

# Auckland's dull heart is the trouble

TIM DICK *Sydney Morning Herald*

*May 27, 2010*

## Auckland better than Sydney?

Auckland recently received a ranking as the world's fourth most liveable city, to the disgust of some Australians.

Auckland may be survivable, but is not liveable. It is as dead as the extinct volcanoes on which it lies. Its public transport is embarrassing, traffic awful and the weather poor. Crime is higher than in Sydney, and incomes lower. The Sky Tower is tall, but there is little to see.

Why then, did Mercer, a consultancy, rank the New Zealand city as the fourth most liveable metropolis in the world, ahead of Sydney in 10th place?

The answer seems to be that Mercer's annual liveability list prefers vapidness to vibrancy. This year, Vienna is first, then Zurich, then Geneva - a roll call of the nice-but-dull. You might not be shot while living there, but there's a fair chance tedium will send you mad.



The Sky Tower jump in Auckland.

Take Geneva, host to a United Nations branch office, associated NGOs and a fountain in a pretty lake. Tourist shops sell cuckoo clocks and chocolates. The Large Hadron Collider is nearby (unfortunately, so far no black hole). And that is it. Its best feature is cheap flights to London.

By ranking Auckland fourth and Sydney 10th, Mercer confirms its indices are compiled by those aroused by boredom but scared of life. This index uses 10 groups of factors - like political, economic and environment - to mislead migrants. For Auckland to rank well, great weight must be put on "water availability".

Auckland has a quarter of Sydney's people. Its harbour bridge is a quarter as impressive. Its performing arts centre, mercifully obscured in the city centre, is a quarter as good as the Opera House.

The NSW government was quick to praise Sydney's ranking, but it should mind the comparative company it keeps: one place up is Bern. According to Mercer, Adelaide is equal to San Francisco and Lyon beats London. If Goulburn were surveyed, NSW could score twice.

In fact, of Mercer's top 20, only four - Sydney, Amsterdam, Berlin and Melbourne - can claim decent-city status with a straight face, those to which you would *want* to move for work.

Pop quiz: Canberra or Paris?

Mercer opts for the national roundabout. In the quality of life alternative universe, a big flagpole trumps the Eiffel Tower.