



Guide to Living Better

Embrace these “Blue Zones” lifestyle traits for a longer, healthier life.



We often hear from the older adults we work with how important programs, amenities, and services that promote successful aging are to them.

Finding a senior living community dedicated to mind, body, and spirit is vital. From practicing yoga and meditation to attending on-site art classes, our residents are focused on not just living longer lives, but on living longer, healthier lives.

There are five regions in the world where people seem to have mastered the secrets to successful aging. While the regions are geographically dispersed, their residents share many lifestyle characteristics. We created this guide to help you explore what are known as “Blue Zones” and to provide examples of how you can incorporate their lessons into your daily life.

We'll share the nine lifestyle choices residents in each of the Blue Zones have in common. Use our checklist of tips at the end of this guide to live like a Blue Zone resident!



What are the Blue Zones?

The Blue Zones are the five places in the world where people live the longest and are the healthiest.

What do super agers (those people who live the longest, healthiest lives) have in common? What do they do each day? Where do they live? Let's explore Blue Zones and a history of the research behind the project.

History of the Blue Zones

The idea behind Blue Zones originated with an article first published in the Journal of Experimental Gerontology. Gianni Pes and Michel Poulain shared what they discovered from using demographic information to locate areas around the globe where people lived the longest.

Their work started in Sardinia, a region with the highest concentration of male centenarians. Since men usually have a shorter life expectancy than women, learning more about an area where men live such long lives was especially interesting to researchers. Pes and Poulain went on to identify other areas with extreme longevity and drew blue circles around them on a map.

Researcher Dan Buettner and his colleagues picked up where Pes and Poulain left off and went on to identify other regions with marked longevity. They designated them as Blue Zones. Here's what we know thanks to Pes, Poulain, Buettner, and their teams.

The Blue Zone project shows that lifestyle plays a far greater role than genetics in how long and how well we live, confirming what researchers in the Danish Twin Study had already discovered: for the average person, genes account for only 20% of longevity.



Getting to Know the Blue Zones

There are five Blue Zones around the world where people benefit from extreme longevity:

1. *Barbagia (a region of Sardinia)*
2. *Ikaria, Greece*
3. *Loma Linda, California*
4. *Nicoya Peninsula, Costa Rica*
5. *Okinawa, Japan*

What is so special about each of these regions? Each of these regions has its own unique claim to longevity that helped researchers learn more about aging.

- **Barbagia:** The region where Blue Zone research originated boasts the world's greatest concentration of men who live to be 100. These male centenarians defy the odds and live longer, healthier lives.
- **Ikaria:** This Greek island in the Aegean Sea has two strong claims to Blue Zone research fame: it has the lowest rate of middle-aged mortality and the lowest rate of dementia.
- **Loma Linda:** The only region in the United States to make the list, Loma Linda is home to a high concentration of Christian Seventh Day Adventists. They outlive their North American peers by an average of ten years.
- **Nicoya Peninsula:** In addition to having one of the lowest rates of middle age mortality, the Nicoya Peninsula has the second highest concentration of male centenarians.
- **Okinawa:** Among its many claims to longevity, most notable is the older women in this Japanese city. Women over 70 in Okinawa are the longest-living population anywhere in the world.

While each of these regions are unique, they do share many common lifestyle behaviors. Buettner's team dubbed these behaviors to be the "Power 9."



What are the powerful lifestyle traits shared by residents of the Blue Zones?

Let's take a look at each of them.

1. Move Naturally

Residents in Blue Zones don't spend their days cooped up in a gym. Instead, they stay physically fit by incorporating natural movement in to their daily lives. Gardening, biking, walking, hiking, and swimming are common activities. Residents do their own housework and yard work and perform household maintenance and repairs for themselves. Many have dogs that they take for frequent walks. In general, they keep moving and avoid being sedentary.

2. Living With Purpose

Most of us do better when our lives have a sense of purpose. Having a reason to get up and out of bed every day just makes life more fulfilling. Blue Zone researchers say having purpose can add as much as seven years to your life expectancy.

Researchers in the U.S. agree. They consider isolation to be a health risk and say that lonely, isolated seniors experience more health problems and earlier mortality. Health problems that increase with isolation include obesity, diabetes, heart disease, and depression.

3. Down-Shift and De-Stress

Stress is a part of daily life for most of us, and the seemingly idyllic Blue Zones are no different. What is different, however, is that residents in these regions have daily routines that help them shake it off.

For some, reducing stress means praying or meditating. Others work a daily nap in to their schedule. Tai chi and yoga are other stress relievers that are a staple of Blue Zone lifestyles. The last two also help relieve the painful symptoms of osteoarthritis.

