

The Best and Worst Cities for Expats in Germany

The annual Expat City Ranking reveals how expats rate life in 82 cities around the world, including seven cities in Germany.

- Aachen (11th) ranks far ahead of Dusseldorf (31st), Hamburg (42nd), Frankfurt (49th), Cologne (50th), Munich (51st), and Berlin (61st) in the Expat City Ranking 2019.
- Based on the ranking, Taipei, Kuala Lumpur, Ho Chi Minh City, Singapore, Montréal, Lisbon, Barcelona, Zug, The Hague, and Basel are the best cities to move to in 2020.
- Kuwait City (82nd), Rome, Milan, Lagos (Nigeria), Paris, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Lima, New York City, and Yangon (73rd) are the world's worst cities.

Munich, 3 December 2019 — Seven German cities are featured in the Expat City Ranking 2019 by [InterNations](#), the world's largest expat community with more than 3.5 million members. While Aachen (11th) is once again the best-rated city in the country, Berlin ranks worst (61st). Aside from Berlin, the German cities are highly rated in the Urban Work Life Index, but expats generally struggle to get settled. Their satisfaction with finance, housing, and the general cost of living varies widely across the cities surveyed.

The [Expat City Ranking](#) is based on the annual *Expat Insider* survey by InterNations, which is with more than 20,000 respondents in 2019 one of the most extensive surveys about living and working abroad. In 2019, 82 cities around the globe are analyzed in the survey, offering in-depth information about five areas of expat life: Quality of Urban Living, Getting Settled, Urban Work Life, Finance & Housing, and Local Cost of Living. Taken together, the first four areas make up the Expat City Ranking, which reveals the best and worst cities to move to in 2020.

Expat City Ranking 2019

Expat Life in 7 German Cities

	 Quality of Urban Living Index	 Getting Settled Index	 Urban Work Life Index	 Finance & Housing Index	 Local Cost of Living Index	 Happiness Level
 Aachen 11th	34th	49th	1st	22nd	3rd	89%
Berlin 61st	26th	67th	49th	67th	12th	67%
Cologne 50th	37th	61st	22nd	56th	24th	73%
Dusseldorf 31st	17th	71st	6th	45th	22nd	80%
Frankfurt 49th	35th	75th	7th	59th	44th	77%
Hamburg 42nd	18th	69th	14th	63rd	36th	74%
Munich 51st	13th	72nd	4th	77th	69th	79%

The Expat City Ranking 2019 covers 82 cities in total.

What Expats Think about Life in 7 German Cities

11. Aachen

Still ranking number one among German cities, Aachen just barely misses out on a spot in the top 10, coming 11th out of 82 cities in the Expat City Ranking 2019. Nonetheless, Aachen has retained its place as expats' top-rated city for work life worldwide. Nearly nine in ten expats (88%) are satisfied with their jobs in general (vs. 64% globally), and 83% are happy with the work-life balance (vs. 60% globally), ranking Aachen first for both factors. According to 72% of respondents, Aachen offers great local career opportunities, which is 21 percentage points above the global average (51%). Almost four in five expats (77%) are also satisfied with their financial situation (vs. 57% globally), and Aachen ranks third worldwide for local cost of living. An Italian respondent points out that the *"working conditions, financial stability, and future career opportunities"* are some of the best things about expat life in Aachen.

It could be due to the attractive work life and affordable cost of living that the city's housing situation has declined: while Aachen comes sixth worldwide for the affordability of housing, it ranks 65th for the ease of finding a home, with only 22% of expats believing it to be easy to find housing. This is not only a substantially smaller share than among respondents worldwide (50%) but also 12 percentage points lower than in 2018 (34%). What is more, getting settled in Aachen may not be easy, though expats at least seem to struggle less than in the other German cities featured. The city ranks 49th in the Getting Settled Index, far ahead of the second-highest ranked German city, Cologne (61st). In fact, over seven in ten expats (72%) feel like the people in Aachen are friendly towards foreigners (vs. 64% globally), and 49% believe it is easy to find new friends, which is just slightly above the global average (45%).

31. Dusseldorf

For the second time in a row, Dusseldorf is the second-best German city in the Expat City Ranking, placing 31st out of 82 in 2019. Expats highlight Dusseldorf's job security, with nearly three-quarters (74%) feeling secure in their employment (vs. 59% globally), and an equal share being happy with their work-life balance (vs. 60% globally). A Brazilian expat emphasizes her satisfaction with the available *"balance between personal and professional life"* in the city.

However, it seems that expats are not having such a great time outside of the office. Just three in ten (30%) find it easy to make new friends in Dusseldorf (vs. 45% globally). *"Friends are hard to find since everyone has had their own groups since they were little,"* explains an expat from Costa Rica. *"There is a lack of acceptance."* Indeed, only half the expats in Dusseldorf (50%) find the local population to be friendly towards foreign residents (vs. 64% globally), and less than half (47%) are happy with their social life (vs. 55% globally).

