city’s special blend, and, given Basel’s #5 ranking for our overall People category (including #3 for Foreign-Born Residents, and #8 for both Educational Attainment and Labour Force Participation), they’re spreading the word to fellow high-performers.

The talent is scooped up not only by the deep culture sector, but also by what has long been anointed as “Europe’s

BioValley,” the tri-nation life sciences cluster stretching from Basel into France and Germany.

Even before Moderna chose the city as its coronavirus vaccine HQ during the pandemic’s first year or medicinal psychedelic firm MindMed opened its R&D centre, Basel was home to pharmaceuticals giant Novartis. The firm completed two decades of work late last year, converting a forgotten industrial production facility in the St. Johann district on the banks of the Rhine into a publicly accessible “campus of knowledge and innovation” designed to encourage encounters between researchers, potentially leading to pharmaceutical discoveries. More than a dozen buildings designed by Pritzker Prize-winning architects like Tadao Ando, Frank Gehry and Álvaro Siza are the sandbox for scientists, artists and architects who help Basel rank #4 in Europe for Prosperity, including #5 for Disposable Household Income.

Future bioscience and tech investment will improve the city’s already impressive #9 spot for Fortune Global 500 companies that call it home.



ONE OF EUROPE’S LARGEST FERRIS WHEELS IS LOCATED IN OLD TOWN

POPULATION

METRO 609,000

HIGHLIGHTS



BIKING



DISPOSABLE
HOUSEHOLD INCOME

The city of peace has a deep resonance in Europe today.

A globally vital city in a snow globe? Geneva comes close. With just over 600,000 residents yet home to the European seat of the United Nations, the international headquarters of the Red Cross and more than 200 international organisations, the city does well by doing good, ranking #5 in Europe for educated citizenry, #24 in our Foreign-Born Residents subcategory and #4 for the disposable income they bring home.

The commitment to urban tranquility was made official in 1949 when the Geneva Conventions, which focus on the welfare and protection of prisoners of war, wounded participants and

10 GENEVA SWITZERLAND

innocents caught up in conflict, were signed here. The city was settled millennia ago and became a Roman outpost cherished for the sparkling waters of its eponymous lake with the confluence of the mighty river Rhône, along with the thermal pools with views of the soaring Alps and the Jura Mountains. Today's residents are equally fortunate, with access to the third-best biking infrastructure in Europe and a bounty of city parks, like La Grange, part of Geneva's 310 hectares of green areas that comprise 20% of the city's footprint.

An increased focus on lake access means there are now several beaches and waterside terraces. If the water is too chilly at Geneva Plage, there's always the outdoor Olympic-size swimming pool. The result is a #11 ranking in our overall Place category. Sweeter still is the city's #6 ranking for Prosperity. The stewardship for the city today and tomorrow creates a lab for urban innovation embraced by residents. Take the new project unveiled earlier this year for 15 driverless electric minibuses to serve the city 24 hours a day in 2025.

The Horizon Europe ULTIMO project will also run in Oslo and Kronach, Germany. There's also plenty of low-tech urban sustainability afoot, like the Geneva sheep that, since 2014, have been mowing local parks during the summer.

Family tourism happens organically here, especially when you consider the handful of standout museums. The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Museum is a stirring journey of humanitarian work and the 150 years of the organisation, with three current exhibition spaces focused on defending human dignity, rebuilding family ties and limiting the risks of natural disasters. The Bodmer Foundation is the most unique book museum on the planet, and the Patek Philippe Museum is a loving, immersive ode to the centuries-old local craft of watchmaking. Back outside, and outside the city, several ski resorts beckon in winter, while local wineries are always ready for you. Don't miss Domaine Les Perrières, a family estate making wine since 1794.



AERIAL VIEW OF THE RHONE RIVER IN GENEVA



11 VIENNA

AUSTRIA

POPULATION METRO 1,843,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 3 EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT
- 6 AIRPORT

Where modernism was born, the future is doing just fine.

Fresh ideas are blowing through the city that gave birth to modernism—creating the global benchmark for urban livability, sustainability and equity. Just consider housing: in an era of prohibitive global urban rents, 60% of the city’s population resides in subsidised apartments and 25% of citizens’ homes are owned by the city. Or the climate emergency: last year, city leaders announced that Vienna will be carbon neutral by 2040, besting the Paris Agreement by a decade. Food security commitments yield 2,100 hectares of fields, vineyards and gardens *within city limits*. That gives Vienna’s #12 ranking in our Restaurants subcategory an authentic localism, especially thriving vegetarian spots like Tian, winner of a Michelin Green Star for sustainable gastronomy in 2022. Also helping this green journey are the new, too-luxurious-to-ignore fully automated trains connecting the city’s U-Bahn stations, with buildout happening throughout the decade. The best part? The trains are built almost exclusively at the Siemens factory in Vienna. Such urban planning is possible, after all, when you boast Europe’s third-best-educated citizens. As is the massive new Aspern Seestadt urban development that insists residents walk, bike and use public transit on local streets (finally!) named after women.



12 BRUSSELS

BELGIUM

POPULATION METRO 2,041,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 2 EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT
- 8 POVERTY RATE

Belgium’s capital and the de facto home of the European Union is a city with plenty of surprises up its stuffy sleeve.

Understated Brussels is a bounty of breathtaking architecture—surely the Grand Place is one of the most beautiful squares in the world—as well as the source of ugly state-commissioned buildings (there are entire social feeds dedicated to it). The city has invested in public spaces, like the Tour & Taxis Food Market under the glass roofs of the former Gare Maritime, and the Grand Hospice: a repurposed neoclassical complex with beautiful colonnades and an interior park. Despite the city being the EU’s administrative centre, one of its most famous landmarks is Manneken Pis, a statue of a naked boy peeing into a fountain—a symbol of the city’s contempt for authority. The wit is thanks to vibrant, educated, multiethnic citizenry (Brussels ranks #6 in our People category, powered by the second-most-educated residents in Europe, after Luxembourg, and 11th-most foreign-born). Get local in the Congolese Matonge quarter’s flea markets and its street art. Or at the new Working From_ co-working space at the Hoxton Hotel.



13 STOCKHOLM

SWEDEN

POPULATION METRO 1,584,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 1 LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION
- 4 GOOGLE SEARCH

Ambitious tech and transit investment activate an enterprising and educated citizenry.

No other Scandinavian city serves up a sensory feast like Stockholm, blending rustic, traditional and New Nordic cuisine, geography (the city centre was built on 14 islands), and salt and freshwater outdoor swimming areas amongst a bounty of public green space, the cobblestones of Gamla Stan and its 1700s architecture and daring modern design. Throw in a multicultural population (Stockholm ranks #2 on the continent in our important People category, trailing only London, powered by its #12 spot for Educational Attainment) and an epic summer season with near-constant daylight, and you’ve got a coveted hometown. Stockholm built the world’s largest open-fibre network in the 1990s, followed a decade or so later by the launch of global hits like Skype, Spotify and Minecraft—earning the city the moniker of “The Unicorn Factory.” More billion-dollar startups have launched here than in any place outside of Silicon Valley. A wander through the recently gentrified Södermalm neighbourhood, the birthplace of many tech giants, reveals why the city tops our Labour Force Participation subcategory this year, with educated, calm citizens creatively solving the world’s problems and chasing the payoffs that come with doing so.



14 MUNICH

GERMANY

POPULATION METRO 2,008,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 4 FORTUNE GLOBAL 500
- 5 CONVENTION CENTRE

Bavaria's party capital is also a business behemoth—even more so post-pandemic.

Yes, there's Oktoberfest every autumn, but Germany's third-largest city works as hard as it plays, becoming one of Europe's hottest destinations for new residents seeking this elusive balance. The pandemic only highlighted the productivity of understated Bavarian innovation, especially given all the "temporary" initiatives—from outdoor seating to a reimagined concrete factory—that have become permanent and made this merry city even more fun. But this is Germany after all and there's productivity to think about. Munich boasts the fifth-best convention centre in Europe—and its airport is ranked #11 (soon to improve after a \$550-million reno wraps up this year), ensuring regional and global access to all that Bavarian ingenuity. The Technical University of Munich, which brands itself "the Entrepreneurial University," also ranks an impressive #7 in our University subcategory. With all that infrastructure and entrepreneurship, Munich ranks #16 in our overall Prosperity category, including #4 for Global 500 headquarters (made up primarily of automakers, media and manufacturing, but being quickly joined by biotech and IT giants). The city's #11 ranking for Disposable Household Income ensures that locals prioritise the fruits of all that labour.



15 PRAGUE

CZECHIA

POPULATION METRO 1,164,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 3 NIGHTLIFE
- 3 MUSEUMS

Bold reclamations focused on resident needs created a more accessible city while tourists weren't looking.

Pandemic lockdowns derailed tourism in Prague, and over the past year the city made long-lasting decisions to ensure that its #3-ranked Museums (ahead of places like Rome and Berlin) and #2-ranked Family-Friendly Activities (trailing only London) remain accessible to the citizens who supported local when tourism didn't. Places like the Čapadlo embankment on the Vltava River have become open-air stages and galleries reminiscent of Paris. Náplavka, with its former ice-storage spaces ensconced in the river's retaining walls, was reborn as a vibrant urban market and series of pop-up bars. Prague's compact, fairy-tale walkability enchants in century-old cobbled streets and the (publicly accessible) hilltop Prague Castle, which has emerged from lockdown alongside Salm Palace—home to National Gallery exhibition spaces, fully renovated. The Baroque Clam-Gallas Palace in Old Town is also newly reopened and eager to be admired. The city's four universities, relative affordability and #3 Nightlife ranking have inspired young talent and billions in foreign investment to pour in—from real estate developers to long-established firms like Microsoft, Cisco and Oracle doubling down on a good thing.



16 DUBLIN

IRELAND

POPULATION METRO 1,371,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 9 CULTURE
- 9 FORTUNE GLOBAL 500

The storied capital is made for flâneurs and entrepreneurs.

Safe, gregarious and increasingly wealthy, the Celtic Tiger has never been fiercer, ranking #9 in Fortune Global 500 companies while simultaneously sustaining #11 for Poverty Rate. The magnetism is obvious in places like its Docklands area, known as Silicon Docks, home to big tech and digital players including Google, Facebook, Amazon, eBay, Apple and Airbnb. They come for some of the world's lowest corporate taxes and stay for homegrown economic development initiatives like Ireland's Local Enterprise Office, which supports international companies with mentoring, training and financial grants. Several internationally renowned universities (Trinity College Dublin, University College Dublin, and Dublin City University) help the city attract startups looking for a smaller, more affordable capital centre. U.S. software firm Workday opened its new European headquarters last year, as did Kara Connect, an employee well-being platform from Iceland. It helps to be able to offer eager young employees something to do outside of work, which Dublin's famous—though increasingly costly—pub-centric nightlife (ranked #12 in Europe) does, along with an abundance of concerts, shows and events (Culture ranks #9). Of course, being among the safest capitals on the planet helps, too.



17 MILAN

ITALY

POPULATION METRO 4,994,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 5 SIGHTS & LANDMARKS
- 6 TRIPADVISOR REVIEWS

A no-nonsense devotion to the finer things makes Italy's northern power a culture and fashion vanguard increasingly sought by a wealthy global class seeking new markets.

The birthplace of Armani, Versace and dozens of other megawatt fashion and design icons is no longer content with its crown as Europe's fashion and design centre. Or even as Italy's financial heart. This city is driven, as always, by its entrepreneurial hunger and is fuelled increasingly by wealthy newcomers lured to the famed Milanese good life by government tax breaks (like capping income tax on money made abroad at a €100,000 flat rate). The result is an influx of Brexit (and Russian) capital seeking a home, and the flurry of luxury real estate, hotels and social clubs that such an influx inspires. In recent months, places like the Ferragamo-owned Lungarno Collection unveiled the Portrait Milano in one of Europe's oldest seminaries, complete with a massive piazza. U.S. networking broker Core Club is opening in a nearby *palazzo*, its first outside of San Francisco and New York City. This strategic proximity to other European capitals and alpine resorts pulling in the global elite also won the city the 2026 Olympic Winter Games and a rush of development.



18 BERN

SWITZERLAND

POPULATION METRO 722,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 1 DISPOSABLE HOUSEHOLD INCOME
- 4 LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION

The understated Swiss capital (trust us, it's not Zürich) is a walkable, historic wonder with a rare blend of prosperity and hospitality.

Secluded on the banks of the emerald Aare River, Switzerland's second city is too often overlooked (see its #120 ranking in our Promotion category—the lowest-ranked capital by far). Many are sleeping on Bern. This UNESCO World Heritage Old City is peppered with historic architecture, like the Zytglogge medieval clock tower, the Parliament Building and hundreds of magical (and Instagrammable) nooks to grab coffee, raclette or craft beer (Bern boasts the highest density of microbreweries in the country). Tasting and shopping often takes place in 12th-century vaulted cellars built to store grains and wines. If you only have time for one, make it Café Marta, especially at *apéro* hour for local beverages and baked goods. Here you'll find locals with the highest disposable income in Europe, who in all likelihood arrived to the café via the continent's #4-ranked biking infrastructure. Given that residents also rank #4 for Labour Force Participation, their *apéro* is well earned. A busy summer has Bern hosting the EuroGames (along with its tens of thousands of athletes and fans) in late July, followed by BernPride, forecasted to be the city's largest ever.



19 ISTANBUL

TÜRKİYE

POPULATION METRO 15,311,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 2 AIRPORT CONNECTIVITY
- 3 INSTAGRAM HASHTAGS

The planet's only major city straddling two continents is going all in to capitalise on its strategic location.

The ancient collision between Europe and Asia radiates in Türkiye's kinetic capital. It's why the city is among the most beguiling for its sense of place, from its #4 ranking in Outdoors to its #9 ranking in our Sights & Landmarks subcategory (many spots among the latter are being renovated for the Turkish Republic's centennial in October). The devastating February earthquakes that killed tens of thousands in the country's south-east and Syria (and flooded the capital with survivors) have sounded the alarms about Istanbul's own preparation for an inevitable destructive quake. The tragedy has cast a pall around new openings like Galataport, Istanbul's reinvigorated historic harbour. Extending 1.5 kilometres along the Bosphorus Strait near the city's long-coveted Karaköy district, the \$1.7-billion project boasts the world's first-ever underground cruise terminal. More recently, the luxury Peninsula Istanbul opened in February, capping a blazing year for hotel openings that includes the seafloor luxury resort JW Marriott Marmara Sea and a dozen others. The city's #6-ranked museums get a boost from the Galataport investment, with the Istanbul Modern, the city's first contemporary art museum (designed by Renzo Piano), returning to its Karaköy roots.



