



Behaving badly in the 'Burgh: Steel City ranks 25th in most 'sinful' cities study

Exactly what wicked ways bumped Pittsburgh to the top 14% of sinful cities?



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When thinking about Pittsburgh, certain catchphrases and notions instantly come to mind: “City of Champions,” “The Steel City” and Primanti Bros. and pierogies with an IC Light to wash it all down.

But is Pittsburgh known as particularly sinful?

According to a [new report by personal finance website WalletHub](#), Pittsburgh is the 25th most “sinful city” in the U.S., out of more than 180 metropolises studied.

It’s no surprise that Las Vegas, the original Sin City, tops the list. And if there’s a silver lining in making this list, it might be that Philadelphia (No.

5), Cleveland (No. 11) and Baltimore (No. 19) all ranked naughtier than the 'Burgh. (However, Cincinnati was further down the list at No. 42.)

Exactly what wicked ways bumped Pittsburgh to the top 14% of sinful cities?

To determine the most sinful cities, WalletHub compared 182 total, including the 150 most populous, plus at least two of the most populated cities in each state, across seven key dimensions: anger and hatred, jealousy, excesses and vices, greed, lust, vanity, and laziness. In all, more than 35 factors were considered.

The study's methodology leans heavily on data quirks, with categories like "lust" measured by adult entertainment establishments per capita and "vanity" scored by the number of internet searches for plastic surgeries. It's a fun and clever exercise, but some metrics — like "anger" measured by violent crime rates or "envy" linked to wealth disparities — highlight issues with real-world consequences.

Ranking the most 'sinful' cities in the U.S.

Personal finance website WalletHub compared more than 180 cities across 37 key indicators of vices and illicit behavior, landing the 'Burgh in the top 14% overall.

10 MOST SINFUL

| Overall rank | City |
|--------------|---------------------|
| 1 | Las Vegas, Nev. |
| 2 | Houston, Texas |
| 3 | Los Angeles, Calif. |
| 4 | Atlanta, Ga. |
| 5 | Philadelphia, Pa. |
| 6 | Denver, Colo. |
| 7 | Phoenix, Ariz. |
| 8 | Miami, Fla. |
| 9 | Dallas, Texas |
| 10 | St. Louis, Mo. |
| 11 | Cleveland, Ohio |
| 25 | Pittsburgh, Pa. |
| 42 | Cincinnati, Ohio |

10 LEAST SINFUL

| | |
|-----|------------------------|
| 173 | Fort Wayne, Ind. |
| 174 | South Burlington, Vt. |
| 175 | Bridgeport, Conn. |
| 176 | West Valley City, Utah |
| 177 | Cape Coral, Fla. |
| 178 | Madison, Wis. |
| 179 | Pearl City, Hawaii |
| 180 | Port St. Lucie, Fla. |
| 181 | Fremont, Calif. |
| 182 | Columbia, Md. |

Source: WalletHub Post-Gazette

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“Regardless of any particular religious tenets, certain activities are considered ‘sinful’ by society as a whole,” said Chip Lupo, an analyst for WalletHub. “Sometimes, these activities are always bad, like violent crimes or identity theft. In other cases, they may be relatively harmless in

moderation but incredibly destructive when not kept under control, such as alcohol use or gambling. The most sinful cities are those where illicit activities and vices alike are the most widespread.”

But should conditions such as obesity and behaviors like overuse of drugs and alcohol — and even the use of tanning beds — be considered sinful?

“Labeling already stigmatized behaviors as sinful only increases the shame that folks have around these behaviors and decreases their likelihood to seek out help. I would suggest referring to them as ‘unhealthy behaviors,’” said licensed clinical social worker Lauren Pulinka, mental health program coordinator at St. Clair Health in Mt. Lebanon.

“Giving into unhealthy temptations often occurs because we are not taking good care of ourselves,” Pulinka continued. “When we feel deficit or are so tired of feeling bad, we resort to quick, unhealthy ways to boost our mood. The best way to avoid unhealthy behaviors is to schedule your own healthy self-care on a regular basis.” Pulinka cited self-care examples of reading, exercising and being with loved ones.

Laura K. Campbell, clinical psychologist at West Virginia University’s Rockefeller Neuroscience Institute in Morgantown, concurred that there’s “already so much stigma attached to addiction, mental health conditions and obesity. “‘Sinful’ implies a moral judgment or that an individual is behaving in an ungodly way and can result in shame, which is never an effective way to promote behavior change. In fact, it can perpetuate the behaviors because they are often used as a means of coping with shame.”