Despite struggling to settle in, expats enjoy Dusseldorf's high quality of life (17th) — within Germany, only Munich ranks better in this index (13th). Nearly nine in ten (89%) are pleased with the quality of the environment in Dusseldorf (vs. 71% globally), and a Turkish expat is grateful for the *"cleanliness of the city and the proximity to nature"*.

42. Hamburg

With a 42nd place out of 82 cities in the Expat City Ranking 2019, Hamburg keeps up its image as part of the cold and windy North: more than half the expats (52%) rate Hamburg's local climate and weather poorly (vs. 23% globally), the worst result among the featured German cities. Similarly, expats

in Germany find it hardest to make friends in Hamburg (74th). Only a quarter (25%) agree that it is easy to gain new friends, which is 20 percentage points below the global average (45%). A Brazilian expat dislikes the *"weather and how locals complain about everything"*, and a Croatian expat expresses her disappointment in how *"Germans are cold and hard to win over as friends"*.

However, Hamburg ranks 14th worldwide in the Urban Work Life Index, and expats are particularly happy with the job security (4th): only Luxembourg City (3rd), Frankfurt (2nd), and Munich (1st) rank better in the respective subcategory. Nearly three-quarters of expats in Hamburg (73%) are happy with their job security (vs. 59% globally), and 92% rate the state of the local economy positively (vs. 66% globally). Close to half (46%) even give it the highest possible rating (vs. 23% globally). A Turkish expat is happy that the *"economic situation is so stable"*, and also praises the city for being *"very nice, green, and elegant"*. In fact, most expats value both Hamburg's urban and natural environments: 91% are happy with the local transportation (vs. 70% globally), and 90% rate the quality of environment positively (vs. 71% globally).

49. Frankfurt

Frankfurt places 49th out of 82 cities in the Expat City Ranking 2019. It ranks among the bottom 10 cities in the Getting Settled Index (75th) but among the top 10 in the Urban Work Life Index (7th). It particularly lives up to its strong reputation as a financial hub: double the global average of working expats name finances as their field of work (16% vs. 8% globally), an only slightly lower share than those who work in IT (18% vs. 11% globally). Nearly nine in ten expats in Frankfurt (88%) are pleased with the state of the local economy (vs. 66% globally), and the city performs even more strongly in terms of job security: it ranks first in the world for this factor. Exactly four in five (80%) are satisfied with their job security (vs. 59% globally), and almost a third (32%) give it the highest possible rating (vs. 21% globally). A Bulgarian expat points out that *"jobs are available, and even if you are not looking for a career you still get paid enough to live"*.

On the other hand, Frankfurt is the worst German city for settling in, ranking 75th worldwide. Only around half the expats (55%) feel at home in Frankfurt, compared to nearly two-thirds around the globe (64%). A South African expat explains that *"interactions with local governments or authorities are always really disheartening because they refuse to speak to you in English, are often unhelpful, and make you feel super unwelcome"*. This feeling seems to go beyond the local government, as less than half the expats (48%) describe the locals in Frankfurt as generally friendly (vs. 64% globally). Maybe this is why 49% find it hard to make new friends (vs. 35% globally), and nearly a third (32%) are unhappy with their social life (vs. 27% globally).

50. Cologne

Cologne receives mediocre ratings in most categories of the Expat City Ranking 2019 and ranks 50th overall. Cologne's strongest area is its Urban Work Life (22nd), although it performs only averagely when compared to other German cities (aside from Berlin). Nearly two-thirds of expats (66%) are satisfied with their job in general (vs. 64% globally), and an equal share is also pleased with their job security (vs. 59% globally). Expats are also content with Cologne's local economy, with over three-quarters (77%) rating it favorably (vs. 66% globally). With a 37th place, Cologne ranks less well in the Quality of Urban Living Index. Still, the majority (86%) is happy with the local transportation (vs. 70% globally), and over four in five (81%) rate the available leisure options positively (vs. 74% globally).

Cologne's biggest weakness is that expats find it very difficult to find housing (76th): only 14% believe it is easy to find a home in Cologne, compared to 50% globally. Moreover, while expats find the

residents of Cologne to be generally friendlier than in the other German cities features — the city ranking 39th in the Local Friendliness subcategory, only second to Aachen (36th) — this does not apparently make it easier to find friends. Nearly half the expats in Cologne (45%) find it hard to make new friends (vs. 35% globally), and only 46% are happy with their social lives (vs. 55% globally). An Italian expat complains of *“unfriendliness”* and feels that *“social contact has been reduced to the minimum possible”*.