20 OSLO

NORWAY

POPULATION METRO 1,279,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 7 LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION
- 8 POVERTY RATE

Smart, practical and increasingly keen to share its idiosyncrasies with the world, Oslo is an economic force with swagger (as much as Norwegians swagger).

No longer overshadowed by Stockholm and Copenhagen, Oslo is proving itself a worthy destination all its own. Its #27 Museum ranking will improve with the recent opening of Munch, a waterfront museum dedicated to the Expressionist painter of "The Scream". Newer still is the National Museum downtown, which replaced several cultural buildings, including the National Gallery. It houses classical and contemporary art and architecture studies and it just became the largest art exhibition space in Scandinavia. Above the city, Rose Castle unveiled a permanent installation of paintings and sculptures that tell the story of Oslo's resilience during the Second World War. No wonder it ranks #8 in our People category. Among Europe's fastest-growing cities, Oslo is hustling to provide much-needed housing, most notably by aggressively building out its Fjord City on industrial port lands. High-rises and pedestrian squares have already opened, and locals are braving the new outdoor public swimming pools. As more prospective residents discover Oslo's Top 10 finishes in everything from low poverty rates to educated citizens to labour force participation, its lore will only grow.



21 COPENHAGEN

DENMARK

POPULATION METRO 1,618,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 3 POVERTY RATE
- 10 GOOGLE SEARCH

One of Europe's most buzzed-about capitals gets real.

Copenhagen's compact, park-filled urban grid, connected by serpentine bike lanes that end at clean urban swimming spots, earned the world's lockdown attention during the pandemic. Its low poverty rate (ranked #3) and Top 10 Labour Force participation on top of all that urban bounty was also impressive. Global attention returns in 2023, by way of a UNESCO Capital of Architecture designation. Events are going on all year, at formal venues like the Danish Architecture Center, but also at places like the waterfront Opera Park, an urban green space designed for climate resilience. Copenhagen's commitment to sustainability is nothing new, of course. It has long invested in its cycling infrastructure, attempting to make 50% of all work and school commutes on bicycles by 2025, as well as helping Denmark reach overall carbon neutrality by 2050. Transit buildout is everywhere, connecting more affordable districts on the city's outskirts, most notably the much-needed Sydhavn connector next year. But nothing will be as daring as the building of Lynetteholm, a 275-hectare artificial island off the city's coast, housing 35,000 people while protecting the harbour from rising water. Or so we hope.



22 HELSINKI

FINLAND

POPULATION METRO 1,200,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 1 POVERTY RATE
- 12 LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION

Irreverence and saunas are the thing in northern Europe's emerging hot spot.

Few nations managed the pandemic better than the country named the world's happiest for the sixth year in a row. And if a country is the happiest in the world, its capital city likely is, too. When the rest of the world was coming to grips with the pandemic, Helsinki's local government immediately took action—supporting local businesses, holding virtual info sessions and generally having everyone's back, so long as they had each others'. Among the first in the world to recognise the safety of al fresco dining, Helsinki purpose-built massive outdoor seating areas as communal infrastructure for local restaurants (which provided local jobs). Most spaces have remained and city leaders continue to generously fund citizen placemaking projects. It's the kind of sensible urban cohesion you'd expect from a city that boasts the lowest rate of poverty in Europe, as well as the 12th-highest rate of labour participation. Global curiosity and post-pandemic recovery have spurred new hotel openings across the city, including exciting urban reuses like GLO Hotel's restored 1920s bank location near the port, and the Best Western Premier Hotel Katajanokka's space in a converted former prison.



23 LISBON

PORTUGAL

POPULATION METRO 2,719,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 2 OUTDOORS
- 9 TRIPADVISOR REVIEWS

The once-sleepy ancient capital on the continent's western edge is today one of Europe's hottest destinations.

Lisbon is tactile, multisensory and best explored on foot in its 2,799 annual hours of sunshine—the most of any European capital. As walkable as Lisbon is, more than 200 kilometres of bike paths opened last year and more are on the way—development that will further improve its #6 ranking in our expansive Place category. Its seven hills provide perches to watch Atlantic sunsets. The best spot? Castelo de São Jorge, a view you have to earn by ascending through winding ancient alleys in one of Europe's oldest neighbourhoods—like, 1,500 years old. Spots like this rank Lisbon #5 in our Outdoors subcategory. Global residents continue to pour in, buoying the ascendant house prices while the government launches new remote work visas (the latest requires a monthly salary of \$2,750) while ending overly generous ones, like its coveted “golden visa” that gave foreigners residency if they invested at least €280,000 in a property. They also come for daring initiatives like Lisbon's first Michelin-starred restaurant at Chef Pedro Pena Bastos' Cura at the Four Seasons Hotel Ritz. Go there instead of the new Lisbon Earthquake Experience.



24 LAUSANNE

SWITZERLAND

POPULATION METRO 583,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 4 DISPOSABLE HOUSEHOLD INCOME
- 5 EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

A stunning sense of place and strategic prosperity serve up the good life on the banks of Lake Geneva.

Nestled between Lake Geneva and vineyards that climb up to snowy Alps, Switzerland's fourth-largest city on some days looks like a CGI setting in a “Lord of the Rings” film. The local vibe is distinctly working to live, with efficient commerce carried out in the largely car-free medieval city centre powered by focused, vital companies that call Lausanne home, as diverse as the International Olympic Committee (since 1914), Logitech and Nespresso. The result is the fifth-most-educated citizens in Europe, who (appropriately) enjoy the fourth-highest disposable income. The pipeline of global talent that pours into the city also gives Lausanne a high-end campus feel, courtesy of places like the International Institute for Management Development, a leading business school, as well as the multitude of graduate studies offered by the University of Lausanne, ranked #43 in Europe. The city's nascent culture scene is also on the rise with the recent opening of Plateform 10, an arts district opened in 2020 that's been buzzing with small galleries, shops and museum openings, including the new home of the city's international art museum.



25 FRANKFURT

GERMANY

POPULATION METRO 1,941,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 4 AIRPORT CONNECTIVITY
- 5 FORTUNE GLOBAL 500

Frankfurt is quickly growing into a European business capital.

Frankfurt has perfected the art of air access. Germany is in the middle of Europe, Frankfurt is in the middle of Germany and its airport—the largest in the country—is one of the world's aviation hubs (#4 in our Airport Connectivity subcategory). The city's #6-ranked convention centre draws more than 4.5 million visitors annually (pandemic years excepted). In 15 minutes, conventioners arriving at FRA can be at the massive Messe Frankfurt, the world's largest trade fair and event organiser, featuring its own exhibition grounds. A short stroll in any direction takes visitors to shopping, restaurants, museums and other pleasures to mix with the business of the day. The convention centre has invested heavily in its “hygiene concept,” a typically German system for safely organising an event in the age of new pathogens. The city has also benefitted from London's Brexit uncertainty. JPMorgan is moving hundreds of employees from London to mainly Paris and Frankfurt, along with approximately €200 billion in assets. Financial clout aside, the city is also becoming a vital global Internet exchange point, and a strategic investment for firms requiring secure data communications infrastructure.



26 NAPLES

ITALY

POPULATION METRO 3,303,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 1 OUTDOORS
- 3 CONVENTION CENTRE

Italy's third-largest city is a 3,000-year-old treasure trove of urbanity, with the experiences to match.

Even by European secondary-city status, Naples is overlooked and underestimated—both by international visitors and by Italy's power centres. The city's three millennia of existence make it one of Europe's oldest—with the accompanying layers of beauty, conflict and lore (*grazie*, Elena Ferrante). Naples tops our deep Place category, including #1 for Outdoors, which is buoyed by the city's historic waterfront, nearby beaches and green spaces ranging from swaths of urban parkland to secret public gardens. Napoli also ranks #4 for Sights & Landmarks—its centuries-old Naples Cathedral rivals any other in the sensual feast that is Italy. Like in Rome and Istanbul, strolling here reveals forgotten history on every block. Despite the city's long association with crime and mafia, tourism has doubled over the past decade, and crime dropped by almost 50% between 2018 and 2019, according to local sources. New international investments (like the W Naples opening next year inside a historic bank building on the kinetic Piazza del Municipio) are finally reaching one of the continent's most beguiling cities. Attributes like its #3-ranked convention centre and a new high-speed train directly from Rome's Fiumicino airport will bring the curious to the *citta*.



27 OXFORD

UNITED KINGDOM

POPULATION METRO 545,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 1 UNIVERSITY
- 9 DISPOSABLE HOUSEHOLD INCOME

Less than an hour from London by rail, Europe's top university town is the best of many worlds.

With a legacy spanning almost nine centuries as a place of learning, Oxford clearly deserves various top rankings for its eponymous university. Today the university—imprinted on the city itself to the point of being indiscernible from it—offers 350 graduate courses, affiliated societies and hundreds of education-focused organisations and businesses. Students of all kinds continue to pour into the city, and first-timers become instantly smitten by the jagged cobblestones, the 500-year-old pubs and the Gothic and neoclassical buildings and spires above, all standing sentry to the enlightenment here. The city's student population helps Oxford rank #13 for Foreign-Born Residents, and the city's ancient commitment to accessibility, along with a newer one to equity, also brings a #13 ranking for Poverty Rate. Those residents who stay in town after graduation enjoy the ninth-highest disposable income in Europe. In addition to the usual magnetism of this curated, stewarded urban treasure on the banks of the Thames (called "Isis" locally), new post-pandemic investments are buzzing, from the Randolph Hotel's reno by new owners Graduate Hotels to East Oxford's new restaurant wave.



28 EDINBURGH

UNITED KINGDOM

POPULATION METRO 894,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 4 UNIVERSITY
- 7 FOREIGN-BORN RESIDENTS

A long-overlooked European capital shines bright and welcomes the world once more.

The Scottish capital has long enchanted with its Gothic architecture, moody weather and the legacy of the literary masters who've flocked here for both. But a fresh appreciation of the city's smouldering festival and arts programming (long powered by the storied University of Edinburgh, our #4-ranked uni in Europe), means new hotel investment to accommodate tourists and talent. There's anticipation around the reopening of the renovated Scottish National Gallery project this summer to showcase the Scottish collection alongside some special loans, right in the heart of the city. Edinburgh ranks #19 in Europe in our Programming category and #18 in our Culture subcategory, both as a result of its 3,000 year-round events (from science festivals to international children's festivals to the big Edinburgh International Festival running every August since 1947). Investment is booming with the long-awaited Gleneagles Townhouse, inspired by its century-old country estate in Perthshire opening last year. Larger still is the new 222-room Virgin Hotels Edinburgh in the 19th-century India Buildings and a rooftop bar with epic city views. The new W Hotel Edinburgh anchors a massive redevelopment of posh St James Quarter.



29 BUDAPEST

HUNGARY

POPULATION METRO 2,429,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 5 FAMILY-FRIENDLY ACTIVITIES
- 8 POVERTY RATE

The Old World beguiles in the Hungarian capital.

Budapest is a buzzy European capital post-pandemic, beloved by digital nomads seeking urban vibrancy on a budget (coaxed here with the new White Card remote worker visa) and freedom from more conservative metropolises. The city, split by the expansive bend of the Danube River, delivers in spades. On the west bank is medieval Buda, hilly and historic; on the east is Pest, modern and bohemian, with its recently revamped City Park that contributes to a #15 Outdoors ranking. The city celebrates the 150th anniversary of its unification in 2023 with the reopening of the Széchenyi Chain Bridge after two years of repairs. The year-long party and investment will improve Budapest's #5 Family-Friendly Activities and #11 Museums rankings, which include the must-see Museum of Fine Arts along with a dozen others, from the Szamos Chocolate Museum to the new music and ethnography museums. At night, Budapest's Communist-era factories and parkades bloom as "ruin bars"—a distinctly Eastern European approach to urban nightlife (ranked #11). Budapest is also suddenly a luxury property hot spot, with the new Matild Palace—the city's first Luxury Collection hotel—opening inside a UNESCO landmark last year, joining newcomer Párisi Udvar Hotel.



30 HAMBURG

GERMANY

POPULATION METRO 2,048,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 14 INSTAGRAM HASHTAGS
- 19 LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION

Germany's second city is as creative as it is ethical.

Hamburg is both Europe's second-largest shipping port and a serious contender for "Venice of the North," with a stunning lake and a latticework of canals. Emblematic of this is the \$933-million Elbphilharmonie, a spectacular concert hall that combines 19th-century warehouses with the crystalline architecture and acoustics of the future. But Hamburg comes by its recent opulence honestly, with the 16th most-educated citizenry in Europe and a workforce that ranks #20 for disposable income. But, this being Germany, lower-income residents are not being left behind, evident in the city's signature redevelopment project, HafenCity. In Europe's biggest inner-city urban development initiative—which, over more than a decade, is transforming more than 2.5 square kilometres of tumble-down docks along the city's port into a buzzing shopping and residential area—a third of housing must be subsidised while another third is rental. Project completion is 2026 and includes new additions to Hamburg's bustling nightlife (#17). This is the town that made the Beatles, after all. Ambitious city-building continues in the 'burbs, too, with an innovative car-free neighbourhood being built a 15-minute train ride from the centre.



31 LUXEMBOURG

LUXEMBOURG

POPULATION METRO 639,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 1 EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT
- 7 DISPOSABLE HOUSEHOLD INCOME

Folded into cliffs and rivers, with a moneyed, international citizenry, this may be Europe's best-kept secret.

Luxembourg (the country) and Luxembourg City (the capital) might be tiny in relation to larger neighbours Belgium, France and Germany, yet the city over-performs in the talent that calls it home. A city that boasts the highest share of educated citizens of any European city (who enjoy the seventh-highest disposable income) delivers cultural infrastructure (ranked #13) and mobility (bike lanes rank #10) that is accessible, plentiful and top quality. Where does the city's wealth flow from? Luxembourg is renowned for its efficient bank sector, for one, as well for as being the Secretariat of the European Parliament and headquarters of the European Court of Justice. The capital of the only Grand Duchy in the world—you might run into the duke in your wanderings—it also ranks #16 for Foreign-Born Residents. More than 170 nationalities call it home, making Luxembourg a true economic, social and cultural melting pot—which seems fitting, given the destruction it endured during the Second World War. It's also one of the continent's best-kept secrets (given its last-place finish in our Promotion category among the top 100 in Europe)—an urban UNESCO World Heritage site that's rarely overrun by visitors.



32 WARSAW

POLAND

POPULATION METRO 1,965,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 2 FOREIGN-BORN RESIDENTS
- 15 FAMILY-FRIENDLY ACTIVITIES

Poland's capital city is an ascendant economic and entrepreneurial hotbed with plenty of reasons to leave work early.