Overall, Pittsburgh ranked No. 11 in the "vanity" section, No. 36 in "anger and hatred" and No. 38 in the "excess and vices." But it dropped all the way down to No. 99 for “jealousy.”

Pittsburgh only scored in the top 5% of the 182 cities polled in a handful of categories, including coming in at No. 5 for most tanning salons per capita (vanity) and No. 10 for most Google searches for “Tinder” (lust).

About those tanning beds

While Pittsburgh’s penchant for cloudy days might explain the need for so many tanning beds, three of the four cities tied for first place in this

category are rather sunny: Las Vegas, and Phoenix and the Arizona city's suburb of Scottsdale. The other first-place finisher, San Diego, is a bit cloudier than Pittsburgh, which averages about 160 sunny days annually versus the California city's 146.

"Body image is likely a strong driver for indoor tanning," explained Campbell. "Like many behaviors, knowledge of health risks — in this case, skin cancer — has not necessarily resulted in behavior change. Women in particular feel strong pressure to adhere to society's beauty standards, and this can be hard to overcome. As far as why there are so many tanning beds in Pittsburgh, I can only guess that there is the same high demand there as there is in many cities."

According to Christie G. Regula of St. Clair Health's Vujevich Dermatology Associates, which has offices in Mt. Lebanon and Pleasant Hills, tanning beds, while not exactly sinful, "are certainly extremely harmful to skin health and put you at a significantly higher risk for skin cancer."

She explained that the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the World Health Organization have declared ultraviolet radiation from the sun and artificial sources, such as tanning beds, to be a known cancer-causing substance. Multiple studies have shown that use of tanning beds is associated with an increased risk of melanoma, the deadliest form of skin cancer, and nonmelanoma skin cancer, including squamous cell carcinoma and basal cell carcinoma.

"The incidence of melanoma in young women is increasing, and it is the most common cancer in young adults, ages 25 to 29. This can develop as a result of lifestyle choices including indoor tanning, especially during adolescence and young adulthood," Regula warned.

It's good to be below average

Whereas Pittsburgh came in below average for violent crimes (No. 95), Cleveland tied with four other cities — Memphis, Tennessee, Detroit, Little Rock, Arkansas, and Birmingham, Alabama — for most violent crimes per capita.

[According to Pittsburgh Police data](#), our city has been host to 41 homicides so far this year and an additional 75 non-fatal shootings, both of which are down nearly 11% and 32%, respectively, from the same period last year. In

fact, Pittsburgh ranked 77th for firearms deaths per capita, No. 95 for violent crimes per 1,000 residents and No. 120 for aggravated assaults per 1,000 residents, according to WalletHub, which compiled data from the Census Bureau and local crime statistics. However, hate-crime incidents earned the city a No. 29 rank.

And Pittsburgh only boasts one casino, although another two are just a short drive away.

Another ray of hope: In 2021, 35% of Pittsburgh's population was classified as obese, as compared to the national average, at more than 40%. These stats are backed up by the most recent available [Pennsylvania Department of Health](#) and [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) information.

“We frequently hear about obesity and certain addictions as epidemic in many regions of the U.S. These are complex behavioral issues that go way beyond overindulgence,” Campbell said. “For example, environmental factors like having more access to fast food than to fresh produce, as is often seen in very rural and inner-city communities, contribute to obesity and related health issues. Major life stressors and mental health conditions, public health concerns in and of themselves, also place individuals at risk for engaging repeatedly in unhealthy behaviors in an effort to cope.”

Pittsburgh ranked No. 21 for prevalence of fast food restaurants per capita.

While there are differences, of course, rural and urban environments share many of the same challenges, including increased poverty, food deserts (lack of grocery stores to buy healthy foods) and higher prevalence of mental health conditions, Campbell said.

“Urban environments do typically have more social service and health care agencies available, which can mitigate these factors to some extent, but that is only true for people who are able to access them.”

Does city culture increase the likelihood of perpetuating these unhealthy behaviors?

“As social beings, we’re certainly influenced by the people who surround us and the greater society,” Campbell said. “It is very challenging to change a behavior like overeating or daily alcohol use if the people closest to us continue to engage in them.

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