

Kentuckians could be happier, says WalletHub

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According to a recent study, only 44% of Americans say they are “very satisfied” with their lives.

While a mix of internal and external factors shapes happiness, some things are out of our control, like the cost-of-living crisis or record-high economic uncertainty.

People across the United States are facing difficult times, and the state in which you live may have an impact on how happy you are. According to a new study by WalletHub.com, Kentucky is not one of the happiest states to live in, coming in at No. 43.

“In addition to pursuing your passions, having a good work-life balance, and maintaining an emotional support network, another key way to boost your happiness is living in the right place,” said Chip Lupo, WalletHub analyst. “The happiest states are those that provide above-average quality of life in a wide variety of areas, from strong state economies and high-quality physical and mental health care to adequate amounts of leisure time and good weather.”

In its study, WalletHub drew upon the findings of “happiness” research to determine which environmental factors are linked to a person’s overall well-being and satisfaction with life. Previous studies have found that good economics, emotional, physical, and social health are all key to a well-balanced and fulfilled life.

Kentucky had a total score of 43.25, ranking 42nd in emotional and physical well-being, 46th in work environment, and 15th in community and environment.

According to the study,



Metro Creative graphic

Hawaii is the happiest state, with residents reporting the highest levels of life satisfaction and the second-lowest depression rate. The Aloha State scored 65.50, followed by Maryland (64.13), Nebraska (63.61), New Jersey (63.42), Connecticut (62.53), Utah (61.12), California (60.09), New Hampshire (59.56), Massachusetts (59.19), and Idaho (58.31), rounding out the top 10.

The South didn’t fare too well, according to WalletHub. While Florida (14th), Virginia (15th), and Georgia (19th) all ranked in the top 20, the bottom 10 were littered with southern states. West Virginia was deemed the unhappiest, with a score of 32.04. Louisiana was 49th, Arkansas, 48th, Alabama, 47th, Tennessee, 45th, and Mississippi, 42nd.

Jeanette M. Bennett, Ph.D.-Associate Professor, Department of Psychological Science at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, said that the most important thing about happiness is that it is a “perception.”

“Each person creates their own sense of happiness based on past experiences and current circumstances, making it deeply individualistic,” Bennett said. “When we think about the ‘ingredients’ of happiness, one important question is: how close is someone’s idea of what their life should be to the reality of the life they are living? When

those are aligned, people are generally happy. When they are not, disruption, frustration, unhappiness, and discontent often arise.”

For many, more money equals more happiness. Bennett said there is solid evidence that, up to a certain point, money significantly increases happiness. But that threshold may not be as high as many assume.

“Studies show that when basic needs are met (housing, food, utilities, and some discretionary income for leisure) happiness increases substantially,” she said. “Having enough income to allow leisure time, rather than working multiple jobs to survive, strongly supports well-being.”

Bennett said that where you live can play a role in happiness, “but the effect is highly personal.”

“If your environment aligns with your preferences, you are more likely to feel satisfied,” she said. She also noted that environmental factors such as noise, light pollution, or toxins can negatively affect health, which in turn affects happiness.

“These factors often go unnoticed but can have a real impact,” Bennett said. And while some cities consistently rank higher for happiness, she noted that moving there will not guarantee the same result.

“Happiness depends not just on location but on your ability to integrate, build connections, and pursue your life’s purpose in that place,” she said.

To view the entire report, visit <https://wallethub.com/edu/happiest-states/6959>.

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