



# TURN ME ON

The  
Economist

**International**  
**The lottery of life**

**Where to be born in 2013**

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IAS

Warren Buffett, probably the world's most successful investor, has said that anything good that happened to him could be traced back to the fact that he was born in the right country, the United States, at the right time (1930). A quarter of a century ago, when *The World in 1988* light-heartedly ranked 50 countries according to where would be the best place to be born in 1988, America indeed came top. But which country will be the best for a baby born in 2013?

To answer this, the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), a sister company of *The Economist*, has this time turned deadly serious. It earnestly attempts to measure which country will provide the best opportunities for a healthy, safe and prosperous life in the years ahead.

Its quality-of-life index links the results of subjective life-satisfaction surveys—how happy people say they are—to objective determinants of the quality of life across countries. Being rich helps more than anything else, but it is not all that counts; things like crime, trust in public institutions and the health of family life matter too. In all, the index takes 11 statistically significant indicators into account. They are a mixed bunch: some are fixed factors, such as geography; others change only very slowly over time (demography, many social and cultural characteristics); and some factors depend on policies and the state of the world economy.

### The where-to-be-born index, 2013

Rank	Country	Score*	Rank	Country	Score*
1	SWITZERLAND	8.22	=40	CUBA	6.39
2	AUSTRALIA	8.12	42	COLOMBIA	6.27
3	NORWAY	8.09	43	PERU	6.24
4	SWEDEN	8.02	=44	ESTONIA	6.07
5	DENMARK	8.01	=44	VENEZUELA	6.07
6	SINGAPORE	8.00	=46	CROATIA	6.06
7	NEW ZEALAND	7.95	=46	HUNGARY	6.06
8	NETHERLANDS	7.94	48	LATVIA	6.01
9	CANADA	7.81	49	CHINA	5.99
10	HONG KONG	7.80	50	THAILAND	5.96
11	FINLAND	7.76	51	TURKEY	5.95
12	IRELAND	7.74	52	DOMINICAN REP.	5.93
13	AUSTRIA	7.73	53	SOUTH AFRICA	5.89
14	TAIWAN	7.67	=54	ALGERIA	5.86
15	BELGIUM	7.51	=54	SERBIA	5.86
=16	GERMANY	7.38	56	ROMANIA	5.85
=16	UNITED STATES	7.38	57	LITHUANIA	5.82
18	UAE	7.33	58	IRAN	5.78
19	SOUTH KOREA	7.25	59	TUNISIA	5.77
20	ISRAEL	7.23	60	EGYPT	5.76
21	ITALY	7.21	61	BULGARIA	5.73
22	KUWAIT	7.18	62	EL SALVADOR	5.72
=23	CHILE	7.10	=63	PHILIPPINES	5.71
=23	CYPRUS	7.10	=63	SRI LANKA	5.71
25	JAPAN	7.08	65	ECUADOR	5.70
26	FRANCE	7.04	=66	INDIA	5.67
27	BRITAIN	7.01	=66	MOROCCO	5.67
=28	CZECH REPUBLIC	6.96	68	VIETNAM	5.64
=28	SPAIN	6.96	69	JORDAN	5.63
=30	COSTA RICA	6.92	70	AZERBAIJAN	5.60
=30	PORTUGAL	6.92	71	INDONESIA	5.54
32	SLOVENIA	6.77	72	RUSSIA	5.31
33	POLAND	6.66	73	SYRIA	5.29
34	GREECE	6.65	74	KAZAKHSTAN	5.20
35	SLOVAKIA	6.64	75	PAKISTAN	5.17
36	MALAYSIA	6.62	76	ANGOLA	5.09
37	BRAZIL	6.52	77	BANGLADESH	5.07
38	SAUDI ARABIA	6.49	78	UKRAINE	4.98
39	MEXICO	6.41	79	KENYA	4.91
=40	ARGENTINA	6.39	80	NIGERIA	4.74

\* Score out of a maximum of 10. Source: Economist Intelligence Unit

#### Related topics

A forward-looking element comes into play, too. Although many of the drivers of the quality of life are slow-changing, for this ranking some variables, such as income per head, need to be forecast. We use the EIU's economic forecasts to 2030, which is roughly when children born in 2013 will reach adulthood.

