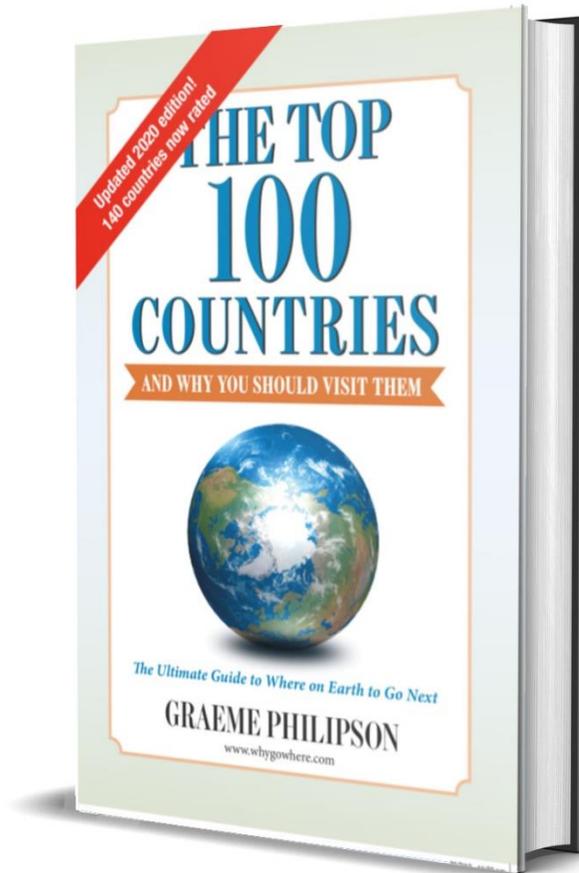# A Totally New Way of Looking at the World

Unique rating system ranks 140 countries by 10 criteria for the traveler

Second edition available September 2019 as print or Amazon Kindle e-book

THE TOP 100 COUNTRIES – And Why You Should Visit Them is a new type of travel book. It uses a unique rating methodology to rank every country by ten key factors important to the traveler. In total, 140 countries are ranked by such things as value for money, number of World Heritage sites, quality of the health system, personal safety, and the environment.

All the data is taken from reputable independent sources. None of this is secret, but what this book does for the first time is bring it all together in a way that shows the strengths and weaknesses of each country as a travel destination (with a little secret sauce). There is also an extensive write-up on every country on earth, with the best and worst points and must-see sights. It is an invaluable guide to the ever-important question:
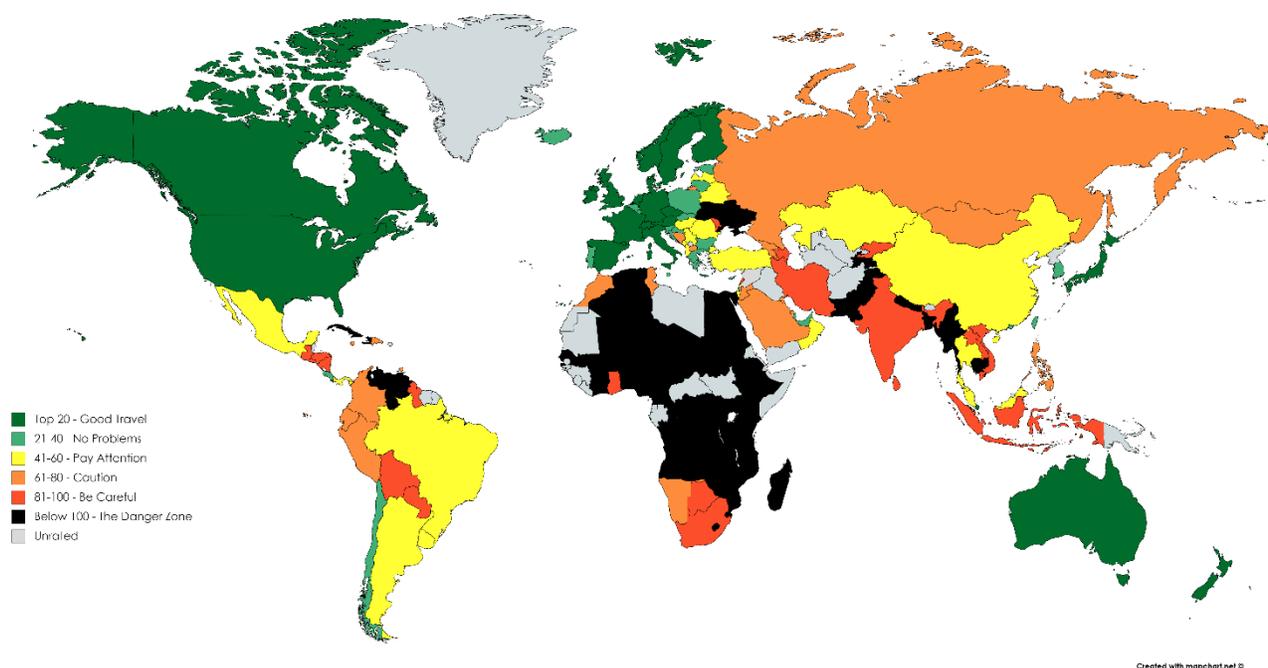
Where on Earth will you go next?

