

□ **READING CHALLENGE**

The Town Where Nobody Locks Doors

In some places around the world, people leave their doors open, their cars unlocked, and their children play outside alone.

Level	A2 — Elementary
Age Group	Teens (11-16)
Topic	Daily Life
Duration	~12-15 minutes
Skill	Reading
Vocabulary	15 words
Quiz	5 questions

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Imagine you are leaving your house in the morning. You close the door, but you do not **lock** it. You leave your bicycle in the garden without a chain. Your car is parked on the street with the keys inside. Does this sound crazy? In most cities around the world, this would be a very bad idea. But in some places, this is completely normal. There are towns and even whole countries where people feel so safe that they do not bother locking their doors. How is this possible? And what can the rest of the world learn from these places?

Iceland: The Safest Country in the World

Iceland is a small island country in the North Atlantic Ocean, close to the Arctic Circle. It has a **population** of only about 380,000 people — that is smaller than many cities. Iceland has been called the safest country in the world many times. The Global Peace Index, which measures safety in every country, has put Iceland at number one almost every year since 2008.

In many Icelandic towns, people leave their front doors unlocked during the day. Some people even leave them unlocked at night. Cars are often parked with the keys inside. Children walk to school alone from a very young age, and they play outside without adults watching them. The **crime rate** is incredibly low. In most years, there are fewer than two murders in the entire country. To put this in perspective, some large cities have more murders in a single weekend.

One of the most surprising things about Iceland is what parents do with their babies. It is very common for Icelandic parents to leave their babies sleeping in prams outside shops, restaurants, and cafes, even in winter. The babies are wrapped up warm in thick blankets, and the parents go inside to eat or shop. In most other countries, this would cause panic. In Iceland, it is completely normal. Parents **trust** that their babies are safe because they know their neighbours and their **community**.

Norway and the Nordic Model

Iceland is not the only safe place in the world. Its Nordic neighbours — Norway, Denmark, Sweden, and Finland — are also among the safest countries. Norway, in particular, is famous for its relaxed attitude to security. In small Norwegian towns, people often leave their houses unlocked, their **belongings** unguarded, and their children playing freely.

In 2011, something terrible happened in Norway. A man carried out two **violent** attacks that killed 77 people. It was the worst act of violence in Norway since World War Two. The whole country was shocked and heartbroken. But what happened next surprised the world. Instead of introducing more security, more cameras, and stricter laws, the Norwegian government said that the answer was “more democracy, more openness.” The prime minister at the time said that Norway would not let fear change the way people lived. Today, Norway is still one of the safest and most trusting countries on Earth.

Japan: Trust in a Big Country

Safety is not just a Nordic thing. Japan, a country of 125 million people, is also incredibly safe. In Japanese cities, people regularly leave their bags on chairs in cafes to save their seat while they go to the counter to order. Children as young as six take the train to school alone. If you lose your wallet in Tokyo, there is a very good chance someone will hand it in to the police or the nearest shop. Studies show that over 80 percent of lost wallets in Tokyo are returned to their owners. Try that in most other big cities!

In Japan, safety comes from a strong sense of social responsibility. From a young age, Japanese children learn that their **behaviour** affects everyone around them. Littering, being noisy on trains, or causing trouble for a **stranger** is considered very rude. This social pressure means that most people follow the rules not because they are afraid of the police, but because they do not want to cause problems for others.

Why Are Some Places So Safe?

So what makes these places different? Why can people in Iceland leave their doors open while people in other countries need three locks and a security camera? Experts say there are several important reasons.

Small communities: In small towns, everyone knows each other. When you know your neighbours, you are less likely to steal from them or hurt them. You also know that if you do something wrong, everyone will find out. This social connection creates natural safety. Many **isolated** villages around the world — not just in Iceland — have very low crime because everyone knows everyone.

Low poverty: Countries like Iceland, Norway, and Denmark have strong **welfare** systems. The government provides free healthcare, free education, and financial help for people who lose their jobs. When people have enough money for food, housing, and education, they are much less likely to commit **crime**. Many studies show a strong connection between poverty and crime.

Equality: In the Nordic countries, the difference between rich and poor people is much smaller than in most other countries. When people feel **equal**, they trust each other more. If everyone in your town has a similar life, with similar opportunities, there is less jealousy and less reason to steal or cheat.