Despite the global economic crisis, times have in certain respects never been so good. Output growth rates have been declining across the world, but income levels are at or near historic highs. Life expectancy continues to increase steadily and political freedoms have spread across the globe, most recently in north Africa and the Middle East. In other ways, however, the crisis has left a deep imprint—in the euro zone, but also elsewhere—particularly on unemployment and personal security. In doing so, it has eroded both family and community life.

## Where to be born in 1988

None of us has a say in where he is born, but we can do something about it for our children. To help you decide the best place to bring junior squawking into the world in 1988, the Economist Intelligence Unit has compiled the "Where-to-be-born" index. The index grades 50 countries around the world according to 11 economic and socio-political criteria. Points for each criterion were allocated using multi-variable attribute theory to assign weights and pointscales. Fine for the quantifiable (like inflation, literacy and GDP) but we thought it would be fun, too to introduce some more unusual and subjective measures. Hence the "philistine factor" (for cultural poverty) and the "yawn index" (the degree to which, despite all its many virtues, a country may be irredeemably boring). These two scales have to be read topsy-turvy: high scores mean that a country is very OK indeed. So, naturally, does a high readership of *The Economist* (in this case, the actual figure is shown before the weighting).

In addition we have awarded certain countries bonus points for things that don't always get taken into account:

- Norway, New Zealand and Canada (+2) for scenic attractions.
- Japan, Sweden and East Germany (+2) for having most newspapers read per capita.
- Canada (+3) for having the most desirable passport. Canadians need no visa to visit most western countries, enjoy priority in obtaining work permits in Commonwealth countries and in the United States, are unlikely targets for anti-western terrorists and are not required by their government to perform military service.
- Hongkong (+5) for offering the most diverse cuisine, France, Italy and Japan (+2) for local culinary delights and Switzerland and Belgium (+1) for the best chocolate..... But (sorry)
- Hongkong (-10) for its political and economic uncertainties.

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Sources: The Economist Intelligence Unit; Business International surveys; BI Forecasting Services; BI Cost of Living; The Economist Publications; World in Figures; World Human Rights Guide.

