

The Best and Worst Cities for Expats in Asia

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

- *Taipei (1st), Kuala Lumpur (2nd), Ho Chi Minh City (3rd), and Singapore (4th) top the Expat City Ranking 2019, while Bangkok (20th), Tokyo (26th), Jakarta (33rd), Shanghai (43rd), and Hong Kong (52th) rank midfield. Beijing (60th) and Seoul (63rd) come in towards the end of the list, and Yangon (73rd) even lands among the bottom 10.*
- *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 — Twelve Asian 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 four of them (Taipei, Kuala Lumpur, Ho Chi Minh City, Singapore) lead the worldwide table, another even ranks among the world's worst cities (Yangon). Expats seem to find it easy to get settled in most Asian cities, with the exception of Tokyo, Beijing, Seoul, and Shanghai. In terms of work life, only Ho Chi Minh City makes it into the global top 10, but none of the cities rank among the ten worst — though Seoul only just misses the bottom 10 with a 72nd place.

Expat City Ranking 2019 Expat Life in 12 Asian Cities

	 Quality of Urban Living Index	 Getting Settled Index	 Urban Work Life Index	 Finance & Housing Index	 Local Cost of Living Index	 Happiness Level
Bangkok 20th	56th	32nd	46th	3rd	9th	81%
Beijing 60th	52nd	74th	37th	39th	32nd	74%
Ho Chi Minh City 3rd	63rd	15th	3rd	1st	1st	88%
Hong Kong 52nd	32nd	44th	60th	58th	78th	75%
Jakarta 33rd	77th	9th	45th	12th	13th	80%
Kuala Lumpur 2nd	44th	1st	26th	2nd	2nd	82%
Seoul 63rd	20th	78th	72nd	52nd	66th	66%
Shanghai 43rd	47th	57th	47th	26th	41st	75%
Singapore 4th	9th	7th	40th	15th	54th	77%
 Taipei 1st	3rd	18th	20th	4th	4th	78%
Tokyo 26th	2nd	65th	29th	43rd	38th	77%
Yangon 73rd	80th	40th	62nd	38th	19th	82%

The Expat City Ranking 2019 covers 82 cities in total.

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.

What Expats Think about Life in 12 Cities across Asia

1. Taipei

For the second year in a row, Taiwan's capital claims the first position of the best city to live in as an expat. Expats are particularly happy with Taipei's high quality of life, ranking the city third worldwide, preceded only by Zug, Switzerland (1st) and Tokyo, Japan (2nd). Almost all expats (98%) are satisfied with the local transportation (vs. 70% globally), and a vast majority (94%) is happy with the availability of healthcare in the city (vs. 73% globally). Taiwan's capital is also one of the leading cities regarding finance and housing as well as the local cost of living, ranking fourth worldwide for both indices. Around seven in ten expats appreciate the local cost of living (71% vs. 43% globally) and are satisfied with their financial situation (69% vs. 57% globally). *"The cost of living in Taiwan is cheaper compared to Japan, Korea, and Hong Kong, for example,"* says an expat from India. *"And Taiwan's health insurance and safety are what make it attractive to me."* In fact, 96% of expats state to feel safe in Taipei, compared to 81% globally.

Taipei performs just slightly worse in terms of work life (20th) and getting settled (18th). The latter is mainly due to expats struggling with the local language (50th), while the city is still voted among the top 10 for local friendliness (4th) and friends and socializing (9th). Four in five respondents (80%) find the local residents generally friendly (vs. 64% globally), and two in three (67%) are happy with their social life (vs. 55% globally).

2. Kuala Lumpur

While Kuala Lumpur ranks second in the Expat City Ranking 2019 overall, it is voted the world's easiest city to get settled as an expat. Three in four expats (75%) feel at home in Kuala Lumpur (vs. 64% globally), and 69% are happy with their social life (vs. 55% globally). Language also does not seem to be a problem, as 92% find it easy to live in the city without speaking the local language (vs. 47% globally). *"It is easy to blend in with the culture, the food, and the people,"* explains an expat from India, *"and the language is not a problem if one can speak English."* When it comes to the Local Cost of Living (2nd) and Finance & Housing Indices (2nd), expats do not complain either: close to four in five (78%) are satisfied with the local costs of living (vs. 43% globally), and 75% find housing affordable (vs. 36% globally). A British expat states that Kuala Lumpur is *"easy on the wallet, easy to travel to/from"* and names the *"availability of nice places to live at reasonable cost"* as a bonus as well.

Expats' satisfaction with the work life is mixed, ranking Kuala Lumpur 26th worldwide in the respective index. *"The work prospects for foreigners, especially the ones educated in Malaysia, are getting smaller within these borders,"* explains a Bangladeshi expat. While expats are satisfied with their jobs in general (5th), they are not happy with the local career opportunities (50th). Just 47% of respondents rate the latter positively, which is just below the global average (51%).

