

S'pore Ranked 'Happiest Place' by Chinese

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Republic beats HK, Taiwan and China in poll of 4,000

CHINA, Hong Kong, Taiwan or Singapore - where are Chinese people happiest?

The answer, according to a survey of 4,000 ethnic Chinese across these regions, is Singapore.

Of the 805 people surveyed here, 51.9 per cent put their homeland at the top of the list - the highest among the four places.

Respondents from the other regions also unanimously picked the Chinese in Singapore as the "happiest".

Nearly 49 per cent of Hong Kongers polled ranked Singapore No. 1, along with 40.3 per cent of Taiwanese and 32.2 per cent of mainland Chinese.

The best things about Singapore were housing, safety and life satisfaction, according to the locals who, like other respondents, were quizzed about their satisfaction level on 11 different indicators.

The bottom three were governance, amount of rest time and income levels respectively. Governance and income levels also made the bottom three in all the other regions, in addition to pollution.

Singapore was the only place where respondents were unhappy with rest time - pointing to a possible lack of work-life balance here.

The issue could be due to Singapore's small size and "very fast" pace of life, said Tampines GRC MP Baey Yam Keng. "People do work very hard because they want to get ahead in life, and this comes at the expense of family time. This is similar to many global cities, where people find it difficult to strike a work-life balance."

But overall, Singapore seems to have overtaken Hong Kong, where residents are now grappling with record housing prices, when it comes to the perception of which place provides a better standard of living.

Said Mr Baey: "If we compare ourselves with these other economies, we are doing a lot better in terms of stability, living environment, housing, safety - this is something that is very clear.

"Singapore is one of the only places where there is public housing for almost everyone... and I think people rightfully acknowledge that."

National University of Singapore sociologist Tan Ern Ser said Singapore "does have a good reputation internationally", which could lead foreigners to think that those living here are better off.

Hong Konger Allan Chiu, 25, recently visited his friends in Singapore, who live in an 80 sq m Housing Board flat. "A flat of that size would be considered a mansion in Hong Kong," said Mr Chiu, an auditor at a financial service company.

Meanwhile, Taiwanese interviewed by The Straits Times said Singaporeans were fortunate to live in a clean and green environment.

Ms Huang Shu-hua, a 52-year-old Taiwanese who runs a noodle shop in Taipei, said: "Singapore is very well governed and clean. Singaporeans are also more down to earth compared with Hong Kongers and mainland Chinese." But she added that she found Singaporeans "unexpressive".

Beijing resident Ruby Bai, a 25-year-old company manager who visited Singapore on holiday last year, said: "Beijing is not as beautiful and clean as Singapore." She hopes China will do more to combat the smog that has earned its capital Beijing nicknames like "Grey-ing".

For Singaporean Esther Yap, a sales coordinator, a big plus about living here is the low crime rate. "My children go out at night but I have no worries," said the 45-year-old mother of two teens.

The study polled about 1,000 respondents via telephone in each region. The survey was conducted by local Chinese daily Lianhe Zaobao, Taiwan-based Global Views Survey Research Centre, China-based Horizon Research Consultancy Group, the Hong Kong Economic Journal and the Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies. It was adapted from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development's Your Better Life Index, which measures well-being across societies.

A section of the study also measured the more tangible aspects of modern living, such as employment and education levels in each society.

Singapore came out tops in three of seven indicators, including Internet connectivity rates, income level and employment rates.

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