

## Movie Explores Why US Ranks 23rd of Happiest Countries

By [Deborah Huso](#) | May 8, 2012 | [0](#)



In our society, we tend to glorify those who have a lot of money and status, prioritizing external values that don't necessarily make us happy.

If that's the case, then what's the formula for happiness? That's the question Roko Belic, co-founder of Wadi Rum Films, set out to answer in making his latest documentary, [The Happy Movie](#). It all started in 2005, when Belic's friend, director Tom Shadyac of *Liar, Liar* and *Patch Adams* fame, handed the young Sundance award-winning Belic a *New York Times* article indicating that the United States ranked 23rd on a list of happiest countries. Why, with all the prosperity and freedom Americans enjoy, did we rank so low? Shadyac decided it was time to finance a film project to find out. The result was *The Happy Movie*.

In it, Belic crosses the globe looking for the fountain of happiness. "I knew other cultures had a lot to offer us in America. We think we have everything we need, but we don't," he says. His travels led him from the bayous of Louisiana to the deserts of Namibia. And he found happiness in all corners of the world.

- In the slums of Kolkata, India, a rickshaw driver named Manoj Singh considers himself a happy and fortunate man despite the fact he barely makes enough money to feed his family.
- In Namibia's Kalahari Desert, Belic found joy on a grand scale and admits he became fearful that happiness was out of reach for those of us leading modern lifestyles. But when he asked the Bushmen what made them happy, they said it was doing things together, whether that was building a hut or hunting game.

• In Okinawa, Japan, “the community was constantly reinforcing happiness,” Belic says. Elders in the society show support to children who are not part of their family, attending events and cheering for kids—even when their own grandchildren aren’t participating.

“We all have the ability to have relationships, no matter how rich or poor,” Belic says. “Nobody I studied [who was happy] was selfish or alone. They all had somebody they loved and somebody who loved them.” He found that people who “value compassion, meaning and making the world a better place” are happier than those who only enjoy wealth and status.

So will watching *The Happy Movie* change your life? It just might. Making the film changed Belic’s. When he was done, he moved to Los Angeles to be closer to friends he loved and to re-engage in a form of play he had given up years ago: surfing. Belic admits that might sound crazy, but then he asked how much sense it made to leave family and friends behind to move across the country for a new job or professional opportunity. “Prioritize the people you love in your life and prioritize your happiness,” he advises. “It’s good for everything else you care about—your health, your longevity, your work and your relationships.”

[Watch the inspiring trailer for The Happy Movie at SUCCESS Videos.](#)

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## Deborah Huso

Articles

Deborah Huso is a Virginia-based freelance writer specializing in business, lifestyle, and travel subjects. She is also a regular book reviewer for SUCCESS. Her publication credits include FamilyFun, Military Officer, Appraiser News Online, Women's Health, GORP.com, USA Today magazines, Alaska Airlines Magazine, WellBella, and The Progressive Farmer, where she serves as contributing editor. Huso also publishes a popular blog on love, motherhood, and work called "I Only Love You Because I Have To" at [www.deborahhuso.com](http://www.deborahhuso.com). Visit Huso online at [www.drhuso.com](http://www.drhuso.com), or follow her on Twitter @writewellmedia.

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