4. “Hara Hachi Bu” or 80% Full

This Okinawan mantra is one residents say before eating a meal to remind themselves to stop eating before they feel full. Instead, they stop when they are no longer hungry. Blue Zone researchers call it the “80% Rule.” It’s practiced throughout the Blue Zones. It signifies eating only until your stomach feels almost full. The gap between when you are no longer hungry and when you feel full can help you maintain a healthy weight and avoid obesity.

5. Plant Slant

Blue Zone residents eat a primarily plant-based diet. Beans, vegetables, fruits, nuts, and whole grains are the core of it. If meat is consumed, it is only a small amount no more than four or five times a month.

This Mediterranean-style diet is a lifestyle that is gaining worldwide popularity. It is linked to lower rates of Alzheimer’s disease, heart disease, obesity, and diabetes.

6. Wine With Friends

Wine lovers will be happy to see this one makes the list. Except for the Seventh Day Adventist Christians in Loma Linda, Blue Zone residents drink alcohol regularly in moderation. Research shows those who do so outlive their peers who don’t drink. Sardinian Cannonau wine is the type of alcohol cited by Blue Zone researchers most often.





7. Faith-Based Belonging

Another behavior Blue Zone residents share is they belong to a faith-based community. While it doesn't matter what denomination it is, participation does matter. Those who attend a service four times per month add four to fourteen years to their life expectancy.

8. Loved Ones First

Everything revolves around family in the Blue Zones. Every decision is made by putting family first. Families spend time together. Younger generations are actively involved in caring for parents, grandparents, and other senior members of the family.

9. Connect with the Right Tribe

The old adage “birds of a feather flock together” rings true in the Blue Zones. Residents build a close circle of friends that share their commitment to living a healthy lifestyle. This helps people avoid bad behaviors—such as smoking and over eating—while promoting more positive lifestyle choices.



Take the Blue Zones Senior Living Quiz

Wondering how your lifestyle stacks up against Blue Zone residents?

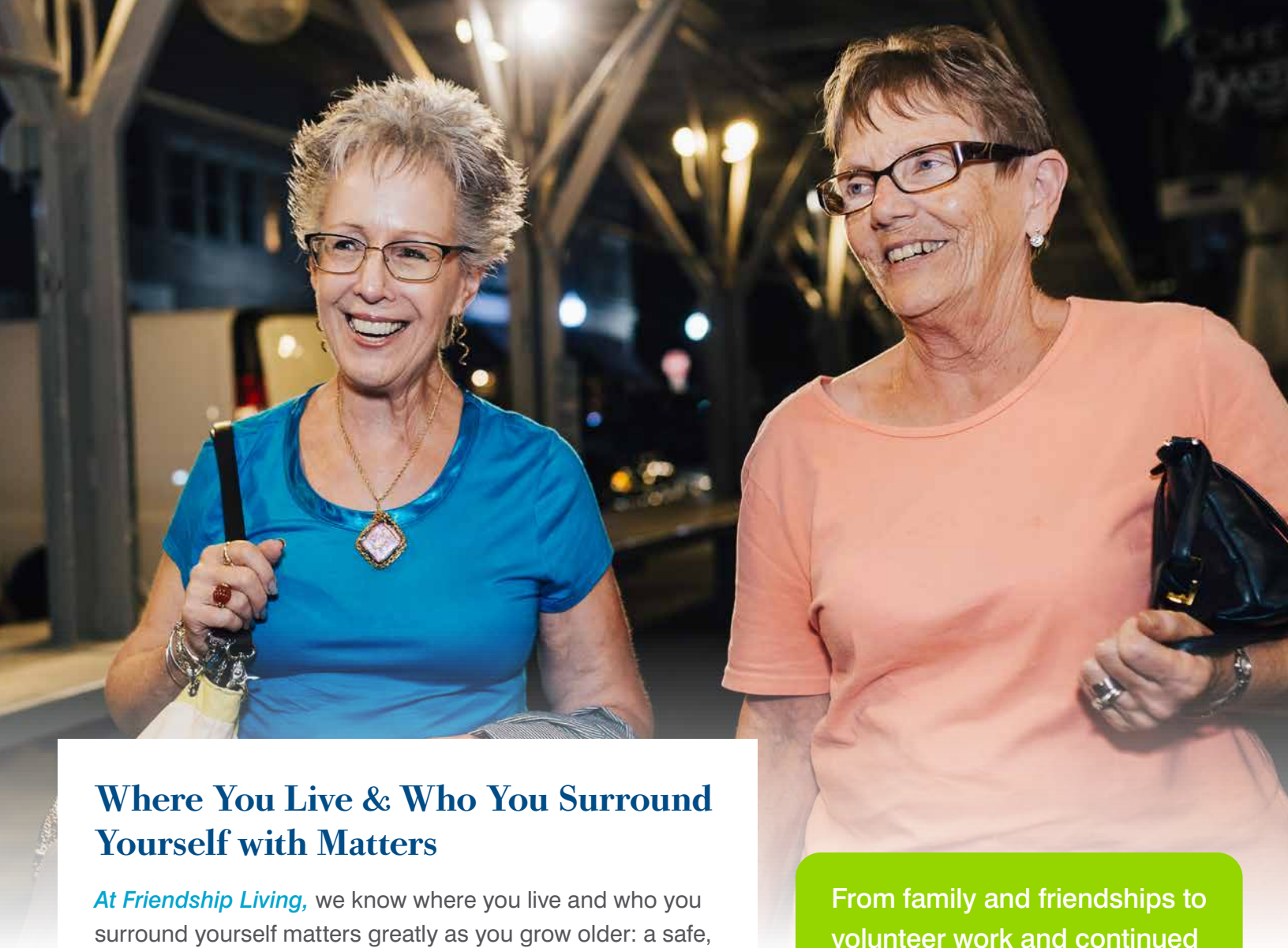
Wonder no more! In fewer than five minutes, you can complete the Blue Zones Quiz online. The results will tell you how healthy your lifestyle is while also making recommendations for improvements.