3. Ho Chi Minh City

Coming in third worldwide, Ho Chi Minh City ranks well in all areas of the Expat City Ranking besides the Quality of Urban Living Index (63rd). With close to nine in ten expats (87%) saying that it is easy to find housing (vs. 50% globally), and 77% being happy with their financial situation (vs. 57% globally), the city tops the ranking in the Finance & Housing Index for the second year running. The same is true

for the Local Cost of Living Index (1st), with 81% rating this factor positively (vs. 43% globally). Ho Chi Minh City is also popular for its thriving work life (3rd), only beaten by Aachen, Germany (1st) and Prague, Czechia (2nd) in the respective index. Expats are particularly happy with their jobs in general (79% vs. 64% globally), the local career opportunities (68% vs. 51% globally), and their working hours (75% vs. 62% globally). What is more, Ho Chi Minh City comes in third worldwide for both the Local Friendliness and Friends & Socializing subcategories. When asked what they like about Ho Chi Minh City, a Philippine respondent replies: *"It is easy to deal and work with the people here, and the cost of living is good."* In addition, 88% of expats find the locals friendly towards foreign residents (vs. 64% globally).

The only blind spot seems to be the quality of life in the city (63rd), particularly when it comes to the quality of the environment (73rd). Almost half the survey participants (47%) rate the latter negatively (vs. 17% globally). *"I do not like the dirty streets, the bad environment management, the missing awareness about plastic, but also the very bad garbage management. Everyone throws their waste on the streets,"* a German expat complains. Lastly, expats are unhappy with the local leisure (68th) and transportation options (64th).

4. Singapore

Not only compared to all Asian cities in the Expat City Ranking 2019, but also worldwide, Singapore stands out in terms of safety. In fact, every respondent in Singapore (100%) rates their personal safety positively (vs. 81% globally), and the vast majority (88%) is also satisfied with the political stability (vs. 61% globally). What is more, almost all (99%) are happy with the transportation infrastructure in Singapore (vs. 70% globally), landing Singapore in the top 10 cities of the Quality of Urban Living Index overall (9th). The same is true for the Getting Settled Index (7th): expats find it easy to get used to the local culture (77% vs. 62% globally), make new friends (58% vs. 45% globally), and are happy with their social life (67% vs. 55% globally).

While Singapore also ranks well in the Finance & Housing Index (15th), the local cost of living (54th) seems to be a disadvantage. More than half the survey participants (52%) are unhappy with this factor (vs. 38% globally), and a South African expat explains: *"The high costs of basic needs such as healthcare makes it difficult as well as the high transport costs when traveling by car or taxi."* Within the Urban Work Life Index (40th), work-life balance (61th) is Singapore's weakest area: close to a quarter of expats (23%) are unhappy with their working hours (vs. 19% globally). *"I feel strong pressure at work, and everything is planned and pre-shaped,"* a Swiss expatriate complains. Maybe this is also why 24% of expats worry about their job security, compared to 21% globally. Expats, however, are very content with the state of Singapore's economy (90% vs. 66% globally).

20. Bangkok

Coming in fifth out of all the cities surveyed in Asia, Bangkok counts as one of the top 20 expat cities to live in worldwide and ranks third in the Finance & Housing Index. More than four in seven expats (58%) say that housing in Bangkok is affordable (vs. 36% globally), and 80% of respondents state that it is easy to find (vs. 50% globally). While Bangkok also ranks high for the local cost of living (9th), it performs not so well in the Quality of Urban Living Index (56th). The vast majority is satisfied with the availability of healthcare (83% vs. 73% globally) and feels safe (89% vs. 81% globally). *"It is a much safer place for my son to grow up in,"* says a German expat. However, the city is one of the worst in the world for the quality of environment (79th) and political stability (74th). Nearly three in five expats (59%) do not like the quality of Bangkok's environment (vs. 17% globally), and 36% worry about the political stability (vs. 17% globally).

While Bangkok's ratings are quite good in the Getting Settled Index (32nd), the Urban Work Life Index (46th) reveals lower results. *"Visa regulations and the amount of paperwork needed to get a work permit makes it very difficult for expats to stay for a long period of time,"* a Bulgarian expat explains. What is more, only 41% rate their local career opportunities positively (vs. 51% globally). It may not be helpful that only 56% are happy with the local state of the economy (vs. 66% globally).

