

IS THERE A RECIPE FOR HAPPINESS?

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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

There are more than 21,000 people per square mile¹ 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,² and even jaywalking.³ But according to the World Database of Happiness, Singapore is one of the happiest countries in Asia. Why?

¹A square mile = 2.59 square kilometers.

²Littering is leaving trash lying around outside.

³Jaywalking occurs when a pedestrian walks across a street at a place where it is not allowed.

20 Families in Singapore often gather to eat in open-air hawker centers.

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"⁴ poorer people's incomes so everyone can have a minimum standard of living. It also offers tax breaks⁵ to people who look after their aging parents. The result is a lot of closely connected families with roughly equal standards of living.

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,

⁴If you top something up, you add to it to make it full.

⁵If the government gives someone a tax break, it lowers the amount of tax they have to pay.

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

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?

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.

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?

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.

1. What is the main idea of the passage?

- a. The answer to happiness is having a simple life.
- b. Poorer people are happier than wealthy people.
- c. The recipe for happiness is work and friends and family.
- d. People can be happy for very different reasons.

2. Why does the author focus on Singapore and Mexico in the passage?

- a. They are very similar countries.
- b. Most people in those countries are unhappy.
- c. Most people in those countries are wealthy.
- d. Their people are happy in very different situations.

3. According to the passage, what "basic necessities" does Singapore government provide?

- a. tax breaks
- b. housing and employment
- c. laws against littering
- d. topped-up incomes

4. According to the passage, why is personal freedom considered less important to people in Singapore?

- a. They are happy about the strict laws.
- b. They are hopeful and confident.
- c. They prefer feeling safe and secure.
- d. They fear the government.

5. Which of these does NOT describe how people socialize in Mexico?

- a. People enjoy going for dinner in expensive restaurants with their friends.
- b. People are happier when they can appreciate simple joys.

c. People feel more connected when they talk to their neighbors.

d. When people spend time with family and friends, they feel happier.