Iceland and Australia top happiness poll

Roger Maynard in Sydney
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Australians – the second-happiest people in the world.
Photograph: Christof Koepsel/Getty Images

They are as different as two countries can be: one big, the other small; one hot, the other cold; and at opposite ends of the world from each other. But if it's happiness you're after, **Iceland and Australia are the best places to live in the world.**

A new study that seeks to go beyond the simple measure of GDP and gauge more subtle aspects of wellbeing such as life-expectancy, education and living standards, puts Iceland top of the international happiness scale, with Australia a close second.

At the bottom end, the economists Andrew Leigh, of the Australian National University, and Justin Wolfers, of Wharton University, Pennsylvania, ranked **Russians, Ukrainians, Romanians and Bulgarians as the world's most miserable.**

Interestingly, happiness was not always dependent on wealth. The study showed that OECD statistics suggested relatively poor countries such as Mexico and Nigeria were happier than some developed nations. The economists decided to study national happiness quotas because they suspected a nation's GDP was not always a reliable measure for gauging well-being.

Using the **Human Development Index**, which combines life-expectancy, education and GDP, the researchers found that Australians were happier than most other people despite longer hours and a lower level of job satisfaction.

Dr Leigh told the Guardian that Australia's happiness could be due to several factors. "The weather could be part of it, though that flies in the face of the Iceland experience," he acknowledged. "Beyond that, economic growth and democracy also seem to play a role. We enjoy a high standard of living and places that have more sun tend to be happier."

The Australians have featured prominently in cross-national happiness surveys since the 1940s but this is the first time international research has compared such a broad range of data to reach its conclusions.