

Where is the milk and honey in this land?

by Mark Pavilons

?No man can be a good citizen unless he has a wage more than sufficient to cover the bare cost of living, and hours of labor short enough so after his day's work is done he will have time and energy to bear his share in the management of the community, to help in carrying the general load.?

??Theodore Roosevelt

It seems our species is forever seeking the proverbial land of ?milk and honey.?

The phrase, ?land of milk and honey,??referring to a place of plenty, comes from the Biblical description of the land promised to the Israelites.

Our country definitely has an abundance of food and resources, where people can live equally in a democracy, make money and have decent lives.

Abundance and choice aside, being able to afford it all can be quite a task. Recent studies show most working Canadians can't afford to miss a single pay cheque.

Are we a society of layabouts who waste our money on cannabis and beer? Do we spend more than we make because we live luxurious lifestyles?

I always wince when I see newcomers arriving on our shores, with this ?milk and honey??idea in their minds. Yes, our country is free from persecution; people are treated fairly and individual rights and freedoms are enshrined and enforced.

But we are part of a bottom-line, market-driven economy. We are plagued by bloated government bureaucracies and we still see pay inequity between the genders. Consumers have to contend with high prices, dictated by monopolies and collusive industries, unhindered by public opinion. Filling up our vehicles, at \$1.30 per litre, is by no means affordable to many.

Those who are born and raised here, and have little experience with the cost of living outside our borders, may think being a Canuck is great.

Well, studies and comparative figures tell a much different story.

A recent study revealed the cheapest, and most expensive countries to live in. Some of the results are quite surprising.

The cheapest country is India, with a cost of living index of 24.14, followed by Moldova, Pakistan, Kazakhstan and Nepal. Should none of those appeal, a little further down the list you'll find Colombia, Serbia, The Philippines, South Africa and Romania.

Living is quite reasonable in places like the Ukraine, Georgia, Algeria and Azerbaijan.

Syria, I'm told, is also quite cheap, but our government advises against travel to that historic area.

When we talk ?cheap,??the statistic creators calculate house prices, groceries, gas, restaurant meals, clothing, etc.

For those who've travelled, you will know how restaurant meal prices can vary widely. I've had some astronomically expensive meals in The Bahamas, and some amazing, dirt cheap local dishes in the Dominican Republic.

The cheapest restaurant meals and apartments are found in Nepal. Cuba has the cheapest cinema prices, public transport and electricity bills. The cheapest McDonald's combo meal is found in the Ukraine, and the cheapest pair of Levis 501s can be purchased in Uganda.

And, there's a lot to be said for simplicity and back-to-basics living. We tend to associate 'cheap' with poor, or lacking in modern world amenities. Oh, no, this couldn't be further from the truth.

Of those countries that are among the cheapest, India has the most World Heritage Sites (32); Colombia has the highest life expectancy (79) and the highest percentage of forested land (54%). Romania has the best average internet connection speed (12.8 mbits per second); Moldova has the fewest roads (9,352 kms). Bosnia and Herzegovina is the least urbanized, while a natural disaster is least likely to occur in the Ukraine.

Truth hurts, doesn't it?

We always think that we in the west are the most advanced, most tech savvy and environmentally forward-thinking. My friends, in many cases, the opposite is true. European nations have much better track records in terms of reducing our carbon footprint and innovative green technology and policies.

Let's move to the list of most expensive to live. Tops is Bermuda, a British Overseas Territory, which has a cost of living index of 133.68. Switzerland, The Bahamas, Norway and Iceland complete the top five, while the UK comes 12th, and the U.S. sits at 21st. Canada isn't in the top 20, but we're not far behind the pack.

Canada's cell phone rates are among the highest in the world. In Denmark, the average monthly bill is roughly \$22, while it's only \$10 per month in Hong Kong.

Has anyone paid \$5 for celery recently?? My brand of whole coffee beans (907 gram bag) went from an average of \$12.99 to a whopping \$18.99. A typical restaurant meal for a family in this country tips the scales at \$200.

Our transit fares continue to rise every year, as do the prices of vehicles and associated parts and repairs. Today, you can't leave a mechanic's shop for much under \$1,000. I didn't pay that for my first two cars!

Our disposable income is slashed by amenities like high-speed Internet, cable and cell phones. This is likely the largest single expense of a modern family, next to groceries and mortgage payments.

In many ways, we've allowed our society and associated lifestyle to evolve into this expensive, stressful addiction.

The milk has soured, and the honey has dried into a hard, gluey mess!