You can also use the checklist at the end of this guide to help you learn how to incorporate lessons learned in the Blue Zones in to your everyday life!

Take the Quiz!

[Click Here.](#)





Where You Live & Who You Surround Yourself with Matters

At Friendship Living, we know where you live and who you surround yourself matters greatly as you grow older: a safe, supportive environment; opportunities for life enrichment and wellness every day; and friends and peers who can help you live with purpose is vital.

Life: Live life on your own terms at Friendship Living. You'll find programs and services designed to give you the support you need to stay independent, as well as enrichment opportunities that allow you to reconnect with old passions and discover new ones.

Energy: Stimulate your body, mind, and spirit with a variety of wellness programs and activities. Yoga, Tai Chi, book clubs, meditation, and nature walks help our residents feel energetic and engaged with daily life.

Purpose: Living with purpose means something different to everyone. At Friendship Living, we help residents find their purpose and live each day to the fullest.

From family and friendships to volunteer work and continued learning, we make it easy for residents to live a purpose-driven life.



Blue Zone Checklist:

How to Incorporate Blue Zone Lessons in to Your Home & Life.

Here are a few tips you can use to incorporate lessons learned from the Blue Zones into your everyday life:

- ☐ *Keep a bowl of fresh fruit* on the counter where it is easily accessible
- ☐ *Place fresh vegetables* at eye level in the refrigerator
- ☐ *Examine the habits* of your “tribe” to make sure you are surrounded by positive people who have healthy habits
- ☐ *Keep the temperature in the room* you sleep in at 65 degrees
- ☐ *Eat slowly* and mindfully to avoid overeating
- ☐ *Use smaller plates* and bowls to better control portions
- ☐ *Be present while you are eating:* no television or electronic devices
- ☐ *Have a mantra* that reminds you to stop eating when you are no longer hungry
- ☐ *Grow your own vegetables* and herbs
- ☐ *Package your own healthy snacks* for quick, easy access
- ☐ *Keep green plants and fragrant herbs*, like lavender and rosemary, in your home
- ☐ *Purchase fresh flowers* at the grocery store and enjoy the time you spend arranging them
- ☐ *Trade your office chair* for an exercise ball
- ☐ *Improve strength, balance, and flexibility* by sitting on a cushion on the floor instead of on the couch



Blue Zone Checklist *Continued*

- ☐ **Adopt a dog** from a local shelter and take it for several walks each day
- ☐ **Volunteer your time** for a cause you believe in
- ☐ **Connect with a religious organization** you feel welcome at
- ☐ **Drink plenty of water** throughout the day
- ☐ **Create a peaceful sleep environment** and commit to sleeping 7–8 hours a night
- ☐ **Plant annual flowers** that bloom all season in window boxes or containers
- ☐ **Get back to nature** by learning more about local birds and how you can care for them year round
- ☐ **Infuse your water** with lemon slices or berries
- ☐ **Find a way to de-stress** every day such as prayer, yoga, meditation, or Tai Chi
- ☐ **Take an art workshop** or music lessons
- ☐ **Journal your thoughts** and feelings each morning or evening
- ☐ **Make time for friends** and loved ones on a regular basis
- ☐ **Work with family members** to explore and document your genealogy
- ☐ **Devote time to legacy planning** and how you want to be remembered

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