It's been a decade of steady growth for Poland, today an economic European powerhouse. But Russia's and Nazi Germany's invasions that started the Second World War remain indelible, which is why Warsaw has welcomed 250,000 Ukrainian refugees fleeing the current Russian invasion. Today, it ranks second in Europe for Foreign-Born Residents. The city is simultaneously getting on with its ambitious projects—from the rebuild of the 17th-century Sasaki Palace destroyed by the Nazis to new museums and a couple of Michelin-starred restaurants, for which it ranks #18. Emblematic of Warsaw's economic development is the 310-metre Foster + Partners-designed Varso Tower, the EU's tallest building. The city is also leading the largest infrastructure project in the Baltics in more than a century. The Rail Baltica high-speed railway should open in 2026, connecting Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania to Poland and the rest of Europe: an 870-kilometre link from Tallinn to Warsaw with a top speed of 234 km/h. Tourism is booming, too, with the city's Family-Friendly Attractions ranking #15 and a 4.4% rise in tourism contribution to its GDP in 2022 versus 2019, according to the WTTC.



33 MANCHESTER

UNITED KINGDOM

POPULATION METRO 2,747,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 3 GOOGLE TRENDS
- 6 UNIVERSITY

A renowned university and a strategic location for future-focused business come together to form a historic sense of place.

Manchester's reputation as the engine of English industry drives a global curiosity in the storied city. Castlefield, an "Urban Heritage Park," is one portal into history: the city's canal, favoured by tourists today, once transported coal into the city's industrial hub. More urban reuse is planned. The University of Manchester is among the highest-ranking in Europe (at #6), which helps with the city's overall #20 Product category ranking, including the Airport Connectivity (#15) and Museums (#62) subcategories. The university is home to a dazzling legacy of 25 Nobel laureates, with several still on staff. Manchester's conversion from producing goods to ideas is well underway, and the history of the workers who made that possible is on grand display at the People's History Museum. The city's middling Museums ranking is supercharged with this year's £15-million transformation that adds a two-storey extension, a new exhibition hall, the Belonging Gallery, the South Asia Gallery and the Lee Kai Hung Chinese Culture Gallery to the Manchester Museum. Also new is Factory International, a flagship cultural centre with exhibits by Japanese artist Yayoi Kusama. No wonder Manchester is #3 for Google Trends (footie clubs aside).



34 VENICE

ITALY

POPULATION METRO 552,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 2 BIKING
- 9 SHOPPING

Safe, profound and willing to reveal its secrets to those who take the time to look for them.

Few cities in the world are as beloved as Venice, reflected in its #26 ranking in our Promotion category—a measure of the content being posted about a city online, as well as the information being sought out by the curious. The number of Facebook check-ins ranks #14 and Tripadvisor reviews are #15. The city coaxes stories from visitors with its narrow streets that are both perfectly walkable and (based on its #2 ranking) bikeable. Landmarks are woven into the city's fabric, as are global concepts crafted here over the past millennium, from banking (conducted by the city's Jewish merchants at their benches, or *bancii*), to quarantines (the 40-day isolation required by incoming ships during plagues). There are dozens of others and, not surprisingly, Venice sees more visitors with every passing year, especially post-pandemic, even as the sea rises ever higher during winter storms, or, like this winter, the canals dry up entirely from drought. The city has harnessed tourism with greater success recently, from banning massive cruise ships from its canals to plans to charge day-trippers (read: those not paying for local hotels) up to €10 to visit.



35 BRATISLAVA

SLOVAKIA

POPULATION METRO 670,000

HIGHLIGHTS

9 POVERTY RATE

15 BIKING

Slovakia's overlooked capital city is reclaiming its rich history from Soviet-era monotony.

Located close to the geographic centre of Europe, the Slovakian capital competes with Vienna, Prague, Krakow and Budapest for both tourism and investment. In fact, no two national capitals are geographically closer than Vienna and Bratislava. An increasing numbers of foreigners venturing off the beaten path discover a compact, cobblestone-lined Hapsburg heart, crowned by St. Martin's Cathedral and the revitalised but no less historic Kapitulska Street. It's worth taking in the urban evolution by bike along the city's #6-ranked biking infrastructure, away from the beautiful chaos of fairy-tale spires and Soviet-era monstrosities—like the 95-metre-high UFO Tower, a perch over the Danube River since 1972. (But do grab a drink in its penthouse bar.) Outside Bratislava's centre, the intrepid can view the future of its skyline: the first towers of the Zaha Hadid Architects-designed Sky Park development that, upon buildout, will feature new residences, an office block and even a heating plant. It's a welcome addition to an industrious citizenry that ranks #16 in our Labour Force Participation subcategory, in a local economy that ties for the third-lowest poverty rate in Europe.



36 BRISTOL

UNITED KINGDOM

POPULATION METRO 956,000

HIGHLIGHTS

9 UNIVERSITY

15 POVERTY RATE

Independent, creative and multi-cultural, Bristol is England at its most engaging.

The more diverse a city's population, the more it produces global ideas on a local scale. Take Bristol, which comes in at #42 in our People category and #9 for its eponymous university. In the '50s and '60s, waves of immigrants made Bristol the most racially diverse city in the U.K. Politics, reggae, hip hop and graffiti shaped a creative scene that nurtured artists like Massive Attack, Portishead and Banksy. Today, the city ranks #27 on the continent for Nightlife. As you'd expect, intriguing street art is everywhere. Start your visit in Stokes Croft, a bohemian neighbourhood covered in graffiti. Keep an eye out for Banksy's Mild Mild West, a mural depicting a teddy bear throwing a Molotov cocktail at riot police. Creating cultural buzz of late is Wake the Tiger, "the world's first Amaze-ment Park," opened last year, with secret passageways, hidden forests, temples and ice caves. Also buzzing is Wapping Wharf, a new harbourside mixed-use neighbourhood with food, drink and shopping opportunities aplenty. Cargo, its commercial area, is composed of 90 repurposed shipping containers where independent retailers have set up shop.



37 NOTTINGHAM

UNITED KINGDOM

POPULATION METRO 919,000

HIGHLIGHTS

1 CONVENTION CENTRE

22 UNIVERSITY

The birthplace of the Robin Hood legend has emerged as one of the U.K.'s small cities to watch.

As recently as 15 years ago, this central England city battled crime, talent flight and typically English savage branding as home to "men in tights and men in fights." Even its hilltop Nottingham Castle wasted away among parking lots and cut-rate motels. Today, thanks to visionary local leadership, the castle, fresh from a three-year, £30-million renovation (helped by the government's Culture Recovery Fund) would make Kevin Costner proud. The local grounds now host medieval reenactments, and adventure parks with rope bridges and slides are once again pulling in families from all over the country. The same can be said about the city. Ranked tops in Europe for its Nottingham Conference Centre, it is home to hundreds of corporate and commercial events annually. The 51-kilometre tram line just adds to the rediscovered walkability and newly redesigned public spaces—from the massive, all-season market square to Hockley, a district of reclaimed lace mills and warehouses that today buzzes with restaurants, bars, offices and gallery spaces. Rest assured that some of the city's wild side still lives on in its #31-ranked nightlife.



38 BIRMINGHAM

UNITED KINGDOM

POPULATION METRO 3,098,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 7 FAMILY-FRIENDLY ACTIVITIES
- 10 NIGHTLIFE

England's historic industrial heart beats anew with robust infrastructure that fosters a cultural economy.

Birmingham (or “Brum”), the largest city in the West Midlands, second-largest in England, has long inspired both industry and imagination throughout the centuries. The area’s rich coal and iron deposits fuelled its ascent as a vital engine for the British Empire, resulting in some of the fastest urban growth on the planet in the 19th century. At the same time, its economic success provided a ring-side opportunity to assess the true cost of all that progress long before such things were questioned. J.R.R. Tolkien grew up here, and the author often cited his childhood adventures in the West Midlands countryside as the inspiration for Middle Earth. No wonder the city ranks #15 in our Outdoors subcategory. Or that the Birmingham Library is the largest public library in Europe. Fellow Birmingham cultural analysts Black Sabbath shared their own local inspiration with the world a half-century later. Given the cultural clout of the region (Shakespeare’s birthplace Stratford-upon-Avon is a 40-minute train south), today the city ranks #13 on the continent in our overall Programming category, including #7 in Family-Friendly Activities and #10 in Nightlife.



39 FREIBURG

GERMANY

POPULATION METRO 589,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 7 BIKING
- 14 DISPOSABLE HOUSEHOLD INCOME

A dynamic university town in Germany's Black Forest dances to its own beat.

Freiburg’s proximity to France certainly gives the outdoor gateway its distinct *joie de vivre*. Or perhaps it’s the region’s 2,000 hours of annual sunshine, making it Germany’s warmest city and the home of some of the country’s best viticulture. Given its youthful exuberance and climate, residents access the story-book urban grid and nearby hiking by Europe’s seventh-best biking infrastructure. Schlossberg hill serves up city views (and the 116-metre spire of the city’s Gothic cathedral and central square Münsterplatz) for those who hike up. A funicular also accommodates the less intrepid. The University of Freiburg, founded in 1457, is omnipresent in the city’s rich cultural scene, from local talks and conferences to a small but mighty nightlife and music scene. But Freiburg works hard, too, ranking #23 for Educational Attainment and #24 for Labour Force Participation. The citizenry enjoys the 14th-highest disposable income on the continent. The city may be small, but its rail connections are growing, most recently with a weekly direct route to fellow wine region Bordeaux to build on the French interest in nearby Europa-Park, the Freiburg region’s ever-expanding theme park.



40 LYON

FRANCE

POPULATION METRO 1,448,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 19 GOOGLE SEARCH
- 20 UNIVERSITY

Future-focused and daring, France's second city is an ancient river metro with big plans.

Lyon is a city to be savoured nose to tail, past to future, literally and figuratively. If the city’s middling Family-Friendly Attractions (#35) and Museums (#62) rankings rise with the plentiful planned investment, that’s just icing on the *gâteau*. Locals are buzzing about the new OL Vallée leisure centre (although it’s a lot more than that). Yes, there’s the massive gym and semi-Olympic pool, but also five indoor soccer pitches, a 32-lane bowling alley, escape rooms and the City Surf Park. More new investment is pouring into La Confluence, a 150-hectare urban redevelopment that not only brings together Lyon’s two fabled rivers—the Rhône and the Saône—but also gives new life to an industrial urban wasteland. Most notable in the new development’s crown is the Musée des Confluences, an architectural enigma glittering at the very point where the rivers meet, with an outstretched park disappearing into the flows. Lyon also takes care of its people, scoring an impressive #27 for Poverty Rate, and is poised to develop its future talent in-house, with the Université de Lyon ranking in the top 20 in Europe.



41 GLASGOW

UNITED KINGDOM

POPULATION METRO 1,264,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 7 FOREIGN-BORN RESIDENTS
- 11 UNIVERSITY

Music and a pursuit of opportunity keep Glasgow real, even as its reputation soars.

Glasgow powers to its top 50 finish on the strength of its People ranking (including #7 for Foreign-Born Residents) and is bringing everyone along for the ride. Tech startups hungry for cheap space and talent are drawn to the city's working-class authenticity over pricier European capitals. What they find is a long legacy of homegrown talent, stoked by the eponymous university founded in 1451, the fourth oldest in the English-speaking world. It counts economist Adam Smith and U.S. founding father James Wilson as alumni, and it ranks #11 in Europe. Being a university town, Glasgow performs well in our Nightlife subcategory (#25) and the city roars to prominence at gritty venues like the Sub Club, where live shows dominate. Glasgow was designated the U.K.'s first UNESCO City of Music in 2008, and the need to get back out there makes nights here even more epic of late. Its impressive #22 spot in our Culture subcategory speaks to this year's events calendar—ranging from the annual Celtic Connections festival to August's UCI Cycling World Championships, hyped as the largest cycling event in history.



42 GOTHENBURG

SWEDEN

POPULATION METRO 1,022,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 2 LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION
- 22 FORTUNE GLOBAL 500

A 400-year-old industrial port town on Sweden's scenic west coast has smartened up for a sustainable future.

Sweden's second city is still celebrating its 400th birthday (2021–2023). There are dozens of celebrations planned, each highlighting this under-the-radar European city that has always done things its own way. There's storytelling, like Gothenburg Stories, the main installation of the city museum, showcasing interviews with 100 locals about city life. There's massive sustainable infrastructure, like the expansion of Jubileumsparken (Centenary Park). Also, there's the Hisingsbron vertical-lift bridge, which can rise to accommodate river traffic and allows residents to bike and walk safely over the Göta River. There are ambitious new attractions, from the completely renovated Gothenburg Maritime Museum and Aquarium to roller-coasters in the new Luna Park at Liseberg amusement park. A half-dozen high-profile hotels have opened over the past year, from the Jacy'z skyscraper resort to the 451-room Scandic Göteborg Central and the Clarion Hotel The Pier, built by China automotive company Geely next to their Gothenburg innovation centre, called Uni3. Its citizens are up to the task, boasting the second-highest labour participation in Europe as part of its #12 People ranking.



43 ATHENS

GREECE

POPULATION METRO 3,417,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 12 OUTDOORS
- 13 SHOPPING

As the 2,500-year-old cradle of Western civilisation, Athens understands resilience.

The ancient capital had a brutal decade: punishing financial crises, subsequent austerity, wildfires and the pandemic. But it has come back stronger, just like always. And its latest rebound is particularly impressive, based on the city's heritage that was rarely compromised despite cutbacks and sacrifice. The sustained investment is now blooming as jobs trickle back and tourists return to almost 2019 levels. They stroll the refreshed Grand Promenade, a four-kilometre tree-lined and car-free walkway at the foot of the Acropolis that connects the city's major archaeological sites. Greece's newest museum, the Athens Olympic Museum, opened to the public in May 2021 in the northern Athenian suburb of Marousi, takes visitors through the long and glorious history of the Olympic Games. Athens' #18 ranking for Museums will improve soon enough. Another new (well, technically renovated) cultural destination is the National Gallery, also reopened in 2021 after an eight-year reno that doubled its size and let in ample natural light to spotlight the European art. Oh, and there are also almost 300 new restaurants and 35 new hotels in town, with the anticipated One&Only Aesthesis opening this fall on a private oceanfront estate.



44 ROTTERDAM

NETHERLANDS

POPULATION METRO 1,868,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 13 FORTUNE GLOBAL 500
- 14 LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION

Long the austere worker city lost in the shadow of Amsterdam and The Hague, Rotterdam demonstrates the secret power of second cities.

