

IS THERE A RECIPE FOR HAPPINESS?

A. What makes us happy? Money? Friends? A good job? Are the answers the same for everyone? According to world surveys, Mexico and Singapore are two happy countries—but their people may be happy for different reasons.

SAFETY AND SECURITY

B. There are more than 21,000 people per square mile in the small nation of Singapore. People on the island work very long hours and regularly bring work home with them. The country has strict laws against smoking in public, littering, and even jaywalking. But according to the World Database of Happiness, Singapore is one of the happiest countries in Asia. Why?

C. One reason for Singapore's happiness is that the government **provides** the **basic necessities**, such as housing and healthcare. There is almost no extreme **poverty** in Singapore. The government "tops up" poorer people's incomes so everyone can have a minimum **standard of living**. It also offers tax breaks to people who look after their aging parents. The result is a lot of closely connected families with roughly **equal** standards of living.

D. People may not be happy about all the laws, but they are generally happy with the results—they breathe clean air, they don't step in litter, and the streets are safe and orderly. So for Singaporeans, it seems that living in a **secure**, clean, and safe place may be more important than having a lot of personal **freedom**. Many societies are trying to find a happy medium between order and freedom. Singapore's ranking on the World Database of Happiness suggests that the country has done a pretty decent job at it.

FRIENDS AND NEIGHBORS

E. In many ways, Mexico is the opposite of Singapore. There are some parts of Mexico where people do not have a safe or secure life. Many people do not have jobs, enough food, or **access** to education. But, as in Singapore, most people in Mexico feel that they are happy. Why?

F. One reason is the importance of social interaction. According to psychologists, much of our happiness comes from feeling that we are part of a larger community. Simple acts like smiling at a neighbor or having dinner with friends can greatly increase our overall happiness. People in Mexico **socialize** with family and friends a lot, and this adds to their happiness.

G. But what about poverty? In Mexico, about half of the population is poor. However, most Mexicans live near people in a similar **financial** situation. If your neighbor doesn't have expensive items—such as a big house or an expensive car—you probably don't feel the need to have those things either. So money, by itself, may not be that important for happiness. What matters more is how much money you have compared to the people around you.

A MIXED RECIPE?

H. So the question "What makes people happy?" does not seem to have a simple answer. Security, safety, freedom, and socializing with friends and family can all play important roles. As the examples of Singapore and Mexico suggest, there may be no single recipe for happiness. It is up to each of us to find our own.

One reason people are generally happy is that the government provides financial support to the poorer members of society.

You don't need to have a lot of money to be happy.

Spending time with family and friends can contribute to happiness.

There are different answers to the question, "What makes people happy?"

Most people are willing to give up certain freedoms to gain more safety and stability.