26. Tokyo

For the third year in a row, Tokyo ranks very high in the Quality of Urban Living Index (2nd in 2019), just behind Zug, Switzerland. Expats are particularly pleased with the transportation infrastructure in Japan's capital (96% positive ratings vs. 70% globally), ranking Tokyo fourth worldwide. However, within Asia, Seoul (1st) and Taipei (3rd) still beat Tokyo for this factor. Expats are also happy with the availability of healthcare (89% vs. 73% globally) and feel safe (97% vs. 81% globally). *"There is absolutely zero crime or reason to worry about personal safety, or being ripped off,"* says a US American expat. While Tokyo also ranks fourth in the world for job security (71% satisfied vs. 59% globally), expats are less happy with their working hours (56th).

Tokyo receives its worst results in the Getting Settled Index (65th), with especially low points in the Local Language (78th) and Friends & Socializing (55th) subcategories, as well as for how easy expats find it to get used to the local culture (63rd). *"The country does not provide enough support in English,"* a Belgian expat reports. *"Without my company's help, I would have struggled to find an accommodation that accepts foreigners. And there are not enough Japanese courses for foreigners."* Nearly half of the survey participants (47%) state that it is not easy to live in Tokyo without speaking Japanese (vs. 37% globally), four in ten expats (40%) have trouble finding friends (vs. 35% globally), and just slightly more than half (51%) are happy with their social life (vs. 55% globally).

33. Jakarta

With a 33rd rank in the Expat City Ranking 2019, Jakarta makes it into the top 10 for settling in but into the bottom 10 cities in the world for the quality of life. The city's most favorable assets seem to be the residents themselves, with Jakarta ranking first in the world for the ease of finding new friends. Around two in three respondents agree that it is easy to make friends in Jakarta (69% vs. 45% globally) and are happy with their social life (65% vs. 55% globally). These are just some of the reasons why Jakarta ranks ninth worldwide in the Getting Settled Index, only beaten by Kuala Lumpur (1st) and Singapore (7th) in the Asian region. *"It is a home away from home,"* shares an Indian expat, *"I would say it is my second home. The people here are very warm and friendly."* Jakarta also ranks well in the Local Cost of Living (13th) and Finance & Housing Indices (12th). In fact, 64% say that their disposable household income is more than enough to cover everyday costs (vs. 49% globally), and 77% say it is easy to find housing as an expat (vs. 50% globally).

On the other hand, Jakarta has a weak spot in the Quality of Urban Living Index (77th). *"I do not like the pollution here,"* a South African explains, *"being outdoors feels unhealthy."* Three in five expats (60%) are not satisfied with the quality of Jakarta's environment (vs. 17% globally), nearly every third expat (31%) wishes for better availability of healthcare (vs. 13% globally), and 19% are unhappy with the local leisure options (vs. 12% globally). Lastly, Jakarta ranks 45th in the Urban Work Life Index: while 36% are unhappy with their local career prospects (vs. 27% globally) and 17% rate the local economy negatively (vs. 15% globally), the city still ranks second in the world for overall job satisfaction. It might help that 74% are also happy with their working hours (vs. 62% globally).

43. Shanghai

Shanghai lands in the middle of the Expat City Ranking 2019, on 43th place out of 82 cities, performing best in the Finance & Housing Index (26th). About five in eight survey participants (63%) feel that their disposable household income is more than enough to cover everything they need in their daily life (vs. 49% globally).

Within the Quality of Urban Living Index (47th), expats are happy with the local transportation (18th) and their personal safety (17th), while the quality of environment (77th) disappoints. In fact, the majority of expats feels safe in Shanghai (93% vs. 81% globally) and is satisfied with the transportation infrastructure (90% vs. 70% globally). *"The local transportation, the safety, and the advancements in technology are great,"* says a Dutch expat. However, more than half of the survey participants (55%) rate the quality of Shanghai's environment negatively (vs. 17% globally). *"I am tired of people smoking everywhere, the air pollution, and the restricted internet access,"* a US American complains. Getting settled in Shanghai (57th) also seems to be problematic for expats: 35% have trouble getting used to the local culture (vs. 20% globally), and three in ten respondents (30%) are not satisfied with their social life there (vs. 27% globally).

52. Hong Kong

Hong Kong's strongest category is the Quality of Urban Living Index (32nd), with 96% of expats agreeing that the local transportation infrastructure is good (vs. 70% globally), and a similar share (96%) feeling safe (vs. 81% globally) — however, the survey was conducted before the current protests broke out. A Swedish expat lists *"feeling safe, the easiness of traveling around, and the geographical position"* as some of the benefits of living in Hong Kong. On the other hand, the quality of the environment is one of the worst in the world (75th): about half of the respondents (51%) are unhappy with it (vs. 17% globally).