The urban post-war rebuild wasn't exactly equal in the Netherlands. Take Rotterdam: recreated to provide Europe with its largest port. Today, it still does. Fittingly, the city was also saddled with the continent's largest red-light district. These days, you can start there, in the once-dingy downtown quay called the Katendrecht district, to witness Rotterdam's current ascent. Katendrecht is now the city's culinary heart, with its Deliplein Square an outdoor dining room ringed by restaurants and the Fenix Food Factory packed with stalls, a local brewery and workshops in an old waterfront warehouse. Watch the city's #64 Restaurants ranking pop in the coming years. Rotterdam is also Europe's design and architecture hot spot. Places like the Wilhelminakade district, the steam ship embarkation point for U.S.-bound Dutch emigrés, is today home to towers designed by Álvaro Siza, Norman Foster, and local starchitect Rem Koolhaas. There's even an all-timber floating office building moored nearby. What rising sea levels? Sustainable architecture elsewhere includes the air-filtering Smog Free Tower and the Windwheel (you'll have to see it to believe it, in 2025).



45 KRAKÓW

POLAND

POPULATION METRO 1,423,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 12 FAMILY-FRIENDLY ACTIVITIES
- 15 BIKING

Poland's second city (and historic soul) is a walkable trip back in time with an eye on an exciting future.

Few cities in Eastern Europe boast more historical significance than Kraków. Largely spared from Second World War bombing, the city features ancient urban gems ranging from the Wawel Royal Castle perched on a hill in all its Gothic-meets-Renaissance glory to the Cloth Hall, which, built in the 1200s, could vie for Europe's oldest shopping centre. It's why the city is increasingly a destination for Europeans looking for new urban holidays, with its #26-ranked Sights & Landmarks and #21-ranked Museums, soon bolstered by this spring's opening of a new home for the Museum of Contemporary Art overlooking the Vistula River. Like in Warsaw, foreign investment is everywhere. Ryanair recently announced a €750-million expansion of its Kraków operations while Google continues to invest. Also this year, Volvo Cars opens an entirely new tech hub to drive electrification, noting the need to beat competitors to Krakow's untapped talent pool. The investment will create an estimated 500 to 600 local jobs. Office and residential investment is also pouring in, with global real estate developer Panattoni, Finland's YIT and Hungarian developer Echo Investment all building this decade.



46 VALENCIA

SPAIN

POPULATION METRO 1,493,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 11 OUTDOORS
- 13 INSTAGRAM HASHTAGS

Enigmatic customs and historically paramount places make this city an undiscovered gem.

Spain's third-largest city has always flown under the radar for non-Europeans. Emerging from a harrowing pandemic, the city was named the 2022 World Design Capital by the World Design Organization. Its reasoning? "With impressive urban infrastructures that coexist harmoniously with the natural and built environment, the city has become a leading example of effective and strategic use of design in public policy." We can't argue. Ranking #11 in our Outdoors subcategory and #22 in our overall Place category, Valencia is going all in on sustainability, building on 485+ hectares of carbon-absorbing urban gardens like Jardins del Real/Vivers and the city's 16 kilometres of European Blue Flag-status beaches. Its new Parque Central unveiled 10 hectares of green space and tree canopy on top of a reused rail yard last year. Amazingly, Valencia also just became the first city in the world to verify its carbon emissions from tourist activity. Look it up—it's a big deal. This is also the home of the City of Arts and Sciences and the site of Europe's largest aquarium, and its new CaixaForum history museum will improve the city's already impressive #15 ranking for Sights & Landmarks.



47 GHENT

BELGIUM

POPULATION METRO 668,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 8 POVERTY RATE
- 23 DISPOSABLE HOUSEHOLD INCOME

Belgium's second city can't wait to tell the world its centuries-old stories.

Ghent may be the second-largest city in Belgium today, but in the Middle Ages of northern Europe, it played second fiddle only to Paris. The temples to Ghent's past prosperity are everywhere in the old city (and are protected as UNESCO sites). The Museum of Fine Arts is Belgium's oldest museum (and turns 226 this year). Do not miss the newly restored Ghent Altarpiece, aka the Mystic Lamb painting, in St. Bavo's Cathedral. An augmented-reality experience will explain everything. In addition to its priceless history, Ghent is fearlessly living in the moment with citizens from 160 nationalities calling the city home (ranking it #31 for Foreign-Born Residents), along with approximately 85,000 university students arriving each autumn to study at the city's two universities and four university colleges, with Ghent University ranking #31 in Europe. The local accountability to the future has established programmes like energy-efficient city lighting, canal cleanup tours, low-emission zones, no-meat days and more equitable home-sharing platforms. The city is also building a new village to house Ukrainian refugees comfortably. No wonder it ranks eighth-best in Europe for Poverty Rate.



48 STUTT GART

GERMANY

POPULATION METRO 1,357,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 13 FORTUNE GLOBAL 500
- 14 DISPOSABLE HOUSEHOLD INCOME

German efficiency and hospitality combine in a company town with a fun side.

Stuttgart is a hardworking economic engine that performs across multiple metrics with aplomb: its People ranking of #33 features the 20th-most-educated citizens in Europe, who rank #24 in our Labour Force Participation subcategory. The city's high score for Prosperity (#27) is shared among the growing talent base (ranking #14 for Disposable Household Income). The economic rev was sideswiped by the pandemic, when its well-used #38-ranked convention centre fell silent. It's since reopened and doubled down on sustainability, with more than half its area committed to green space and the solar panels on its roof generating surplus electricity for local households. Also buzzing are the streets around the convention centre, as the business travel that fuelled Stuttgart's party mile for decades—a hub of bars, cafés, clubs and intimate drinking dens—has roared back. Given the pent-up demand, this was one place in Germany where the post-pandemic return to business was swiftest. It's not surprising: Stuttgart ranks #13 for Global 500 companies based here, and is an economic hub boasting the European headquarters of Porsche, Bosch and IBM.



49 LIVERPOOL

UNITED KINGDOM

POPULATION METRO 1,534,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 7 SIGHTS & LANDMARKS
- 14 NIGHTLIFE

The city that helped win wars and change history is poised to tell its story again.

Liverpool's place as an integral urban centre in world history is difficult to comprehend without visiting it yourself. Fortunately, Liverpool documents it all masterfully—and honestly. The city's role as a strategic British Empire trade port, responsible for half of Britain's transatlantic slave trade, is laid bare at its International Slavery Museum. Its contribution to helping win both world wars with tens of thousands of Liverpudlians enlisting (plus its own strategic location) is outlined in the Western Approaches Museum, housed in a hidden bunker under the city's streets. But it was in its post-war decline that Liverpool made history once more when four local teenagers decided to jam together. Today, The Beatles Story is the world's largest permanent exhibit purely devoted to the band. Almost as revered is Liverpool FC, the U.K.'s most storied club, and Anfield stadium, their home since 1892. Given these layers of history, the city's #7 ranking for Sights & Landmarks isn't surprising. A huge 2023 includes Liverpool hosting Eurovision 2023 on behalf of 2022 winner Ukraine in May, as well as the Liverpool Biennial, the U.K.'s largest contemporary art festival, all summer.



50 ANTWERP

BELGIUM

POPULATION METRO 1,028,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 8 POVERTY RATE
- 23 SHOPPING

Ancient affluence meets modern crisis in Belgian's storied river city.

Antwerp has conducted business on the River Scheldt since the Middle Ages, and has the centuries-old Diamond District to prove it. No wonder the city today ranks #23 in both our Shopping and Disposable Household Income subcategories. Its cultural wealth is also shared freely, with dozens of museums of all sizes. The big news is the newly renovated Royal Museum of Fine Arts Antwerp, which took 11 years and cost €100 million to add 6,500 square metres. But the city truly shines through its quaint cobblestone townhouses, secret courtyards and alleys that all lead to the soaring Gothic beauty of the Cathedral of Our Lady. Modern architecture is catching up, too, kick-started by the Antwerp Port House by Zaha Hadid a decade ago. But not all is rosy for this gilded urban gem, and the city is currently in the grips of a violent war between drug cartels trying to control the main port of entry into Europe (an estimated 1,000 tonnes of Latin American cocaine arrived last year alone). The January 2023 murder of an 11-year-old girl by suspected drug gangs was the latest tragedy.



51 MARSEILLE

FRANCE

POPULATION METRO 1,400,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 22 FORTUNE GLOBAL 500
- 41 CONVENTION CENTRE

The oldest city in France—and a port since 600 BCE—sparkles with 300 days of sunshine annually and plenty of global delights.

Leading up to its designation as Europe's Capital of Culture a decade ago, Marseille modernised its seedy port city reputation. A swath of new waterfront buildings demonstrates the commitment across city leadership in France's third-largest city. Don't miss Vieux Port, designed by Norman Foster, who turned a site that's been here for 26 centuries into a mesmerising pedestrian-only zone with a vibrant sense of place. The showstopper is at Quai des Belges, where a dramatic blade of reflective stainless steel creates a dreamy canopy and shade. Nearby is the Museum of European and Mediterranean Civilizations with its fishnet-inspired design, linked by a pedestrian bridge to the 17th-century Fort Saint Jean. Another new ode to the old is the just-opened Cosquer Méditerranée, housing a full-scale replica of the nearby Grotte Cosquer cave, decorated with prehistoric artwork before it was inundated with water. The city's economic development is also ascendant: Marseille ranks #27 in our Poverty Rate subcategory and #22 for Fortune Global 500 companies headquartered here.



52 FLORENCE

ITALY

POPULATION METRO 794,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 5 SHOPPING
- 8 TRIPADVISOR REVIEWS

A city as a museum? Florence is as close as you'll find.

If you've never been—or if it's been a few years since your last visit—it's time to go, presto. The Renaissance beauty scores high in our Programming category (#18) thanks to a bounty of shopping, dining and culture: Botticelli's "Birth of Venus" and "Allegory of Spring", Michelangelo's "David" and Giotto's "Ognissanti Madonna", to name just a few. Of course, in the birthplace of global fashion brands like Roberto Cavalli, Salvatore Ferragamo and all the "ccis" (Pucci, Gucci, Capucci and Stefano Ricci), Florence ranks #5 for Shopping. The entire city is like a living, breathing museum (#12). But the city is also doubling down on remaining a coveted hometown, proud of its recent *Il Sole 24 Ore* honour of having the longest life expectancy in Italy, at 84. Given the investment in the globally lauded 132-year-old Meyer Children's Hospital and the Santa Maria Nuova Hospital right in the city's heart, it's not surprising. Living well means eating well, and luxury resort Borgo Santo Pietro's new Saporium (led by Chef Ariel Hagen and his farm-to-table cuisine) is one of many innovative restaurant openings in 2023.



53 SOUTHAMPTON

UNITED KINGDOM

POPULATION METRO 688,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 9 DISPOSABLE HOUSEHOLD INCOME
- 13 FOREIGN-BORN RESIDENTS

A port city on England’s south coast (yes, the Titanic departed from here) bubbles with potential.

Less than an hour’s train ride from London, Southampton is leveraging its rich heritage as a maritime gateway to optimise plentiful opportunity. Residents are well versed in the city’s attributes as a hometown that takes care of its own. With more than 50 city parks and green spaces and within 30 minutes of the New Forest National Park, the outdoors is never far. And neither are spectacular beaches further afield, with the bucolic Isle of Wight a short ferry ride away. Long called the U.K.’s “gateway to the world,” the city is drawing investment with its port potential, with proposals ranging from the Maritime Gateway (to funnel visitors from Southampton Central Station to the waterfront) to the billions of pounds proposed to better link the Island to increase tourism (which already thrives here, given the city’s cruise ship traffic). In light of this ambition, it’s easy to see how Southampton ranks #10 in our overall Prosperity category, including #9 for Disposable Household Income and #13 for Poverty Rate. Its two universities and economic resilience mean Southampton has the 13th-highest foreign-born population in Europe.



54 DRESDEN

GERMANY

POPULATION METRO 1,344,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 5 BIKING
- 39 DISPOSABLE HOUSEHOLD INCOME

Few European cities evoke conflicted emotions like this vital German city.

Known as “Florence on the Elbe” (after the river that flows through it) until February 13, 1945, this Baroque masterpiece (and its robust manufacturing infrastructure) was bombed by 800 British planes dropping 2,700 tonnes of explosives over two days, reducing the city to rubble and killing more than 25,000, including refugees and Allied prisoners of war. The terror was captured and shared with the world by a POW named Kurt Vonnegut. “Slaughterhouse-Five” has sold more than a million copies in the U.S. alone since its publication in 1969. Today, Dresden is sowing the work of its meticulous rebuild in the decades following the war. The stunning architecture is highlighted by the Baroque Zwinger Palace and its several museums, including the Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister that showcases art from the 15th to the 18th centuries. Despite the devastation, Dresden ranks #61 in our Sights & Landmarks subcategory. The city is investing in livability with the fifth-best biking infrastructure in Europe, eagerly used by residents whose disposable household income ranks #39. That is until winter, when locals and visitors alike blow their budgets at some of Europe’s best Christmas markets.



55 COLOGNE

GERMANY

POPULATION METRO 2,100,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 9 CONVENTION CENTRE
- 17 GOOGLE TRENDS

Cologne is open for business and pleasure.

Despite aesthetic riches like the twin-spired Cologne Cathedral, which rises above the historic buildings of the city’s Old Town, and the cultural bounty of places like the Museum Ludwig with its 20th-century art, the perception of the city lags behind its virtues. Cologne ranks cruelly low in our Culture (#46), Sights & Landmarks (#37) and Museums (#62) subcategories. That last one hurts, given the range of museums in town, from Middle Age riches at the Schnütgen, classics at the Wallraf-Richartz and the Picassos and more modern marvels at the Museum Ludwig. The city even has its own beer, Kölsch. Its global ascent is inevitable, especially with both Germans and international visitors rediscovering the city—like the more than one million who attended the restarted Pride parade last June. In addition to its overlooked cultural bounty, Cologne is also a regional business powerhouse and destination, powered by its #9-ranked convention centre and fuelled by citizens ranked #28 in both the Educational Attainment and Disposable Household Income subcategories. It’s also home to Lufthansa, traditionally the second-largest airline in Europe, which should help draw new head offices post-pandemic.



56 AARHUS

DENMARK

POPULATION METRO 846,00

HIGHLIGHTS

- 3 POVERTY RATE
- 28 LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION

Denmark's second city is doing it by design.

