

Andrew Marr's Megacities

By 2050, 70% of the world will live in cities, and by the end of the century three-quarters of the entire planet will be urban. There are now 21 cities called "megacities," e.g., they have more than 10 million inhabitants. In Andrew Marr's BBC series *Megacities*, he traveled to five of these cities, including Tokyo and Mexico City.



TOKYO

Tokyo, with a population of 33 million people, is by far the largest city in world. It's also the most technologically advanced, and the city runs like digital clockwork. The automated subway, for example, is so efficient that it is able to transport almost eight million commuters every day and on the rare occasions that it doesn't work well, nobody believes it. If you are late for work in Tokyo and, as an excuse, you say that your train was late, you need to provide written proof from the train company. The idea of late trains is almost unthinkable. There is very little crime, violence, or vandalism in Tokyo and the streets are safe to walk both day or night. There is also relatively low unemployment compared to other big cities in the world.

But such a huge population creates serious problems of space, and as Marr flew over Tokyo in a helicopter he saw soccer fields, playgrounds, even driving schools constructed on top of buildings. Streets, parks, and subways are extremely overcrowded. Property prices are so high and space is so short that a family of six people may live in a tiny apartment of only 270 square feet.

There are other problems too, of alienation and loneliness. The *Hikikomori* are inhabitants of Tokyo who cannot cope with "the mechanical coldness and robotic uniformity" of a megacity and have become recluses, rarely or never leaving their homes. There is also a new business that has grown up in Tokyo that allows friendless people to "rent a friend" to accompany them to a wedding or just to sit and talk to them in a restaurant after work.

Another strange group of people are the *Hashiriya*, Tokyo's street racers who risk their lives driving at ridiculous speeds along the city streets. During the week these men have ordinary jobs and they're model citizens. But on Saturday nights they spend the evening driving through the city as fast as they possibly can. It's a deadly game, but it's just one way of escaping the daily pressures of life in the metropolis.



TOKYO



MEXICO CITY

MEXICO CITY

As a complete contrast to Tokyo, Marr takes us to Mexico City, a colorful and vibrant city of about 20 million people where people live their lives on the street. Marr says that "in Mexico City, food and friendship go hand in hand." The city is full of taco stands and cafes where people meet and socialize and Mariachi bands stroll through the boulevards and squares playing songs for money. And on Sundays people of all ages gather to dance in the street.

But it's a city with problems of its own, too. It can take two-and-a-half hours for commuters to drive to and from work during rush hour through choking traffic fumes, and pollution levels are high. And, looking down from a helicopter, Marr shows us the huge social divide. On one hillside we see massive, luxurious houses and on the next hill, slums. It's a city of great wealth but also extreme poverty, and there are many homeless people. Because of this social imbalance, it can be a dangerous city, too, with high levels of crime, especially kidnapping. In fact, there are boutiques that sell a rather special line in men's clothes: the shirts, sweaters, and jackets look completely normal, but are in fact bulletproof, made of reinforced Kevlar.

But despite the crime, the traffic, and the pollution, Andrew Marr describes Mexico City as "a friendly, liveable place" and the most enjoyable megacity of all that he visited.



Find words in the article that mean...

TOKYO

- 1 _____ *adj* operated by machines not people
(paragraph 1)
- 2 _____ *adj* impossible to imagine (paragraph 1)
- 3 _____ *noun* the number of people who don't
have a job (paragraph 1)
- 4 _____ *adj* with too many people in it (paragraph 2)
- 5 _____ *noun* a feeling that you don't belong to a
community (paragraph 3)
- 6 _____ *noun* the feeling of not having any friends
(paragraph 3)

MEXICO CITY

- 7 _____ *noun* the process of making air (and water)
dirty (paragraph 2)
- 8 _____ *noun* the state of being very rich
(paragraph 2)
- 9 _____ *noun* the state of being poor (paragraph 2)
- 10 _____ *adj* not having a house (paragraph 2)

4 LISTENING &



You are going to listen to an interview with Miles Roddis, a travel writer for the *Lonely Planet* guidebook series, talking about his five favorite cities. Look at the photos, and try to guess which continent or country they were. Which are his favorite cities?

5 17 Listen once and find out where they are. What personal connection does Miles have to each place?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

5 18 Now listen to some extracts from the interview. Try to write in the missing words. What do you think they mean?

- 1 ...there's wonderful surfing on Bondi beach and plenty of great little _____ for sunbathing and swimming.
- 2 ...the choice of places to eat is _____.
- 3 But what gives the city a special _____ during the Festival is "the Fringe."
- 4 And the Museum of Islamic Art has a whole lot of _____ pieces from Muslim times.
- 5 Tuscany's two major tourist towns, Florence and Pisa, are absolutely _____ - _____ with tourists all year round...
- 6 These walls are amazing – they're completely intact, and you can _____ into people's living rooms as you walk past.
- 7 The Laotians are a lovely, _____, laid-back people.
- 8 I remember looking down on it from one of the restaurants along its banks, and feeling that it was _____ all my troubles.