The book is written by Graeme Philipson. After decades as one of the world's top technology journalists and market researchers, he has applied his analytical and journalistic skills to his favorite pastime – travel.

www.whygowhere.com

They say it's a small world. They're wrong

PLANET EARTH is a big place and full of infinite variety.

There are around 200 countries in the world, depending on how you count them. No one can ever visit them all, except for a few box-tickers. In this book we have tried to give you a brief overview of most of the world's countries and what makes them worth visiting. We actually rank 140 countries and look at dozens more (we didn't spell it out – a hundred sounds better).

Legend:
- Top 20 - Good Travel
- 21-40 - No Problems
- 41-60 - Pay Attention
- 61-80 - Caution
- 81-100 - Be Careful
- Below 100 - The Danger Zone
- Unrated

Created with mapchart.net ©

We have tried to paint a picture of each of them. It is not definitive. There are plenty of good sources of more detailed information, most of it free and online. The days of relying solely on a Frommers or a Lonely Planet guidebook are long gone. And see our website (**www.whygowhere.com**)

We believe what we have done is unique. We have taken ten different criteria for our 140 countries, found quantitative ratings for them, and combined them into an overall score to rate and rank each country. We also rank them for each factor. The result is a useful guide to how easy and desirable these countries are to visit. It will help you decide where on Earth to go next.

The Top 100 Countries index uses the following criteria, all of them from independent and reputable international sources:

- **Popularity (tourists per year)**
- **Tourist infrastructure**
- **Happiness**
- **Value for money**
- **Number of World Heritage Properties**
- **Safety and security**
- **Quality of the health system**
- **Quality of the environment**
- **Corruption level**
- **Personal and economic freedom**

What the book doesn't cover

THE TOP 100 COUNTRIES rating system does not cover things like excitement level, the tastiness of the local cuisine, or the ease or cost of travel to these destinations (which will vary according to your starting point). Nor does it look at a range of other subjective factors. Travel is the most personal of experiences, and individual tastes cannot be quantified.

But we believe the ten factors we have chosen give a good indication of the relative merits of each country, based on the criteria that are important to most travelers. The main body of the book is structured according to the regions of the world, looking at most countries individually, even those that are not rated. It is intended as a guide to help you work out which countries you might visit. We look at the best things to see and do, and at each country's history and culture - even the national dish and beverage of choice.

The rating system is by necessity a little arbitrary – there is no way to properly weight the different factors. But the ten individual indexes give a good indication of the strengths and weaknesses of each country, and act as a handy guide to which of them offer a combination of desirability and ease of travel.

The result is, we believe, a refreshingly different way of looking at the world and the relative strengths and weaknesses of each country as a travel destination.

The description of each country is accompanied by its detailed score in the Top 100 Countries Index, for each of the ten criteria, plus other things like the level of tourist infestation. The ratings help us see the pros and cons of each destination. Different people like different things, but by using this rating system we have tried to give an objective analysis of each country.

The major countries have longer writeups

FOR MAJOR DESTINATIONS, like the USA, Europe's 'Big Five', and China and Japan, we go into some detail, breaking our descriptions down by the regions of that country. Some places are mentioned only briefly, and most unrated countries are skimmed over – they are simply not very good places to go. But India for example gets a detailed listing, despite its low score, because it is so big and so interesting.

We have included a little 'Our view' section for many destinations. These are our opinions or pointers to favorite places in most of the countries we have visited. For some of them we are relying on the impressions of trusted colleagues. Some of the countries we really like rate rather poorly, while some of the higher-ranking countries we find not so desirable. But that's just an indication of how different things appeal to different people.

We hope you will find it a useful addition to your never-ending quest to work out just where on Earth to go to next.

Inside the book

HERE'S THE LISTING for just one country, Malaysia (ranked 49th overall). All Top 100 countries have the tables on the scores and the ranking, while the level of detail depends upon how interesting the country is and its value as a destination. All countries on earth are mentioned in the text. Some countries get 10 pages, some only get a paragraph.