It has centuries-old fairy-tale streets and a buzzing student population (mostly from Aarhus University, the largest in Scandinavia and ranked #34 in Europe), but Aarhus hits different from its second-city contemporaries. Maybe it's the afterglow of a blistering decade and its 2017 European Capital of Culture honours, building on a commitment to creativity, sustainability and considered urbanism already underway. Or perhaps it goes back further, to 1941, when Aarhus City Hall unveiled its iconic modernist clock tower as a beacon to democracy while under Nazi occupation. The 2004 expansion of the ARoS Aarhus Art Museum, today one of the largest in northern Europe, was followed by similarly daring architecture in the city's underused industrial Isbjerget quarter. A decade after its first residential project—modelled on a cluster of floating icebergs—caught the design world's attention, new residents continue pouring in. Aarhus is also an increasingly walkable feast (especially in the old city), featuring four Michelin-starred restaurants that also boast the guide's green stars for sustainability. (Try the local lobster at Substans.) Sated locals rank #28 for Labour Force Participation, and the city's focus on equity means it ties for third-lowest for Poverty Rate in Europe.



57 EINDHOVEN

NETHERLANDS

POPULATION METRO 771,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 11 LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION
- 29 UNIVERSITY

The industrious Dutch city works away from the spotlight (despite sharing it with the world).

For seven centuries Eindhoven was a small trading settlement with proximity to European markets. All that changed in 1891, when native sons the Philips brothers founded a light bulb startup that would grow to join the ranks of the largest electronics companies ever. Remarkably, the city became known as the City of Light during the early 1900s and its course was set, especially as Philips diversified into myriad opportunities over the next century, creating and perfecting thousands of products as it powered the world's insatiable need for personal tech. Today, the company's fingerprints are everywhere, from the skyline that includes the landmark Witte Dame building (once a lamp factory) and Bruine Heer building (Philips' main offices) to the football stadium the company built for the city's PSV team to the legacy of innovation that has earned the city the title of Dutch industrial design capital. The Eindhoven University of Technology (ranked #29) and the Design Academy Eindhoven are prestigious global design schools. The city also embraces its public outdoors and parks, with the largest percentage of parkland of any Dutch city and ever-expanding bike infrastructure.



58 NICE

FRANCE

POPULATION METRO 615,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 27 CULTURE
- 29 OUTDOORS

The Côte d'Azur's urban heart is not taking time off.

In many ways, France's fifth-largest city paved the way for the modern European holiday destination. Quite literally: in the 1800s, visionary city leaders convinced vacationing English aristocracy to pay to pave the five kilometres of beachfront, known today as Promenade des Anglais. These days, the stunning urban heart of the Côte d'Azur is busy reclaiming its perch as both a coveted tourism destination post-pandemic and a cultural muse to timeless artists that range from Matisse to Picasso. Ranked #27 on the continent in our Culture subcategory, Nice is in the running for 2028 European Capital of Culture (to be named in December), excited to leverage its dozens of museums and galleries (many housed in the city's bounty of La Belle Époque architecture). Tourism-focused urban development is also in full swing, led by this year's opening of the Daniel Libeskind (among others) designed Gare Thiers-Est, a massive jagged crystal next to the train station, inspired by the mineral forms of azurite found in the region, with high-end shops, a 120-room Hilton hotel, offices and epic public spaces. Closer to the beach, Anantara Hotels & Resorts opens in a 175-year-old icon, joining other recent openings and renos.



59 GRAZ

AUSTRIA

POPULATION METRO 605,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 8 BIKING
- 11 EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

Austria's lush second city is smart, prosperous... and communist?

Green, clean and historic, Graz is, given its urban perfection, a fitting recipient of its UNESCO City of Design title. Mid-rise, red-roofed white city blocks snake out from the medieval tangle of Baroque and Renaissance buildings rising and falling with the verdant undulations of the topography. Trees and forests share the urban grid, rising up to Graz's Schlossberg, once the site of a strategic medieval fortress, and sliced by the Mur River below. The walkable city is dissected by the #8-ranked biking infrastructure in Europe. The rare blend of aesthetics, relative isolation and warm, sunny microclimate (Graz is one of Austria's winemaking clusters) has long pulled in mavericks. The city boasts eight universities and much of the population is made up of current and former students who contribute to Graz's #11 ranking for Educational Attainment. Many settle here, launching hundreds of companies annually. In 2020, almost 1,500 startups were reported to have launched in Graz. Today, the city's Disposable Household Income ranks #17. In 2021, the city also elected Elke Kahr of the Communist Party of Austria as mayor, who seems to be a rising tourist attraction all her own if international media is a metric.



60 MALMÖ

SWEDEN

POPULATION METRO 669,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 4 LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION
- 14 EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

Sweden's third-largest city revels in the hustle of its citizens and its outdoor playground.

Most know Malmö by the Øresund Bridge that leads away from it, immortalised in the TV drama "The Bridge". That same link is responsible for Malmö's relative obscurity, located a 25-minute drive from international darling Copenhagen and usually ceding global attention to Stockholm. (Although the connection has been a boon for accessing the massive Danish market next door.) Despite its #113 ranking in our Promotions category, Malmö is riding the demand for smaller but connected and ambitious hometowns. Especially ones with the historic and plentiful warehouse and industrial real estate boasted by this once-thriving shipping industry hub that crumbled with the oil crisis 50 years ago. Places like the Kockums or Västra Hamnen shipyard, today home to hundreds of companies employing thousands on an industrial waterfront that just oozes authenticity. The 2000 opening of Malmö University in the central business district yields a #14 ranking for Educational Attainment and #4 spot for Labour Force Participation by citizens. Playtime is never far away, courtesy of the dozens of parks cherished by locals—like downtown's massive King's Park, and Ribersborg, a coastal stroll with swimmable beaches and even a bathhouse en route.



61 BORDEAUX

FRANCE

POPULATION METRO 1,364,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 16 CONVENTION CENTRE
- 21 FAMILY-FRIENDLY ACTIVITIES

A pandemic exodus from Paris headed (partially) to Bordeaux. Today, the reignited city is poised for its own *Années folles*.

Two hours southwest of Paris by train, Bordeaux was always a tempting weekend escape for Parisians and international tourists pining for fresher air, local cuisine and the largest concentration of wineries in a nation synonymous with viniculture. Wide golden beaches (with surfing!) are just a 45-minute drive away. But as the pandemic suffocated big-city density, younger urbanites sought out more room and cheaper housing permanently. Many landed at this UNESCO World Heritage city with a tenth of the capital's population despite many similarities, from the gastronomy (the city ranks #31 in our Restaurants subcategory) to the stunning 18th- and 19th-century architecture, kinetic nightlife and Seine-like promenade. All those new arrivals spent the past few years exploring the historic streets, home to some of Europe's best biking infrastructure, and staking their claims. The result is an economic and cultural renaissance, with new businesses opening weekly. The city's impressive #21 ranking for Family-Friendly Activities got another boost in late 2021, with the opening of the Bassins des Lumières, a colossal digital art space housed in the city's former submarine base.



62 UTRECHT

NETHERLANDS

POPULATION METRO 890,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 14 FOREIGN-BORN RESIDENTS
- 21 UNIVERSITY

Utrecht is a laid-back university hub trying to keep the doors held open to the world.

Utrecht is a distinct hometown and destination all its own, despite being only a 25-minute train ride from Amsterdam. Home to an astounding 29 universities and colleges attended by 70,000 students from 125 countries, of which the biggest is Utrecht University, founded in 1636 and ranked #21 in our University subcategory. Education and research comprises most of the local economy and with global talent pouring in to study here, Utrecht ranks #14 in our Foreign-Born Residents subcategory. The city's medieval urban grid bursts with Dutch history that can only be possible in a place that for centuries was the cultural and religious heart of the nation. Given its magnetism—combined with that easy access to coveted Amsterdam—the city's leaders are in the midst of the largest new development in the Netherlands, with 30,000 houses and office and industrial space being built in nearby Leidsche Rijn. The full buildout, including a new hospital, schools, places of worship, retail and new public transit to the city centre, may be ready for 2025. Sustainability is the directive, and an underground roadway is the engineering point of pride for project builders.



63 THE HAGUE

NETHERLANDS

POPULATION METRO 1,103,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 14 LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION
- 22 FORTUNE GLOBAL 500

The political capital of the Netherlands delivers on livability for citizens while keeping humanity accountable.

The third-largest city in the Netherlands feels a world apart from the country's capital, considering its global purpose. Home of the Dutch royal family, the Peace Palace and International Criminal Court, where the UN International Court of Justice rules on international law, The Hague keeps an impeccable home. It's packed with 13th-century architecture like the Binnenhof complex, where you'll find the Dutch government offices right in the heart of the city. Its large fountain and pond is an urban haven for ducks and swans that add to the overall story-book vibe. The city ranks #39 for just this type of city park, as well as for larger ones, like Westduinpark with its dense forests and high dunes that drop into a stunning sandy beach. Art museums are everywhere and, in the spirit of accessibility, so are attractions for families (ranked #52), ranging from the Madurodam Miniature Town to the Children's Book Museum in The Hague Library and the LEGOLAND Discovery Centre. It's all accessible in one of the most bike- and pedestrian-friendly cities on the continent.



64 NUREMBERG

GERMANY

POPULATION METRO 1,353,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 11 DISPOSABLE HOUSEHOLD INCOME
- 21 LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION

Historic and entrepreneurial, Nuremberg is a Bavarian tiger on the rise.

Few cities embody their country like Nuremberg does Germany. The northern Bavarian city is sprinkled with medieval architecture, ancient fortifications and stone towers—most notably in its Altstadt (Old Town). Amid the red-tiled buildings rises Kaiserburg Castle. A short stroll away is Frauenkirche, a Gothic cathedral dating back to the 14th century. More currently, Nuremberg is known for its rich beers, energetic night-life and enticing gingerbread bakeries. It also gained infamy during the Second World War as the site of the first Nazi rallies and atrocities... and, ultimately, the Nuremberg trials that brought to justice those who set the stage for them. Adding to its complex tapestry is a business climate that ranks among the strongest in Europe. The city and its environs are home to iconic German companies like Adidas, Puma, Diehl, Faber-Castell and Playmobil. The firepower drives the city to a #21 ranking for Labour Force Participation, and a resulting #11 for Disposable Household Income. Given all the enterprise nearby, the fact that Nuremberg boasts the 24th-best convention centre space in Europe is probably not too surprising.



65 STRASBOURG

FRANCE

POPULATION METRO 853,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 16 BIKING
- 24 WALK SCORE

A medieval jewel near the French-German border is one of Europe's best-preserved centres of history.

Tucked on the French side of the Rhine River, Strasbourg was only “strategically” bombed during the Second World War. As such, its medieval and Renaissance history was mostly spared and its Grande Île historic heart became the first urban centre in France to be recognised in its entirety by UNESCO. Its gothic Notre Dame de Strasbourg cathedral was built just 94 years after the Paris icon and is a portal into the history of this underappreciated city, especially in light of the Rhine panorama from its 142-metre spire. Strasbourg has also worked diligently for its “French Cycling Capital” bonafides (ranking #16 in our Biking subcategory), with more than 600 kilometres of bike paths and almost 20% of citizens biking to work across the 21 bridges and footbridges that connect Grande Île to the rest of the city. As the formal seat of the European Parliament, Strasbourg has long put citizens first, indicated by its #27 tied ranking for Poverty Rate in Europe, and ingenious public services like the new Solidarity Concierge, a one-stop post office, tools and small household appliance rental, laundry and shoe repair.



66 AACHEN

GERMANY

POPULATION METRO 594,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 9 BIKING
- 28 EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

A historically key European centre keeps doing right by citizens local and global.

Germany’s westernmost city is closer to Brussels and Amsterdam than to Berlin, and occupies a key role in European history, first as a Roman thermal bath complex, then as the medieval imperial residence of Emperor Charlemagne, long credited as a unifier of Europe. (The city’s International Charlemagne Prize of Aachen is the oldest and best-known prize awarded for work done in the service of European unification, most recently given to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and the Ukrainian people.) The city also crowned dozens of Holy Roman Emperors as kings of the Germans until the 1500s. The walkable historic centre is a joy to explore (the city ranks #9 in our Biking subcategory), especially its spectacular Aachener Dom, constructed more than 1,200 years ago and one of the first 12 buildings to appear on the UNESCO list of World Heritage sites. Today, it’s the site of epic Christmas markets. Schools like the Aachen University of Applied Sciences, the largest and most prestigious technical university in Germany, help the city rank #28 for both its educated citizenry and for the disposable income they bring home.



67 BELFAST

UNITED KINGDOM

POPULATION METRO 787,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 22 FOREIGN-BORN RESIDENTS
- 32 CONVENTION CENTRE

Few European capitals are growing with the voraciousness of Northern Ireland’s storied capital.

Belfast is making up for lost time, intent on leveraging the architectural bounty sprinkled throughout its Georgian streetscapes to draw investment and new talent searching for an affordable, connected and supportive hometown willing to do the work. And Belfast has always gotten it done, back when it was the shipbuilding capital of the world, at the turn of the last century, drawing makers and craftspeople who crowned the city “Linenopolis” as it rose to Ireland’s global linen industry dominance. The Titanic was built here, and today the Titanic Quarter is one of Europe’s largest urban waterfront regeneration projects, with 20,000 people already living, working and visiting daily. Many more will visit now that the Titanic Belfast museum has reopened and expanded. Nowhere else on the planet will sate your obsession (whether historical or Hollywood) like here. The city’s warehouses today house global brands like Deloitte and PwC, and homegrown firms like FinTrU and Options Technology, each company eager to tap into the 43% of Belfast’s population aged 30 or younger (ranking #22 for Foreign-Born Residents) in a global talent crisis, while local leaders build affordable housing to keep them here.



68 LEEDS

UNITED KINGDOM

POPULATION METRO 1,903,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 13 UNIVERSITY
- 26 NIGHTLIFE

This year belongs to Leeds.

The U.K.'s fourth-largest city finally gets to reap the fruits of the labour it undertook leading up to 2017, when it lost its European Capital of Culture bid on a post-Brexit technicality. City leaders applied some Yorkshire pragmatism, got their £10 million bid money matched and launched their own year of culture, called Leeds 2023. January kicked off with concerts, a literary festival and a storytelling initiative by older citizens. The celebration will build on a legacy of cultural programming (ranked #39), powered by a storied nightlife (#26) supported by six (six!) local universities and a proud 1990s past of bringing acid house dance music to the world. The ongoing Back to Basics weekly club night, launched in 1991, claims to be Europe's longest-running, while downtown's Mojo bar has been making foggy memories since 1996. New spots helping shape the city include the Viaduct Showbar, an LGBTQIA+ hot spot in the heart of the city. The deep culture also resonates outdoors, and Roundhay Park, with its 285 hectares of lakes, forests, playgrounds and cafés (and the occasional Rolling Stones, Madonna and U2 show) is one of the Europe's largest urban green spaces.



69 DÜSSELDORF

GERMANY

POPULATION METRO 1,465,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 13 CONVENTION CENTRE
- 28 GOOGLE SEARCH

A vibrant economy and inflow of new immigrants balance efficiency and revelry.

