Singapore: Asia's most liveable city?

On Monday, the second annual World Cities Summit will kick into high gear. Mayors, urban planners and officials from around the globe will gather here to exchange ideas on how to develop liveable and sustainable cities for the future.

Host country Singapore was recently ranked the most liveable city in Asia, and 28th in the world, in a survey of 450 cities.

For the last 15 years, human resource consulting firm Mercer has been compiling a livability index for cities.

This year, its survey spanned 450 cities. Singapore came in 28th, while Australian capital Vienna topped the chart.

Singapore has held the top spot in Asia since it overtook Tokyo in 2004. The Mercer survey ranks cities according to 30 factors, ranging from the ease of buying fresh fish for the table, to the reach of law enforcement. It is conducted by Mercer employees, together with partner firms and quality-of-life experts.

Multinational companies that relocate staff from one city to another use the findings to determine the appropriate amount of hardship allowance to pay their staff.

Naturally, the report concentrates on the needs and concerns of expats. Those polled by Mercer say housing, education and banking services in Singapore are as good as they get.

In housing, however, their term of reference is likely to be the quality and upkeep of private housing, the choice for most expats, and not HDB homes. High-end estates popular with expats include areas in Tanglin, Bukit Timah and Newton.

As for education, what impresses expats is the wide choice of private and international schools on offer. Parents can choose from a buffet that includes American, French, Swiss and Japanese schools. Others, like American investor Jim Rogers, 67, opt to send their children to good-quality local schools, so as to expose them to Mandarin.

Where money matters are concerned, expats value the ease with which they can access global banking services and exchange foreign currencies.

So what bothers expats about life here? The aspect that gets them literally hot under the collar is the climate.

British-born Lin Foo-Memish, 45, wishes what it needs are more cultural exhibitions and museums, and a wider variety of theatrical and musical performances.

Mr Takahashi would also like to see more green spaces set aside for people to relax and play in. If Singapore wants to better its 28th spot in the hotly contested race to be the world's most liveable city, Mercer's senior researcher Mariana Gupta notes that top-tier global cities like New York and Paris have declared car-free zones in key parts.

As for Singapore, Dr Gupta says it too needs to go beyond what he calls "first-generation issues", such as clean air and water, to excel in "second-generation issues", such as being bicycle- and recycling-friendly.

That would bespeak its "sophistication" and coming of age as a global city.