49	Malaysia	Score	Ranking
Popularity (million annual visitors, 2018)		25.95	15
Quality of tourist infrastructure (out of 7)		4.66	44
Value for money for visitors (PPP vs US$)		0.35	31
Happiness Index (out of 10)		5.34	78
Number of World Heritage Properties		4	=68
Personal safety and security (out of 100)		68.60	56
Quality of health system (out of 100)		78.13	38
Environment and pollution (out of 100)		59.22	67
Low level of corruption (out of 100)		47	=50
Freedom - personal and economic (out of 10)		6.41	100
Population (million, 2019)		32	41
Land Area (000 sq km)		331	56
Population density (people per sq km)		96.6	66
Annual international visitors per capita		0.81	32
OVERALL SCORE		**52.25**	**49**

Best thing	The food. Great combo of Chinese and Malay – wonderful cuisine.
Worst thing	The institutional racism practised by the Malays against the Chinese.
Most surprising thing	It's an advanced country with good infra-structure, but still really cheap.
National dish	Laksa (coconut curry soup) with seafood, chicken or beef.
Beverage of choice	Beer. For some reason Carlsberg (locally brewed) is the most popular. Try the tuak (palm wine) in Sabah and Sarawak.
Why you should visit	Penang and Malacca. KL can be fun.

Kuala Lumpur and the Malay Peninsula

MALAYSIA'S CAPITAL Kuala Lumpur, almost universally referred to as 'KL', is a big bustling city in the middle of the Malay peninsula. For many years it had the world's tallest building, the twin Petronas Towers. But now there's many taller.

Like everywhere in Malaysia, KL has great food. The big Central Market near the main train station is great, and there are plenty of others. Bukit Bintang is the main shopping and entertainment precinct, with massive shopping malls. An extensive train system makes it reasonably easy to get around – the traffic on the crowded streets is chaotic. But the best things to do in peninsular Malaysia are found outside of KL.

There are lots of great places to go. Many people like the Cameron Highlands, a resort area north of KL known for its tea plantations, established as a hill station by the British in the 1930s. It's cooler climate and mountain scenery has made it a popular tourist destination.

Langkawi is an island resort area off the north-west coast. In many ways it is very much like the Thai island resorts, and the closest part of the mainland is actually in Thailand rather than Malaysia. It's your standard resort. For a change of scene catch the will ferry to Penang (see below).

One place to avoid is the city of Johor Baru ('JB'), just across from Singapore. It's a big place with a bad reputation – justifiably. It's where uptight Singaporeans go to unwind and it is notorious for its prostitution and shonky bars. Stay away.

Our view

We don't like KL, though we know many people who do. We find it a bit too noisy and crowded and higgledy-piggledy. There are so many better things to do in Malaysia. But the train ride from KL to Singapore is a great trip – eight hours or so trundling up or down the Malayan peninsula, at a pretty reasonable price.

Penang and Malacca

THESE TWO CHARMING cities on the west coast of the Malay peninsula are good places to visit and chill out for a day or a week. They both have great restaurants and a colonial ambiance missing from the rest of the country, and certainly not in evidence in KL.

They are on the Straits of Malacca, the narrow waterway between Malaya and Sumatra that is one of the world's busiest shipping lanes. Their strategic location saw them occupied by Europeans from the 16th century. Both towns often changed hands between colonial masters over the centuries - the Dutch, the Portuguese, the British - leaving them with some great architecture.

Penang is on an island, connected by bridge and ferry to the mainland. Its greater urban area has become the largest in Malaysia after KL, with tax concessions that have made it a major manufacturing and distribution hub and with the country's second largest international airport.

But for the visitor all the action is in the historic center, the heritage protected George Town. It's a fun place, full of great bars and restaurants and cheap hotels. It has a higher proportion of Chinese than most cities in Malaysia – Malays never settled there.

Malacca, quite a way further south, is a similar place, though not as big. It too has an attractive old town, with a pleasant riverside setting that has been substantially smartened up in recent years. You can get there by bus from Singapore or KL.

Our view

We love both places but prefer Malacca. It is a lot quieter. But Penang is the home of the Peranakan cuisine, a wonderful blend of Chinese and Malay that is absolutely delicious. It is also called Nonya food, after the women who developed it and prepared it. In George Town there is a Peranakan restaurant called Kebaya, which we vote the best restaurant we have ever been in, based on a combination of its food, its ambiance, and its pricing. We have eaten there many times.

Malaysia on Borneo

TWO OF THE STATES of the Malaysian Federation are on the large island of Borneo. Sabah at the very north of the island was once known as British North Borneo ('BNB'), but it is the southern state of Sarawak that was home to one of the most fascinating episodes in British colonial history.