Düsseldorf has the special blend that makes an efficient, prosperous city perform for its residents and visitors. Take the Messe Düsseldorf, the city's convention centre (rated #13 on the continent). Several Global 500 companies are here, attracting residents and placing Düsseldorf at an impressive #28 in our Educational Attainment subcategory for its citizenry. New talent is welcomed by an understated multiculturalism (including Germany's largest Japanese community, in the Immermannstrasse area), and the capital of the North-Rhine Westphalia state's #28 spot for Disposable Household Income. The small but mighty cultural scene (ranked #96 but poised for big things) supports more than 100 galleries, and Joseph Beuys, the sculptor and performance artist, is a local icon almost 40 years after his death. The Kunstsammlung North Rhine-Westphalia museum is home to important classical and contemporary European art collections, performances and screenings. The architecture at MedienHafen—a waterfront development juxtaposing old with new—boasts buildings and hotels by Frank Gehry, David Chipperfield, Joe Coenen, Steven Holl and Claude Vasconi alongside restored historic warehouses that maintain the industrial port character of the Rhine River shoreline.



70 LINZ

AUSTRIA

POPULATION METRO 624,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 10 EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT
- 11 BIKING

Straddling the banks of the Danube halfway between Salzburg and Vienna, a creative dynamo rewards non-linear thinkers.

Yes, it has beautiful pastel buildings and Baroque churches, but Linz undertook a post-war rebuild that pursued a place of learning and expression, first with the founding of Johannes Kepler University in 1966, and then with the Fine Arts Academy and The Brucknerhaus in the early 1970s. The Ars Electronica Center followed in 1996 and became the flagship institution of this UNESCO City of Media Arts 20 years later, adopting the moniker of "the Museum of the Future." The 2003 opening of Lentos Kunstmuseum gave the city a beacon on its skyline and a place to showcase two centuries of modern art. The 2009 European Capital of Culture honour fuelled Linz's ambitions even more, as it opened its Musiktheater, one of Europe's most state-of-the-art opera houses, and Mural Harbor, Europe's largest gallery of graffiti and murals. The city's two lauded universities (technically focused Johannes Kepler and the arts and performance-leaning Anton Bruckner Privatuniversität) means an impressive Top 10 ranking for educated citizenry that enjoys the 12th-highest disposable income. The city also boasts the #11th-best biking infrastructure in Europe—always a sign of a smart city.



71 PALMA

SPAIN

POPULATION METRO 709,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 9 EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT
- 24 OUTDOORS

A historic centre is coveted by investors seeking their place in the sun.

It's a tale as old as the 21st century: locals flee the cramped quarters of a historic city for more convenient outskirts only to have the abandoned patina and authenticity gobbled up by global culture vultures able to work from anywhere (if needing to work at all). Palma, capital of the Spanish island of Mallorca (aka Majorca), enchants visitors to its centre with a stunning tangle of sandstone architecture packed right around the colossal Santa Maria cathedral, a Gothic masterpiece from the 1200s. After two decades of global fascination (and real estate investment) by the cognoscenti, the Balearic capital is more a destination than a mere gateway to cheap all-inclusive beach holidays, and is lauded as a smaller, mellower Barcelona. It ranks #24 in our Outdoors category and entices international palates with its #37-ranked restaurants. Hotel investment is on a tear since travel resumed post-pandemic, with 30 hotels in the historic centre alone (and more on the way). The city's seafront promenade is getting upgraded, and the Club de Mar marina is being reimaged as one of the most modern in the Mediterranean, with the largest wharf in Spain.



72 BONN

GERMANY

POPULATION METRO 790,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 13 FORTUNE GLOBAL 500
- 27 BIKING

A former capital keeps its advantage.

Bonn may have a relatively small population today, but its importance to Europe and the world can't be understated (if only because Ludwig van Beethoven was born here in 1770 and his three-storey stucco house draws tens of thousands of visitors annually). The capital of West Germany from 1949 to 1990, it was among the world's most important decision centres. It was also the seat of government of reunited Germany from 1990 to 1999. Two millennia prior, it was deemed a strategic imperial outpost by the expanding Roman army and was constructed as such, in effect becoming one of Germany's oldest cities. Today, the German federal government maintains a substantial presence here and a third of national ministerial jobs are still located in the city, as well as 20 United Nations institutions, the most in the country. Old capitals don't relinquish their advantage easily and, besides being a government town, Bonn remains the headquarters for publicly listed Deutsche Telekom and Deutsche Post, giving the city a #13 ranking in our Fortune Global 500 subcategory. The local talent pipeline is served well by the University of Bonn (#42) and an educated citizenry (#28).



73 TOULOUSE

FRANCE

POPULATION METRO 1,454,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 42 GOOGLE SEARCH
- 46 RESTAURANTS

An ancient city pursues its future.

The heart of France's aeronautics and space industry is a rare hometown that's both a globally recognised innovator and a 2,000-year-old urban treasure trove committed to its citizens current and future. The Airbus Group, Airbus Defence & Space, Thales Alenia Space and dozens of other aeronautics firms alone employ almost 100,000. The sectors have long attracted complementary investment and today Toulouse is among the European leaders in intelligent transport, from autonomous vehicles (both driving and flying) to hyperloop implementation. France's longest cable car just opened here, spanning the tree-lined Garonne River. But the Pink City (named for the distinct rose hue of its many buildings) is also an emerging cultural hotbed, with a torrent of recent and upcoming investments—like its conversion of the Saint-Michel prison into an auditorium for the Orchestre National du Capitole in its efforts to become France's City of Dance. Locals are buzzing about the upcoming Les Halles de la Cartouche, a 13,500-square-metre former munitions factory that will house a food hall, co-working space and sports and cultural centre. With this fall's Rugby World Cup coming to town, the secret may finally be out.



74 GRENOBLE

FRANCE

POPULATION METRO 717,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 24 WALK SCORE
- 49 DISPOSABLE HOUSEHOLD INCOME

France's winter wonderland is leading the way on a warming planet.

The capital of the French Alps, sprawling out over the deep valley among the Vercors, Chartreuse and Belledonne ranges, has long coaxed outdoor-loving adventurers wanting urban excitement with their adrenaline. A large as the city is, its relative flatness, and 450 kilometres of bike paths and focus on walkability rank it #24 in our Walk Score subcategory. Self-propelled adventures also abound around the city, of course, from dozens of mountain biking loops in the foothills to canoeing on the Isère River to skiing at nearby resorts with views of the city. Grenoble is the gateway to an incredible 25 ski resorts. This is the country's base of hydroelectricity, as well as the birthplace for outdoor icons like Rossignol, Roma and Petzl, so city leaders here are well aware of the fragile ecosystem they call home. Amidst grim news recently published by the University of Grenoble that half of France's 169 ski resorts have closed due to lack of snow since 1951, the city was named the 2022 European Green Capital with the aim to lead other regions with workable solutions for other mountain cities globally, before it's too late.



75 LEICESTER

UNITED KINGDOM

POPULATION METRO 897,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 37 LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION
- 38 AIRPORT CONNECTIVITY

History and creativity keep things interesting in the U.K.'s East Midlands.

It's been an eventful decade for Leicester. The archeological discovery of Richard III's remains in 2012 and his reinterment at Leicester Cathedral in 2015 was a global event, as was the capture of the Premier League title by Leicester City in 2016. The wave of excitement was halted with the pandemic, of course, but development has returned, with new construction planned to ensure the city, boasting two universities, remains a competitive potential hometown for graduates. Amazingly, all that digging has unearthed even more treasures below the city streets, most recently a Roman place of worship that will join the city's popular King Richard III Visitor Centre as a future museum. Leicester is often cited as the most excavated city in Britain, with 15% of the historic city centre dug up to expose its medieval, Anglo-Saxon and now even Roman history. Above ground, the buzz is back at Leicester's Cultural Quarter, home to theatres, galleries and studios for more than 30 years since the conversion of the city's textile and shoe manufacturing district. Leicester also showcased its creativity by unveiling the tallest mural in Europe on its St George's Tower last year.



76 HANOVER

GERMANY

POPULATION METRO 1,315,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 7 CONVENTION CENTER
- 13 FORTUNE GLOBAL 500

While many cities claim to work hard, play hard, Hanover walks (and bikes) the talk.

The industrious city on the banks of the Leine River is home to a diverse ecosystem of companies (and, given the local business community's obsession with collaboration and coordination, it feels particularly symbiotic). Companies here range from Sennheiser to Volkswagen (which just started building the hot new ID.Buzz electrified van in town) to financial services provider Swiss Life. The economic firepower has Hanover finishing an impressive #13 in our Fortune Global 500 subcategory and #35 in our overall Prosperity category. All that business in town is pulling in 500 conferences per year (pandemic aside), with most taking place in the #7-ranked Hannover Messe fairground convention centre. The city's 50,000 students have plenty of options after graduation. But Hanover has long invested in its livability, claiming that 50% of the city is dedicated to green spaces. Its #39 ranking in our Biking subcategory validates that biking and pedestrian infrastructure, along with the city's recent "no car days" efforts. The arts also matter here, as a recent UNESCO City of Music honour—and seemingly daily theatre, opera and arts programming—would indicate.



77 BOLOGNA

ITALY

POPULATION METRO 786,000

HIGHLIGHTS

24 WALK SCORE

29 CULTURE

Youthful exuberance and incredible cuisine fuels Italy's academic and cultural dynamo.

Timeless Bologna, home of the oldest continuously operating university in the world, is a well-balanced meal of a city, founded more than 2,000 years ago (with its streets today comprising a massive, textured open-air urban museum), yet kinetic, happy and optimistic, powered by thousands of international students. It also serves up some of the best *actual* meals in Europe as the nationally recognised culinary capital of this culinary country. Bolognese kitchens of centuries past invented parmesan, mortadella, parma ham, ragù, lasagne and balsamic vinegar. No wonder Italians love referring to it as *La Grassa* (the fat one). That Bologna's restaurants rank only #58 in Europe speaks more to the relative obscurity of the city (approximately a million tourists visited in 2022) than to its hundreds of outstanding osterias. More visitors and residents are casting their eye on the city, especially after it topped the national *Il Sole 24 Ore* newspaper's 2023 annual quality of life survey. Bologna is also a cultural feast (#29 in our Culture subcategory), with an epic 2023 summer and fall lineup that includes the Varignana Music Festival of classical music and new programming at its 50-plus museums.



78 LEIPZIG

GERMANY

POPULATION METRO 1,049,000

HIGHLIGHTS

24 BIKING

24 CONVENTION CENTRE

Arts and commerce forge a German urban gem.

Calling Leipzig a "secondary" German city seems like an understatement. There may be fewer than a million people living here, but this industrial centre so heavily damaged by Allied bombing at the end of the Second World War has emerged as an exciting urban renewal story in a country full of them. Yes, there are the typical German economic attributes, like an enviable convention centre (ranked #24 in Europe); regional (and expanding) offices for Porsche, BMW, Amazon and others; a cargo airport that is one of DHL's three global hubs; and the resulting citizenry with impressive disposable household income (#39). But there are also growing global bonafides about the city's arts and culture. *The New York Times* even called it "Germany's new cultural hot spot" and "better than the capital" a few years back. A lot of the buzz is around Spinnerei, a 19th-century cotton mill adapted into a community hive, housing 13 galleries and hundreds (yes, osterias.) of artists' studios. The centre also features indie cinema, a restaurant and a beer garden. The cultural lineage of Leipzig is well earned: Wagner was born here, while Mahler and Bach all lived and worked in the city. The city's middling Culture and Programming rankings will rise with the increased attention.



79 SHEFFIELD

UNITED KINGDOM

POPULATION METRO 1,189,000

HIGHLIGHTS

16 UNIVERSITY

33 NIGHTLIFE

From a steel city to the Outdoor City, few European urban centres have experienced rebirth like this.

Looking at Sheffield today, it's difficult to understand why George Orwell called it the "ugliest town in the world." Mind you, that was in 1936, back when "in whichever direction you look you see the same landscape of monstrous chimneys pouring forth smoke." More than 80 years later (in 2021), the U.K.'s fifth-largest city was named the greenest in the country by a University of Southampton study. An incredible 61% of the city is designated as green space and more than a third is within the boundary of the Peak District National Park. Amidst all those trees (the most per person in Europe, according to proud local boosters) 80 stands are classed as ancient woodlands. Sheffield's #48 ranking in our Outdoors category will definitely improve as word of its investment grows. Local government has also been expanding walking and biking routes in an effort to limit car use, an investment in the more than 60,000 students who call the city home (half of whom attend the University of Sheffield).



80 NANTES

FRANCE

POPULATION METRO 1,011,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 18 BIKING
- 24 WALK SCORE

A revived port city plays the long game.

The historic capital of Brittany—and one of Europe’s leading ports in the 1700s—was an industrial engine until shipbuilding, hit hard by the 1970s oil crisis, ground to a halt. The manufacturing and shipping centre—Île de Nantes in the middle of the Loire River—was left a derelict wasteland in the heart of a proud but wounded city. All that changed in 2007 when centuries of warehouse and factory stock was repurposed as the city’s cultural hub. Spots like Les Machines de l’île, a collection of interactive art exhibits featuring giant walking machines inspired by local son Jules Verne’s novels and plays, help the city finish #59 in our Family-Friendly Activities subcategory. The city was also designated as a European Green Capital 10 years ago, further helping habitat rehabilitation, food security and sustainable transportation (Nantes ranks #18 and #24 in our Biking and Walk Score subcategories, respectively). Of course a city this historic and nationally vital has cultural bounty to spare, none more impressive than the Musée d’Arts, established by Napoleon in 1801 and fully renovated a few years ago. Its collection of the arts masters rivals anything in Paris. (Except without the capital’s crowds.)



81 BOURNEMOUTH

UNITED KINGDOM

POPULATION METRO 532,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 24 FOREIGN-BORN RESIDENTS
- 25 DISPOSABLE HOUSEHOLD INCOME

From beach town to hometown on the U.K.’s south coast.

This coastal resort town is a pocket-sized shot of California two hours by train from London. A rare microclimate means more sunshine, warmer weather and (for the surfers and swimmers who play on its eponymous beach, often lauded as one of Europe’s best) warmer seas. The area’s golden beaches, it should be noted, are Blue Flag-certified. With its beachfront promenade, Ferris wheel and piers, the city has embraced its unique beach-town vibe for decades, readily drawing families with one-of-a-kind, Instagrammable attractions—like the only pier-to-shore zipline on the planet, or the Chocolate Boutique Hotel (which is exactly what it sounds like). Its #71 spot for Family-Friendly Activities will improve as word gets out. Aside from its robust hospitality industry, Bournemouth is also a financial industry hub, recently boosted by newly arrived tech firms and remote workers who prefer a morning surf to a tube commute. The result is a Top 25 finish in our Disposable Household Income subcategory and #15 for Poverty Rate. Two local universities favoured by international students bring a #24 finish for Foreign-Born Residents.