Smart punishments: In Norway, the prison system focuses on helping criminals become better people, not just punishing them. Norwegian prisons look more like schools or hostels than jails. Prisoners learn new skills, get education, and prepare to return to normal life. Norway has one of the lowest rates of people going back to prison after they are released — only about 20 percent, compared to over 70 percent in some other countries. Instead of heavy prison sentences, many Nordic countries also use **fines** and community service as punishments for smaller crimes.

Is It Really Perfect?

Of course, no place is completely free of crime. Even in Iceland, there are burglaries, fights, and fraud. In Japan, there are problems with cybercrime and organised crime groups. And as cities grow and more tourists visit, some of these safe places are seeing small increases in crime. Reykjavik, the capital of Iceland, has more crime than small Icelandic villages, just as any city has more crime than a small town.

Some people also argue that these countries are safe partly because they are small and have populations that are quite similar. They say it is easier to trust people when everyone looks alike and shares the same culture. But this argument does not fully explain Japan, which has a large population and big, busy cities but is still very safe. It also does not explain why some small countries with similar populations have much higher crime rates.

What Can We Learn?

The towns where nobody locks their doors teach us something important about human nature. People are not naturally criminal. When people have enough money, good education, healthcare, and a fair society, most of them choose to be honest and kind. Crime is often a result of desperation, inequality, and broken communities — not because some people are born bad.

You do not need to live in Iceland or Japan to make your community safer. Simple things make a difference: getting to know your neighbours, helping people who are struggling, treating others fairly, and teaching children to care about the people around them. Safety does not come from bigger locks on your door. It comes from building a world where people do not want to break in.

Next time you lock your front door, think about the people in Iceland who simply close theirs and walk away. Imagine a world where that kind of trust was normal everywhere. It might seem like a dream, but for millions of people, it is just another ordinary day.

Vocabulary

#	Word	Definition
1	lock	to close something with a key so that other people cannot open it
2	trust	to believe that someone is honest and will not hurt you or steal from you
3	crime	an action that is against the law, like stealing or hurting someone
4	population	the number of people who live in a place
5	crime rate	how much crime happens in a place, usually shown as a number
6	stranger	a person you do not know
7	community	a group of people who live in the same area and often help each other
8	belongings	the things that you own, like your phone, bag, or clothes
9	violent	using force to hurt or damage someone or something
10	isolated	far away from other places or people; alone
11	behaviour	the way a person acts or does things
12	fine	money that you must pay as a punishment for breaking a rule
13	equal	the same in size, amount, or value; fair for everyone
14	poverty	the state of being very poor; not having enough money for basic needs
15	welfare	money and help that a government gives to people who need it

Comprehension Quiz

1. What is special about many small towns in Iceland?
 - A) They have the tallest buildings in Europe
 - B) People often leave their doors unlocked and feel very safe
 - C) Nobody lives there during the winter
 - D) Every house has a security camera

2. Why do people in these safe places trust each other?
 - A) Because they all come from the same family
 - B) Because everyone knows each other in small communities
 - C) Because there are police officers on every street
 - D) Because nobody owns anything valuable

3. What do parents in Iceland sometimes do with their babies?
 - A) They never take their babies outside
 - B) They leave their babies sleeping in prams outside shops and cafes
 - C) They always carry their babies on their backs
 - D) They ask strangers to look after their babies

4. According to the article, what is one reason why countries like Iceland and Norway are so safe?
 - A) The weather is too cold for criminals
 - B) There are very strict punishments for all crimes
 - C) There is low poverty, good welfare, and people feel more equal
 - D) The police have special technology to stop all crime

5. What lesson does the article say we can learn from these safe places?
 - A) Every country should copy Iceland exactly
 - B) More police and cameras are the best way to stop crime
 - C) When people feel equal and supported, they are more likely to trust each other
 - D) Only small countries can be safe

Answer Key

#	Answer	Question
1	B	What is special about many small towns in Iceland?
2	B	Why do people in these safe places trust each other?
3	B	What do parents in Iceland sometimes do with their babies?
4	C	According to the article, what is one reason why countries like Iceland and Norway are so safe?
5	C	What lesson does the article say we can learn from these safe places?