From 1841 to when the Japanese invaded a century later, most of what is now Sarawak was ruled by the 'White Rajahs', the English Brooke family. They turned it into an absolute monarchy, ceding control to Britain only after Japanese occupation during World War II. The history of their weird little paternalistic empire reads like the most fantastic fairy tale.

Sarawak and Sabah were joined with Malaya (and initially Singapore) to form Malaysia upon independence in 1963. Singapore soon left (see above) and Malaysia is now a federation of 13 states, with the two on Borneo as large in area as the 11 states on the Malay Peninsula.

They are good places to visit. The Sarawak capital Kuching, seat of the White Rajahs, is a major center with great food (it has a large Chinese population) and many rainforest and wildlife activities. Borneo is where orang-utans come from, and Sarawak is the best place to see them.

Sabah's capital Kota Kinabalu (Jesselton in colonial times) is a thriving place with similar outdoor activities. It also has orang-utans and has the added advantage of being the jumping off point for a visit to Mount Kinabalu, the highest mountain in Southeast Asia. At over 13,000 feet it is high enough to get the occasional snowfall, even though it is virtually on the equator.

It is surrounded by a large and attractive national park. It's a reasonable climb to the peak if you're fit enough, though numbers are tightly controlled.

This part of Malaysia not so widely visited as the peninsula, but it has a lot to recommend it.

Methodology

ALL DATA IN THE Top 100 Countries is taken from reputable and publicly available international sources. We have not attempted to rate intangibles like the quality of the food, the weather, the friendliness of the people, or similar things. The rating system should be regarded simply as a way of comparing countries by the ten factors we have used, and not as a definitive guide to where to visit and why – though the rationale is that it might make your decision easier, or at least more informed.

Popularity

SOURCE: UN World Tourism Organization database, a handy list of the number of annual international visitors to each country.. As a general rule, the more people that visit a country, the more reason there is to go.

Tourism infrastructure

SOURCE: The World Economic Forum (WEF) annual Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report contains a series of detailed indexes that measure the factors and policies that enable the development of the travel and tourism sector.

Happiness

SOURCE: The data in this index component is taken from the 2019 World Happiness Report, published annually by the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network. The WHR rates countries by how happy their citizens perceive themselves to be.

Value for money

SOURCE: This data is taken from the World Bank's calculation of Purchase Price Parity (PPP), a widely accepted measure of how cheap or expensive a country is. It measures bang for your buck.

Heritage

SOURCE: The number of UNESCO World Heritage Properties in each country, as a rough guide to the significance of its cultural heritage on a global scale. These are often good reason for visiting a country.

Safety and security

SOURCE: SafeAround, a website and app which rates over 160 countries and over 100 cities for their level of physical safety for the traveler, taken from numerous reputable sources.

Health

SOURCE: This date is taken from the 2017 Legatum Prosperity Index.. We have used the 'Health' component, which is based on a country's 'basic mental and physical health, health infrastructure, and the availability of preventative care'.

Environment

SOURCE: The 2018 Environmental Performance Index (EPI), an excellent report produced by Yale University's Center for Environ-mental Law and Policy and Columbia University's Center for International Earth Science Information Network.

Corruption

SOURCE: The Corruption Perception Index 2017, published by Transparency International,. It is based on the 'perceived levels of public sector corruption according to experts and businesspeople'.

Freedom

SOURCE: The Cato Institute's Human Freedom Index, a 'broad measure of human freedom and the absence of coercive constraint. It uses 79 distinct indicators of personal and economic freedom'.

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About the Author

GRAEME PHILIPSON has been traveling the world for business and pleasure for 40 years. He has worked in or visited most of the Top 100 countries and been to quite a few others.

In his long career as one of the world's leading tech industry journalists and market analysts he developed a unique perspective on Planet Earth. His worldview is informed by a deep knowledge of the history and culture of the countries he has visited. He conceived the idea of the Top 100 Countries index based on similar rating systems he has devised for commercial use in the sustainability, local government and home automation sectors.

GP, as he is universally known, has also written a number of major studies on the restaurant industry and published a book of original poems.

This book and the website **www.whygowhere.com** combine the best of all possible worlds - his passion (travel), his knowledge (history) and his skills (data analysis and writing).

There is nothing more fun than travel, he believes, nor anything that teaches you more about life. "And you get to eat great food, meet fabulous people, and have a really good time," he says. He now devotes his life to travel and writing about the places he has been.

His mission, which he has chosen to accept, is to work out where on earth to go next. And to help others do the same. "**Why go where**?" is the eternal question.

So many places, so little time ...

Graeme Philipson

graeme@philipson.info

phone +61 418 609 397

(Eastern Australia timezone – don't call me in the middle of the night!)

www.whygowhere.com