82 SEVILLE

SPAIN

POPULATION METRO 1,019,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 19 CULTURE
- 23 NIGHTLIFE

Seville’s millennia along the Guadalquivir River, an ancient highway between Cadiz and Cordoba, has threaded city building into its DNA.

Despite being Spain’s fourth-largest city, Seville—or Sevilla in its mother tongue—is as complex and multilayered as the most ornate fan wielded by local flamenco dancers. The Andalusian capital revels in its warm, sunny climate and #26-ranked parks and outdoors, and is proudly walkable, narrow and winding, perfect for exploring by foot or bike. Moorish and Baroque architecture radiates in panoramas out from its spectacular cathedral and the Giralda bell tower. Not content with masterpieces of the past, city builders are always looking to visually delight locals and visitors, which results in the #23 ranking for Sights & Landmarks. Take the 10-year-old Metropol Parasol that rises over the medieval Plaza de la Encarnación. Six massive sculpted sunshades ascend 28 metres up and shade those below from the relentless Andalusian sun. Speaking of heat, the new proMETEO project made Seville the world’s first city to name heatwaves in the same way we do hurricanes in a bid to raise public awareness of their impact on health and to encourage people to protect themselves. The nights are just as hot, evidenced by Seville’s #24 ranking in our overall Programming category, including #19 for Culture.



83 TURIN

ITALY

POPULATION METRO 1,431,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 22 RESTAURANTS
- 22 FORTUNE GLOBAL 500

Italian excellence and influence simmers slowly at the foot of the Alps.

Italy's fourth-largest city and capital of Piedmont is a sensory feast that has long been underappreciated by international tourists. Perhaps it's because Milan, just a 45-minute train ride away, sates most itineraries. Turin (or Torino in Italian) couldn't care less, confident in a homegrown wealth and elegance that serves up a #22 European ranking for its restaurants (and #36 for the disposable income of its citizens). That the city was the first capital of a unified Italy from 1861 to 1865 further validates its profound importance to the nation. Turin is also a stunner, with Baroque architecture meticulously rebuilt after heavy Allied bombing in the Second World War—the streetscapes are reminiscent of the grandest in Paris, but with the Italian Alps as a backdrop. An incredible 163 *piazze* make exploring the city by foot a portal into its cultural textures, especially the #29-ranked museums that document the dynamism of a city like in few other places. The Museo Casa Mollino, an apartment once belonging to Italian architect Carlo Mollino, is a design pilgrimage, while the Museo Nazionale dell'Automobile honours a city that some refer to as "Italy's Detroit." The National Cinema Museum reminds the world that the first blockbuster was made here, and inspired Hollywood.



84 BILBAO

SPAIN

POPULATION METRO 1,042,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 5 FOREIGN-BORN RESIDENTS
- 13 FORTUNE GLOBAL 500

Smart, safe and economically vibrant, Bilbao is redesigning the European good life.

Bilbao, in the heart of Basque Country in northern Spain, last year celebrated 25 years since the 1997 opening of the Guggenheim Bilbao, the Frank Gehry-designed titanium-clad museum that made the city, and its architect, global icons. Proudly one of Europe's second cities, Bilbao revels under the cover of its own relative obscurity and isolation, creating its own magnetism. Sure, the Guggenheim's destination architecture still draws hundreds of thousands annually, but as one of Europe's most welcoming cities (ranking #5 in our Foreign-Born Residents subcategory), Bilbao is building an accessible hometown full of new green spaces and sustainability-minded housing—with other daring new waves of architecture, like Santiago Calatrava's Zubizuri Bridge and Bilbao Airport, and Zaha Hadid's redevelopment of the old port area. The design-minded city is also emerging as a stealthy, affordable business headquarters, ranking #13 for Fortune Global 500 companies located in town, including multinational electric utility company Iberdrola and financial giant BBVA. Disposable Household Income appropriately ranks #15 in Europe. The world is watching this small urban dynamo, especially as it hosts the launch of the Tour de France cycling race this summer.



85 MONTPELLIER

FRANCE

POPULATION METRO 802,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 26 BIKING
- 47 FAMILY-FRIENDLY ACTIVITIES

France's fastest-growing city looks like a sure bet.

The French call it *la surdouée* (the gifted one). The term of endearment has had particular resonance over the past 20 years, as Montpellier became the country's fastest-growing city by population, with almost half of residents today aged 34 or younger. Most come for the University of Montpellier, founded in 1220, which is not only one of the oldest in the world, but also the planet's oldest medical school still in operation. Several other universities and dozens of other schools mean that 70,000 students call the city home and provide ample talent for a rising economy. The U of M's centuries of medical expertise have nurtured a growing life sciences ecosystem, joining existing tech and IT regional operations for IBM, Ubisoft and Dell, with dozens more firms arriving every year. The magnetism is obvious: a great climate, sun, affordability, Mediterranean beaches a 20-minute bus ride away and a medieval walkable grid that ties for #24 in our Walk Score subcategory (enhanced with 150 kilometres of bike paths throughout the city, and even more leading to the sea—ranking the city #26 in our Biking subcategory).



86 PORTO

PORTUGAL

POPULATION METRO 1,351,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 15 OUTDOORS
- 17 CONVENTION CENTRE

Everyone wants a piece of Portugal's king of the north.

Portugal's bright second city is first on the minds of voracious global real estate investors and site selectors either priced out of Lisbon or tired of its crowds. That's not to say that Porto isn't equally coveted, with its colourful old town hugging the banks of the Douro and crowned by Gustave Eiffel's wrought-iron bridge just unfinished enough to remind anyone looking that this was the industrial heart of the nation for centuries. Tourists often outnumber locals in central Baixa, and current visitor numbers, like real estate prices, are already pushing past 2019 levels, especially among the U.S. buyers and visitors who have been emboldened by the value of a strong dollar against the euro. They come for the #15-ranked outdoors and parks in Europe (including beaches reachable by subway), and new ways to experience the city, from the reopened Mercado do Bolhão, Porto's historic central market, to a new fourth metro line to the massive World of Wine development on the Gaia side of the river housing seven museums and 10 restaurants. Economic development office InvestPorto, meanwhile, is accelerating the city's green transition with expansive investor support and direct connection to the city's talent pool.



87 TALLINN

ESTONIA

POPULATION METRO 610,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 20 FOREIGN-BORN RESIDENTS
- 22 BIKING

As one of Europe's smallest capitals, Tallinn stands tall.

With its medieval spires and conical, red-tiled roofs sprouting from the city's verdant tree canopy, Tallinn's Old Town is enjoying three decades as a UNESCO World Heritage site. An impressive #23 ranking for its diverse museums is earned by Kumu Art Museum, which houses three centuries of Estonian art—it's a deep look into the region's geopolitically fraught history, seen in pieces illustrating pastoral Baltic homeland by Germanic artists, Imperial Czarist fleets, Soviet propaganda, protest posters and, finally, independent Estonian voices. To experience the future of this entrepreneurial city, walk 30 minutes north to the newly redeveloped Port Noblessner seafront to see what the local ministry of entrepreneurship and IT claims is the highest density of startups in the world, even calling it "Europe's Silicon Valley." Tallinn's #20 finish for Foreign-Born Residents certainly points to the opportunity here. There's also innovation around the city's carbon-neutral public transport, resulting in Tallinn being named 2023's European Green Capital. The #22-ranked biking system in Europe didn't hurt, either. The city's economy will be more connected to the EU than ever with the completion of the Rail Baltica high-speed railway in 2026.



88 LIÈGE

BELGIUM

POPULATION METRO 797,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 8 POVERTY RATE
- 51 CULTURE

Where Belgium works and plays hard.

A heritage of industry and optimisation of its strategic location has positioned Liège as Belgium's economic engine. As the third-largest river port in Europe and its eighth-largest freight airport, the city is a hub of transport and logistics, long drawing head offices of international firms like AB InBev, Mittal, Umicore, FN Herstal and others. The city also ensures that its citizens take part in the prosperity, with the eighth-lowest poverty rate in Europe. And while Liège may not have the bucolic historic strolls through the centuries that you might find in other European centres, its tiny alleys and hilly topography do reward visitors with spectacular vistas and discoveries. Take the Montagne de Bueren and its 374 steps at a gruelling 30% incline, originally built so that soldiers from the Coteaux de la Citadelle could get to the city centre quickly. Come here during evenings in October to see the entire stairway lined with candles. Local governments and corporations eager to inject some fun into all that productivity have supported the city's legacy of folk festivals, arts shows and concerts, like the annual electro-rock Les Ardentes. As a result, the city ranks #51 in our Culture subcategory.



89 GDAŃSK

POLAND

POPULATION METRO 1,142,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 29 BIKING
- 33 FACEBOOK CHECK-INS

A defiant Polish city savours sacrifice through art and commerce.

Resilience, thy name is Gdańsk. The Baltic port's history is visible in its architecture, somewhat more reminiscent of Amsterdam or Stockholm than of Kraków. But it's also in the DNA of its people, bent but not broken over a century of globally seismic events. The earliest shots of the Second World War were fired here by the Nazi battleship Schleswig-Holstein. And, 40 years later, Gdańsk became the birthplace of the Solidarnosc (Solidarity) movement that precipitated the fall of the Iron Curtain after years of subverting the communist regime. Today, the city is revelling in its ability to do right by those who fought for their freedom by drawing industries like finance, engineering and manufacturing. The city is also a nascent creative dynamo, with old shipbuilding warehouses reclaimed as music venues, studios and pop-up bars. Outside of town, dozens of huge Communist-era apartment blocks are livened up by 60 murals, including images of Chopin and Solidarity leader Lech Walesa. The city's #29 spot for biking will get a boost in 2025 when Gdańsk brings the Velo-city world cycling summit to Poland for the first time.



90 NEWCASTLE

UNITED KINGDOM

POPULATION METRO 1,175,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 25 UNIVERSITY
- 31 SIGHTS & LANDMARKS

That sound you hear coming from northeast England are the gasps from people who haven't visited in a while.

England's fastest-growing tech region outside of London was setting the stage, long before the pandemic, as a destination for nascent companies ranging from data sciences to subsea technology to advanced manufacturing, as well as convincing iconic brands like Siemens, Procter and Gamble, Barclays and dozens of others to base their U.K. operations here. With a location just 2.5 hours from London by train and an airport that connects to 85 destinations, the Newcastle-as-HQ pitch is working, with 50,000 registered businesses, according to local numbers, and the city's buildings either being reused or replaced entirely. The landmark development to watch is the Newcastle Helix, a 10-hectare central city quarter situated where the former Scottish and Newcastle Brewery once stood. Developed in partnership with the University of Newcastle (ranked #25 in our University subcategory), the site will be a "testbed for innovative technologies and solutions tackling some of the most pressing challenges facing cities around the world." Appropriately, it will feature plenty of affordable housing to rent or purchase.



91 MÁLAGA

SPAIN

POPULATION METRO 878,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 20 AIRPORT CONNECTIVITY
- 32 OUTDOORS

Urban inspiration in the sun and sea.

Málaga is the urban gateway to the sun-drenched Costa del Sol in the country's southwest, within close proximity to 16 spectacular beaches that help the city rank #32 in our Outdoors subcategory. But while the busy port city buzzes with hedonistic vacationers who pour into the oceanfront high-rise hotels, this is also one of Spain's most culturally significant cities—and not only because the modern skyline is dwarfed by two massive hilltop citadels (the Alcazaba and the ruins of the Moorish Gibralfaro), or because of the soaring Renaissance cathedral. This year marks the 50th anniversary of the death of native son Pablo Picasso, and the city is reclaiming the famous artist and sharing his local inspiration with the world. Dozens of tours (from the church where he was baptised to the ring where he watched the bullfights), exhibits and workshops are planned, none more comprehensive than by the Picasso Museum Málaga (itself celebrating its 20th anniversary in 2023). The anniversary is a good reminder of the city's 40 museums (ranked #49), including the cube-shaped waterfront Centre Pompidou Málaga, opened in 2015, and the Contemporary Art Centre of Málaga in the city's kinetic Soho district.



92 CLERMONT-FERRAND

FRANCE

POPULATION METRO 507,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 49 DISPOSABLE HOUSEHOLD INCOME
- 58 BIKING

A French city that bubbles under the surface.

A small pre-Roman city in the heart of France that sits in the middle of 80 (dormant) volcanoes? Welcome to the enigmatic Clermont-Ferrand, home of both world-renowned Volvic water and Michelin (which, given the aesthetics and good life of Marcel Michelin's hometown, explains the tire company's obsession with ranking hospitality). The historic city is walkable (it ties #24 for its Walk Score) and exploration is rewarded with only-here discoveries like the jet-black 13th-century cathedral built from local volcanic rock. Explore further, past ornate and original churches, mansions and arcades, all spellbindingly black, to the medieval district of Montferrand and its trove of little-visited 800-year-old architecture. Despite all the history, the three local universities mean an astonishing third of the city is under 25; the city also ranks #53 in our Foreign-Born Residents subcategory, giving it an international flair despite its relative obscurity. The pipeline of youthful energy is why the city is known as France's Liverpool, due to its music, festivals and legacy of launching the world's first international short film festival in 1979.



93 LILLE

FRANCE

POPULATION METRO 1,313,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 36 BIKING
- 39 FAMILY-FRIENDLY ACTIVITIES

All roads, it seems, lead to Lille.

The city, by rail, is only 35 minutes from Brussels, an hour from Paris and 80 minutes from London. No wonder it's a key French industrial centre, historically for the textile and mechanics industries but more recently for finance and retail—it's the birthplace of national chains like Decathlon, Leroy Merlin and Auchan, among others. The entrepreneurial undercurrent here has tapped into the city's hospitality industry of late, with dozens of independent cafés and roasters, elevated waffle houses and craft breweries (inspired by the Belgian brewers just across the border) having opened over the past two years. Helping the city rank #53 in our Restaurants subcategory is Chef Florent Ladeyn's sustainable spin on Flemish cuisine featured at his Bloempot and Bierbuik-Bloemeke bistros. The city's more than 120,000 students help elevated its Nightlife ranking to #58, much of it tucked into Lille's beguiling French-Flemish architecture: tall, narrow and red-bricked buildings that rise from cobblestone streets. The city is also famous (at least nationally) for the Palais des Beaux-Arts museum, which houses France's second-largest art collection after the Louvre, including all the Rembrandts, Goyas and Rubens, with a fraction of Paris's crowds.