### THE WORLD IN 1988

Country	Economics					Socio-political								Total
	GDP/capita	GDP growth (1988 forecast)	Inflation (1988 forecast)	Cost of living	Human rights	Life expectancy	Literacy	% of population in higher education	Economist readers Per million capita	Philistine factor	Yawn index	Bonus points		
1 USA	11	3	10	6	9	10	10	11	451.2	4	12	7	-	93
2 FRANCE	10	2	11	4	9	10	10	5	158.3	3	12	7	+2	86
3 W. GERMANY	11	2	11	4	10	9	10	6	121.0	3	7	2	-	85
4 ITALY	9	3	9	4	9	9	9	5	88.8	2	12	11	+2	84
5 CANADA	10	3	10	7	10	10	10	9	813.4	5	3	1	+5	83
6 JAPAN	11	3	11	1	9	10	10	6	27.5	1	8	8	+4	82
7 HONGKONG	7	8	9	7	8	10	8	3	971.7	5	5	12	-5	77
7 UK	8	2	10	6	9	9	10	4	1482.0	5	9	5	-	77
9 SWEDEN	11	2	10	5	10	10	10	8	264.5	3	3	2	+2	75
10 NETHERLANDS	9	2	11	5	10	10	10	6	300.8	4	5	2	-	74
10 S. KOREA	6	7	10	7	6	8	9	5	18.7	1	6	9	-	74
12 AUSTRIA	10	2	11	3	10	9	10	5	157.0	2	8	3	-	73
13 NORWAY	9	2	11	5	10	10	10	6	500.6	4	5	2	+2	72
13 SWITZERLAND	12	2	11	3	10	10	10	4	684.4	5	2	2	+1	72
15 BELGIUM	9	2	11	5	10	9	10	6	22.8	4	2	1	+1	70
15 IRELAND	7	2	10	4	9	9	10	4	88.8	5	7	3	-	70
15 SPAIN	7	3	9	6	9	9	9	5	92.1	2	7	4	-	70
18 AUSTRALIA	8	2	9	8	9	9	10	5	412.0	4	2	3	-	69
18 FINLAND	10	3	10	3	10	9	10	6	222.8	3	2	3	-	69
18 NEW ZEALAND	8	1	7	8	10	9	10	6	752.8	4	2	2	+2	69
21 ARGENTINA	6	2	2	9	9	9	9	6	18.5	1	6	9	-	68
21 USSR	6	4	10	7	2	8	10	4	0.9	0	7	10	-	68
23 POLAND	5	3	6	10	4	9	10	3	5.2	1	7	9	-	67
24 DENMARK	11	0	10	3	10	10	10	6	332.0	4	1	1	-	66
24 HUNGARY	6	1	8	10	6	9	10	3	37.4	1	7	5	-	66
24 PHILIPPINES	2	4	10	9	4	7	8	6	11.5	1	5	10	-	66
27 GREECE	6	1	7	7	9	9	8	3	184.6	3	7	5	-	65
27 INDIA	1	5	9	10	6	8	4	2	3.5	1	7	12	-	65
27 MEXICO	5	5	1	11	6	8	8	3	8.8	1	6	12	-	65
30 BRAZIL	5	5	1	10	7	7	8	2	10.9	1	6	12	-	64
30 ISRAEL	7	4	7	6	8	9	9	7	249.0	3	2	4	-	64
32 CHINA	1	6	9	11	2	6	7	0	0.4	0	7	12	-	63
32 PORTUGAL	6	3	9	7	9	9	7	2	146.5	3	5	3	-	63
32 UAE	10	2	11	7	9	10	5	2	960.8	5	1	1	-	63
32 VENEZUELA	6	2	2	9	9	9	9	6	17.9	1	6	9	-	63
36 E. GERMANY	7	3	11	4	3	9	10	6	0.6	0	5	2	+2	62
36 SINGAPORE	7	7	10	7	6	8	9	5	1712.0	1	1	0	-	62
38 MALAYSIA	5	4	11	10	5	8	6	1	147.0	3	2	6	-	61
39 YUGOSLAVIA	6	1	2	9	5	9	9	4	12.7	1	5	6	-	57
40 S. AFRICA	6	4	7	9	2	7	8	1	68.8	2	2	8	-	56
41 TURKEY	4	6	4	9	4	7	7	2	16.8	1	5	5	-	54
42 INDONESIA	2	5	9	10	4	4	6	1	6.6	1	5	6	-	53
43 PAKISTAN	2	6	9	10	3	5	2	0	15.1	1	6	8	-	52
44 EGYPT	4	4	4	5	6	5	4	4	19.7	1	6	6	-	49
45 LIBYA	7	3	8	6	2	5	4	2	4.1	1	0	9	-	47
46 S. ARABIA	6	3	12	7	3	5	3	2	258.7	3	1	1	-	46
47 NIGERIA	3	4	7	10	5	4	3	1	8.0	1	1	4	-	43
48 IRAN	6	0	8	2	0	7	4	2	7.1	1	0	9	-	39
48 IRAQ	6	0	4	8	2	5	2	2	1.2	1	0	9	-	39
48 ZIMBABWE	3	0	7	10	5	5	7	1	98.1	2	1	5	-	39

[Enlarge](#) Where to be born in 1988

What does all this, and likely developments in the years to come, mean for where a baby might be luckiest to be born in 2013? After crunching its numbers, the EIU has Switzerland comfortably in the top spot, with Australia second.

Small economies dominate the top ten. Half of these are European, but only one, the Netherlands, is from the euro zone. The Nordic countries shine, whereas the crisis-ridden south of Europe (Greece, Portugal and Spain) lags behind despite the advantage of a favourable climate. The largest European economies (Germany, France and Britain) do not do particularly well.

America, where babies will inherit the large debts of the boomer generation, languishes back in 16th place. Despite their economic dynamism, none of the BRIC countries (Brazil, Russia, India and China) scores impressively. Among the 80 countries covered, Nigeria comes last: it is the worst place for a baby to enter the world in 2013.

### Boring is best

Quibblers will, of course, find more holes in all this than there are in a chunk of Swiss cheese. America was helped to the top spot back in 1988 by the inclusion in the ranking of a "philistine factor" (for cultural poverty) and a "yawn index" (the degree to which a country might, despite all its virtues, be irredeemably boring). Switzerland scored terribly on both counts. In the film "The Third Man", Orson Welles's character, the rogue Harry Lime, famously says that Italy for 30 years had war, terror and

murder under the Borgias but in that time produced Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci and the Renaissance; Switzerland had 500 years of peace and democracy—and produced the cuckoo clock.

However, there is surely a lot to be said for boring stability in today's (and no doubt tomorrow's) uncertain times. A description of the methodology is available [here](#): food for debate all the way from Lucerne to Lagos.

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