51. Munich

Munich offers the best quality of life in Germany but the worst housing market, with the city placing 51st out of 82 cities in the Expat City Ranking. The Bavarian capital ranks 13th worldwide in the Quality of Urban Living Index and even tenth for its quality of the environment. More than nine in ten expats (92%) are happy with the latter (vs. 71% globally). On the other hand, Munich is the third worst city worldwide for expat housing (80th), ahead of only San Francisco (81st) and Dublin (82nd). Just 11% of expats believe it easy to find a home in the city (vs. 50% globally), and 81% say housing is unaffordable (vs. 44% globally). A Hungarian expat sums it up, saying: *“Even though you have everything at your disposal, and everything works well, making friends is super difficult, people are very closed and cold, and finding affordable accommodation is also very difficult.”* Similar to the other German cities featured, expats find it hard to get settled in Munich, the city ranking 72nd in the Getting Settled Index. Just 58% feel at home (vs. 64% globally), and under half (46%) are happy with their social life (vs. 55% globally).

On a more positive note, the Bavarian capital offers an incredibly good work life (4th), only ranking behind Ho Chi Minh City (3rd), Prague (2nd), and Aachen (1st) in the respective index. The city even ranks first worldwide in the Job Security subcategory, with more than three-quarters of expats (77%) happy with their job security (vs. 59% globally), and over nine in ten (92%) rating the local economy positively (vs. 66% globally). *“Munich is an excellent place to work, with many opportunities to find jobs and do business,”* states an expat from France. In fact, 73% are happy with their local career opportunities (vs. 51% globally).

61. Berlin

Berlin is the worst-rated German city in the Expat City Ranking 2019, coming 61st out of 82 cities worldwide. Germany's capital is an outlier in the country, as it ranks poorly for work life, coming in 49th worldwide, far behind the second-worst German city, Cologne (22nd). Only around three in five expats in Berlin (62%) are satisfied with their work-life balance, which is just barely above the global average of 60% and far below the share of expats in most other German cities featured. Berlin is also the only German city in which expats rate the local economy worse than the global average (18% negative ratings vs. 15% globally) and feel they have fewer local career opportunities: only 48% rate their career prospects positively, compared to 51% of expats globally. A Russian expat complains that there are *“poor career opportunities for expats”*.

Berlin is more in line with other German cities when it comes to the Getting Settled Index (67th). Only around two in five (43%) describe the local Berliners as friendly (vs. 64% globally), and only 59% feel at home in the city (vs. 64% globally). A Swiss expat expresses that *“the people are relatively closed-off and not easy to contact”*. Expats also find it difficult to find housing in Berlin, with nearly two-thirds of expats (64%) struggling to acquire a home — twice the global average of 32%.

However, ranking 26th in the Quality of Urban Living Index, Berlin is the best-rated German city in terms of available leisure options (12th). Nearly nine in ten expats (87%) are happy with the leisure activities on offer (vs. 74% globally). Berlin also ranks well in the Local Cost of Living Index (12th),

second in Germany only to Aachen (3rd), with close to three in five expats (57%) rating the cost of living positively (vs. 43% globally). Interestingly, despite the local cost of living seeming to be low, Berlin does not perform well in the Finance subcategory (62nd). More than a third of expats (34%) are unhappy with their financial situation (vs. 26% globally).

About the Expat City Ranking 2019

The [Expat City Ranking](#) is based on the annual [Expat Insider survey](#) by InterNations. For the survey, more than 20,000 expatriates representing 178 nationalities and living in 187 countries or territories provided information on various aspects of expat life. In addition to their satisfaction with life in their host country, respondents were also invited to share their opinions on the city they are currently living in.

Participants were asked to rate more than 25 different aspects of urban life abroad on a scale of one to seven. The rating process emphasized the respondents' personal satisfaction with these aspects and considered both emotional topics as well as more factual aspects with equal weight. The respondents' ratings of the individual factors were then bundled in various combinations for a total of 13 subcategories, and their mean values were used to draw up four topical indices: Quality of Urban Living, Getting Settled, Urban Work Life, and Finance & Housing. These were further averaged in order to rank 82 cities worldwide. In 2019, the top 10 cities for expats are Taipei, Kuala Lumpur, Ho Chi Minh City, Singapore, Montréal, Lisbon, Barcelona, Zug, The Hague, and Basel. The survey also includes a Local Cost of Living Index, which does, however, not factor into the overall ranking to avoid overrepresenting financial aspects.

For a city to be featured in the Expat City Ranking 2019, a sample size of at least 50 survey participants per city was required.

About InterNations

With more than 3.5 million members in 420 cities around the world, InterNations (www.internations.org) is the largest global community and information site for people who live and work abroad. InterNations offers global and local networking both online and face-to-face. At around 6,000 official events and activities per month, expatriates have the opportunity to meet other global minds. Online services include country and city guides created by a team of professional writers, guest contributions about life abroad, and discussion forums to help members with topics such as the local job or housing search. InterNations membership is by approval only to ensure we remain a community of trust.

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