94 VILNIUS

LITHUANIA

POPULATION METRO 708,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 29 LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION
- 30 SHOPPING

Distilled urbanism on the Baltic edge.

Lithuania's tiny capital (it has just over 700,000 people) is focusing on its small but mighty attributes. Take its city branding campaign last year, titled "Nobody knows where Vilnius is." It was irreverent, self-effacing and endearingly on-brand for a city still considered a secret European capital, with its UNESCO-protected walkable centre replete with Gothic, Baroque and Renaissance layers that are never too crowded. The city also celebrates its 700th anniversary in 2023, with an all-year party featuring summer music festivals, citizen-led placemaking projects, an art biennial and the fascinating Pavilion: Vilnius 200 Years Ago exhibit, a project with the National Museum of Lithuania. Even the city's 17th-century operas will be brought to life via artificial intelligence. The culture infusion will showcase the city's #34 Museum ranking and improve its #55 ranking in our Programming category. Given the city's historic fight for survival (it was occupied once by the Nazis and twice by Soviet Russia), tensions around current Russian aggression in the region are high. It hasn't stopped foreign-born residents (#31) and the overall labour force (#29) from fortifying the booming IT and software sectors, increasingly joined by life sciences and AI investment.



95 WROCŁAW

POLAND

POPULATION METRO 890,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 33 GOOGLE TRENDS
- 50 FAMILY-FRIENDLY ACTIVITIES

A Polish power is hard to pronounce but easy to love.

Founded in the 10th century, Wrocław is the fourth-largest city in Poland and among its most beautiful. A turbulent history has forged a city stacked with diverse, colourful pan-European architecture and an open door to new residents, especially if they want to hang a shingle and get down to business. The city has always been an economic power, boasting one of Europe's largest market squares and easy access to the Odra River and its tributaries (spanned by 100-plus bridges), earning it the nickname "The Venice of Poland." It's also the third-largest academic centre in the country, with more than 130,000 students at 28 schools, including the University of Wrocław with its medicine, economics, science and tech, and music degrees. With a #40 ranking in our Poverty Rate subcategory, the city prioritises equity, especially as its citizens get wealthier from a steady stream of foreign investment, whether from the dozens of multinationals that have set up shop here—from IBM to the Volvo Group—or the digital nomads and solo-preneurs who attend innovation events like the city's Wolves Summit every year. More and more visitors are choosing not to leave once things wrap up.



96 CARDIFF

UNITED KINGDOM

POPULATION METRO 915,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 35 UNIVERSITY
- 40 FOREIGN-BORN RESIDENTS

Is this the U.K.'s new second city?

The Welsh capital has spent the past decade positioning itself as an irresistible European hometown for the world. The pitch: more castles than any other city in the world, plenty of parks, Blue Flag beaches to the south and mountains (with more castles!) to the north. And, perhaps the checkmate: it's the closest European capital to London by train (in under two hours). But it's what Cardiff has managed to recently achieve within city limits that is truly astonishing. The Cardiff Bay regeneration project has reinvigorated downtown. Once one of the world's busiest docks when the coal mines were humming, the infrastructure in place today and in the near future can accommodate the world, from the massive Wales Millennium Centre and the Welsh Assembly to improved access to cultural treasures like the Neo-Gothic Pierhead events centre, as well as the Norwegian church where Roald Dahl was christened. The Cardiff Bay Wetlands Reserve is also part of the site's rebirth. Next up is the massive Atlantic Wharf redevelopment that will give the city 1,000 new homes, plus hotels, offices, a public square and a 17,000-seat indoor arena by Live Nation and Oak View Group.



97 PADUA

ITALY

POPULATION METRO 536,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 29 CONVENTION CENTRE
- 33 DISPOSABLE HOUSEHOLD INCOME

Even for a city older than Rome, Padua has an astonishing influence on Europe and the world.

Less than 30 minutes by train from Venice, Padua was an imperial city when La Serenissima was still a bunch of uninhabited sandbars, and has the pre-Roman street grids, Roman ruins, medieval walls and Renaissance frescoes to prove it. It ranks #43 for Sights & Landmarks. More impressive than the stones of history are the minds who lived, created and changed the world here. Head to Prato della Valle, Italy's largest square, to see the 78 statues of notable residents. You can take a selfie in front of the houses where Galileo Galilei and Donatello lived, or on the street where architect Andrea Palladio was born, or in front of the basilica where the world's first female recipient of a PhD, Elena Cornaro Piscopia, was buried. The city's eponymous university is the second oldest in Italy, founded in 1222, and is widely credited as the birthplace of modern medicine. At #49 in our University subcategory, it is one of the leading higher education institutions in Europe. Students make up one-fifth of Padua's population. Fortunately for them, the city is investing in its urban tramway, with plans to open extensions in 2026.



98 COVENTRY

UNITED KINGDOM

POPULATION METRO 740,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 10 UNIVERSITY
- 42 FOREIGN-BORN RESIDENTS

A people-powered coveted hometown has re-emerged in the U.K. Midlands.

Surrounded by a bucolic countryside and the villages of Warwickshire, Coventry is, to borrow a metaphor from the city's automotive roots, revving up and waiting to accelerate toward its destiny once and for all. The city has long been a manufacturing powerhouse, despite interruptions by wars, recessions and pandemics. It was the hub for the U.K.'s automotive and bicycle industry for decades, until that tragic day in 1940, when the Coventry Blitz by the Luftwaffe destroyed the city and killed 500 people. A lucrative post-war boom ended in the 1970s and the city reinvented itself again as an education hub, with dozens of coveted high schools specialising in IB education and music, one of the largest providers of teacher training in the U.K. and for the two highly regarded universities (the University of Coventry ranks #10 in Europe based on our data). The city was also finally awarded the U.K. City of Culture honour... in the middle of the pandemic. Ever resilient, it's been leveraging its transport heritage to secure a gigafactory for EV batteries that could create 20,000 jobs. Not surprisingly, redevelopment is everywhere.



99 POZNAŃ

POLAND

POPULATION METRO 996,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 42 GOOGLE TRENDS
- 32 CONVENTION CENTRE

Poland's business heart wants Europe's attention.

Poland's fifth-largest city is a business and scientific hub favoured by the country's university students and, therefore, long targeted by multinationals like Roche, Amazon and Unilever. The city is also a hub for international events, conferences, fairs and exhibitions, and has invested heavily in its #32-ranked Poznań Congress Center, capable of hosting conferences and events for up to 20,000 people. Given its pursuit of investment, both permanent and temporary, Poznań enjoyed the lowest unemployment rate in Poland last year, with only 1.2% of professionally active residents not employed. A few minutes from the high-rises and dealmakers is the city's historical centre with its quilt of town squares and city parks. Later this year (or maybe early next), the city is aiming to reopen the Old Market Square, first built in 1241 and currently under construction. When it does, Poland's third-largest town square (the Poles love their town squares) will be a more accessible heart, enhanced with the revival of Jana Baptisty Quadro street as a cultural passageway with a retractable roof, public spaces and a mobile stage. It's inevitable that Poznań will be inviting even more people to town.



100 TOURS

FRANCE

POPULATION METRO 520,000

HIGHLIGHTS

- 20 CONVENTION CENTRE
- 48 BIKING

Medieval roots bloom in France's bucolic Loire Valley.

The urban gateway to the Loire Valley is as gorgeous as it is smart, with the narrow cobbled streets, distinct half-timbered French houses and the Gothic grandiose of Cathédrale Saint-Gatien. A stroll here feels like a step back a half millennium, especially (ironically) when medieval streetscapes are lit up as part of a new illuminated walking tour. Tours is also the birthplace of French novelist and playwright Honoré de Balzac and has drawn both literary tourists and aspirational writers for decades, and the University of Tours obliges with its impressive humanities and literary departments. The latest investment in the city's arts is the Olivier Debré contemporary art centre, a prestigious artistic venue with big plans to bring international talent to town. A dozen or so exhibitions are organised annually and the building is ready for them, with four large spaces dedicated to contemporary art. Tours citizens, who rank #37 in our overall Prosperity category, enjoy its natural bounty as much as its cultural one, filling the 19th-century Prebendes d'Océ garden or, further afield, touring their local (world-class) wineries.

Europe's

BEST CITIES PERFORMANCE BY CATEGORY

RANK	CITY	COUNTRY	PLACE	PRODUCT	PROGRAMMING	PEOPLE	PROSPERITY	PROMOTION
1	London	United Kingdom	3	1	1	1	8	1
2	Paris	France	2	2	2	14	1	2
3	Amsterdam	Netherlands	9	3	10	15	22	9
4	Barcelona	Spain	8	5	6	30	95	5
5	Zürich	Switzerland	96	14	49	3	2	30
6	Madrid	Spain	23	16	4	17	71	6
7	Berlin	Germany	28	11	8	16	62	7
8	Rome	Italy	5	10	3	103	77	3
9	Basel	Switzerland	10	30	111	5	4	29
10	Geneva	Switzerland	11	33	71	7	6	32
11	Vienna	Austria	14	13	17	11	72	10
12	Brussels	Belgium	46	19	20	6	18	23
13	Stockholm	Sweden	56	12	44	2	54	15
14	Munich	Germany	29	4	33	37	16	17
15	Prague	Czechia	15	23	5	27	91	14
16	Dublin	Ireland	35	21	16	26	12	12
17	Milan	Italy	7	9	12	107	80	8
18	Bern	Switzerland	12	57	113	13	3	120
19	Istanbul	Türkiye	13	8	7	120	122	4
20	Oslo	Norway	25	25	56	8	17	43
21	Copenhagen	Denmark	44	22	25	18	11	28
22	Helsinki	Finland	38	26	41	25	7	52
23	Lisbon	Portugal	6	27	14	56	81	13
24	Lausanne	Switzerland	43	67	115	9	6	103
25	Frankfurt	Germany	54	7	42	44	23	35

RANK	CITY	COUNTRY	PLACE	PRODUCT	PROGRAMMING	PEOPLE	PROSPERITY	PROMOTION
26	Naples	Italy	1	15	9	124	107	25
27	Oxford	United Kingdom	94	18	95	20	10	84
28	Edinburgh	United Kingdom	33	17	19	29	89	31
29	Budapest	Hungary	42	31	11	102	21	18
30	Hamburg	Germany	72	41	26	21	38	19
31	Luxembourg	Luxembourg	21	107	89	4	36	100
32	Warsaw	Poland	60	29	23	53	53	21
33	Manchester	United Kingdom	104	20	35	55	83	11
34	Venice	Italy	4	60	22	109	85	26
35	Bratislava	Slovakia	16	97	48	57	15	93
36	Bristol	United Kingdom	74	28	46	42	25	58
37	Nottingham	United Kingdom	103	6	62	39	74	73
38	Birmingham	United Kingdom	58	24	13	35	118	39
39	Freiburg	Germany	20	44	120	33	48	110
40	Lyon	France	49	34	38	67	33	45
41	Glasgow	United Kingdom	70	32	28	29	75	46
42	Gothenburg	Sweden	102	46	92	12	63	82
43	Athens	Greece	27	40	15	70	103	22
44	Rotterdam	Netherlands	93	61	72	23	26	62
45	Kraków	Poland	19	39	21	101	69	40
46	Valencia	Spain	22	42	29	59	104	27
47	Ghent	Belgium	62	64	87	62	14	98
48	Stuttgart	Germany	92	65	88	33	27	48
49	Liverpool	United Kingdom	30	53	27	55	83	55
50	Antwerp	Belgium	85	79	58	62	14	75

RANK	CITY	COUNTRY	PLACE	PRODUCT	PROGRAMMING	PEOPLE	PROSPERITY	PROMOTION
51	Marseille	France	77	50	53	72	28	41
52	Florence	Italy	26	54	18	112	88	20
53	Southampton	United Kingdom	109	124	91	20	10	108
54	Dresden	Germany	17	62	93	94	60	70
55	Cologne	Germany	97	36	51	84	57	37
56	Aarhus	Denmark	95	69	102	60	19	114
57	Eindhoven	Netherlands	108	47	108	43	41	112
58	Nice	France	39	96	54	72	40	49
59	Graz	Austria	18	77	107	75	67	83
60	Malmö	Sweden	79	122	98	10	70	113
61	Bordeaux	France	34	87	37	90	47	47
62	Utrecht	Netherlands	98	56	99	58	30	106
63	The Hague	Netherlands	106	111	70	23	29	99
64	Nuremberg	Germany	75	91	84	37	46	89
65	Strasbourg	France	36	81	75	89	44	64
66	Aachen	Germany	24	71	126	84	57	109
67	Belfast	United Kingdom	100	52	79	45	76	90
68	Leeds	United Kingdom	80	45	39	50	97	60
69	Düsseldorf	Germany	68	66	83	84	57	44
70	Linz	Austria	31	88	125	63	65	123
71	Palma	Spain	32	101	60	24	100	80
72	Bonn	Germany	67	58	124	84	31	102
73	Toulouse	France	76	94	61	77	52	53
74	Grenoble	France	87	78	116	67	33	104
75	Leicester	United Kingdom	118	59	80	39	74	107

RANK	CITY	COUNTRY	PLACE	PRODUCT	PROGRAMMING	PEOPLE	PROSPERITY	PROMOTION
76	Hanover	Germany	78	63	100	94	35	94
77	Bologna	Italy	47	35	63	112	88	42
78	Leipzig	Germany	53	72	109	94	60	74
79	Sheffield	United Kingdom	84	55	59	50	97	79
80	Nantes	France	41	105	82	87	45	72
81	Bournemouth	United Kingdom	119	119	86	42	25	111
82	Seville	Spain	37	84	24	79	116	34
83	Turin	Italy	57	51	36	115	79	36
84	Bilbao	Spain	66	100	73	40	78	92
85	Montpellier	France	48	116	67	91	52	63
86	Porto	Portugal	117	37	34	100	92	38
87	Tallinn	Estonia	55	92	45	31	120	91
88	Liège	Belgium	115	120	103	76	20	118
89	Gdańsk	Poland	52	98	74	99	68	61
90	Newcastle	United Kingdom	101	49	57	74	102	88
91	Málaga	Spain	45	76	50	79	116	51
92	Clermont-Ferrand	France	89	125	121	67	33	122
93	Lille	France	64	112	66	105	50	65
94	Vilnius	Lithuania	122	68	55	52	101	95
95	Wrocław	Poland	59	102	81	98	66	56
96	Cardiff	United Kingdom	107	70	78	69	93	77
97	Padua	Italy	63	43	114	109	85	101
98	Coventry	United Kingdom	124	48	117	35	94	116
99	Poznań	Poland	61	93	85	113	64	71
100	Tours	France	86	109	112	97	37	119



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