Hong Kong also ranks among the bottom 10 cities regarding the local cost of living (78th), as three-quarters of expats (75%) are dissatisfied with it (vs. 38% globally). Furthermore, housing is not affordable enough for most survey participants (91% unhappy vs. 44% globally), leading to an overall 58th rank in the Finance & Housing Index. *"The cost of living is the highest in the world,"* a Canadian expat describes, *"I knew this coming here, and yet, it is still a shock. The space is the biggest issue — I pay the same as I did in Vancouver, but my apartment is half the size."* In fact, Hong Kong ranks 81st for the affordability of housing, only ahead of San Francisco. Lastly, expats seem to work a lot in Hong Kong: only 44% rate their working hours positively (vs. 62% globally), and 30% are unhappy with their work-life balance (vs. 21% globally). *"Work-life balance is nonexistent,"* says a US American. *"The job is stressful, and I am becoming a boring, sick, and tired person because I am always working."*

60. Beijing

With a low 60th place overall, Beijing achieves its highest ranks in the Local Cost of Living (32nd) and Urban Work Life Indices (37th). Five in nine expats (56%) are happy with the local career opportunities (vs. 51% globally), and 76% like the state of the local economy (vs. 66% globally). A British expat shares: *"The salary is fair, and we are able to save a considerable amount."* In fact, two-thirds of expats (67%) are happy with their financial situation (vs. 57% globally), putting Beijing in 39th position in the Finance & Housing Index.

The Getting Settled Index (74th) is Beijing's weakest spot. More than a quarter of expats (28%) do not feel at home in the city (vs. 21% globally), and only 38% of the survey participants find it easy to get used to Beijing's culture (vs. 62% globally). And, although most Asian cities lose points in the Local

Language subcategory, Beijing ranks last (82nd), as expats find it quite difficult to live there without speaking the local language (62nd). *"The locals speak very little English,"* a German respondent explains, *"and learning their language is difficult. It makes life for expats here harder."* Finally, the Quality of Urban Living Index (52th) also shows some less than satisfactory results: just three in five expats (60%) are satisfied with the local leisure options (vs. 74% globally), and 68% do not like the quality of the environment (vs. 17% globally). For the latter, Beijing ranks second to last in the world, only better than Kuwait City.

63. Seoul

Seoul manages to be both the world's best city in one category, and the world's worst in another. While the capital city of South Korea ranks 20th in the Quality of Urban Living Index overall, it places first among all cities for its local transportation infrastructure. Almost all expats (99%) are satisfied with Seoul's transportation system (vs. 70% globally), and 84% think it could not be any better (vs. 36% globally). *"It is an interesting culture with friendly people, and getting from one point to another is very easy,"* says an Australian expat. What is more, close to nine in ten survey participants (88%) are satisfied with the availability of healthcare in Seoul (vs. 73% globally), but 49% rate the quality of the environment negatively (vs. 17% globally).

Within the Urban Work Life Index (72nd), Seoul comes in last in the world for the Work-Life Balance subcategory (82nd). *"I do not like the long working hours,"* says a Mexican expat. In fact, more than every third expat in Seoul (36%) is unhappy with their working-life balance (vs. 21% globally), and 32% are dissatisfied with the working hours (vs. 19% globally). This might be one of the reasons why Seoul also ranks among the bottom 10 for expats' overall job satisfaction (75th). However, Seoul loses the most points in the Getting Settled Index (78th). *"Sometimes people make you feel like a stranger because it is a very homogenous society,"* a Bahraini respondent explains. Three in ten expats (30%) do not feel at home in South Korea's capital city (vs. 21% globally), more than half of the respondents (53%) find it difficult to live in Seoul without speaking Korean (vs. 37% globally), and 49% have trouble finding friends (vs. 35% globally).

73. Yangon

On 73rd place, Yangon is the only Asian city that ranks among the bottom 10 of the world. On the upside, Yangon's locals seem to be one of the expat-friendliest worldwide: six in seven survey participants (86%) report that people are friendly towards foreign residents (vs. 64% globally), and an even higher share (88%) find them generally friendly (vs. 64% globally) — positioning the city second worldwide in the Local Friendliness subcategory, just after Muscat. *"Myanmar people are good and very easy to work with,"* says an expat from Sri Lanka. While this seem to help with making new friends (25th), expats still struggle to feel at home (53rd) and get used to the local culture (55th). Only 54% of expats find it easy to get used to Yangon's culture (vs. 62% globally). Expats are happier with the local cost of living (19th): 54% rate this factor positively (vs. 43% globally), and 70% are happy with their financial situation (vs. 57% globally).

While Yangon also ranks low in the Urban Work Life Index (62nd), it is the Quality of Urban Living Index (80th) that puts it far behind other cities. *"I do not like the poor healthcare system,"* says a South Korean expat. In fact, more than half of the survey participants are not satisfied with the available healthcare (54% vs. 13% globally) and the local transportation in Yangon (52% vs. 19% globally), and 31% rate the local leisure options negatively (vs. 12% 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.

Find more information about InterNations on our [press page](#), in our [company blog](#), or in our [magazine](#).

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