

The Best and Worst Cities for Expats in the GCC States

The annual Expat City Ranking reveals how expats rate life in 82 cities around the world, including six cities in the GCC States.

- Doha (12th) ranks ahead of Abu Dhabi (15th), Manama (21st), Muscat (28th), and Dubai (34th) in the Expat City Ranking 2019, while Kuwait City (82nd) is once again the worst in the world.
- 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 — In the Expat City Ranking 2019 by [InterNations](#), Doha (12th) takes the top spot among the cities in the GCC States, while Kuwait City (82nd) comes in last place both within the region and worldwide. Abu Dhabi (15th), Manama (21st), Muscat (28th), and Dubai (34th) rank top to midfield. Barring Kuwait City, the cities are among the top 25 worldwide for getting settled, and expats generally value the safety as well as the availability and affordability of housing. However, apart from Doha, the lack of a good work life is a prominent weakness for the cities in the GCC States.

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 6 Cities in the GCC States

	 Quality of Urban Living Index	 Getting Settled Index	 Urban Work Life Index	 Finance & Housing Index	 Local Cost of Living Index	 Happiness Level
Abu Dhabi 15th	31st	11th	51st	29th	45th	72%
 Doha 12th	48th	22nd	25th	10th	33rd	78%
Dubai 34th	28th	17th	71st	47th	58th	67%
Kuwait City 82nd	81st	82nd	79th	31st	61st	52%
Manama 21st	58th	2nd	58th	16th	26th	78%
Muscat 28th	51st	4th	73rd	17th	27th	67%

The Expat City Ranking 2019 covers 82 cities in total.

What Expat Think about Life in 6 Cities in the GCC States

12. Doha, Qatar

This year's biggest winner, Doha gains 38 places to become the best GCC city overall, ranking 12th out of 82 cities in the Expat City Ranking 2019. Qatar's capital has moved rapidly up the ranks, performing best in the Finance & Housing (10th), Getting Settled (22nd), and Urban Work Life (25th) Indices. For the latter, it gained 31 ranks, with 70% of expats in Doha now satisfied with their job in general, which is both above the global average in 2019 (64%) and the share for Doha in 2018 (59%). Additionally, four in five (80%) are pleased with the state of the local economy (vs. 66% globally), compared to 67% in 2018, and 64% are happy with their work-life balance (vs. 60% globally), ten percentage points more than in 2018 (54%). A British expat praises Doha's *"family-friendly working hours and adequate remuneration"*. Within the Finance & Housing Index, Doha is indeed the best GCC city for expats' satisfaction with their financial situation, coming fifth worldwide. Nearly seven in ten respondents (69%) are happy with this factor (vs. 57% globally), compared to 63% back in 2018.

However, Doha still ranks quite low in the Quality of Urban Living Index (48th). Expats are particularly dissatisfied with the local climate (27% unhappy vs. 23% globally) and the local transportation (28% vs. 19%). Doha is also one of the worst rated GCC city for the quality of environment, ranking 53rd worldwide, ahead of only Manama (55th) and Kuwait City (82nd). Just 58% of respondents rate this factor positively (vs. 71% globally), and a Greek expat names the *"driving behavior of the locals, the air pollution, and the high levels of humidity"* as the things he likes least about life in Doha.

15. Abu Dhabi, UAE

Placing 15th out of 82 cities in the Expat City Ranking 2019, Abu Dhabi ranks well in most areas surveyed. The vast majority of expats (97%) feels safe (vs. 81% globally), ranking the Arab capital sixth place worldwide. However, expats are less satisfied with factors like the local transportation (21% unhappy vs. 19% globally) and the local leisure options (14% vs. 12% globally), causing Abu Dhabi to rank 31st for the quality of urban living overall. Abu Dhabi's best results are found in the Getting Settled Index (11th): almost three-quarters of expats (73%) describe the local residents as friendly towards foreign residents (vs. 64% globally), and nearly seven in ten (69%) feel at home (vs. 64% globally). An Indian expat shares that he likes the *"friendly culture of work and respect for people of all nations"* in the city. It may be helpful that expats can live there without speaking the local language: close to nine in ten (87%) find this easy (vs. 47% globally).

On the downside, Abu Dhabi continues to rank in the bottom 10 for job security (73rd), with 30% of expats worrying about this factor (vs. 21% globally). What is more, Abu Dhabi ranks 49th in the Finance subcategory. *"Everything is expensive,"* comments an expat from Pakistan. *"Due to high taxes, it is now getting very tough for average-salaried expats to survive. Taxes have been increased but salaries are still the same."* In fact, just 43% state that they have more than sufficient disposable household income to cover their daily costs (vs. 49% globally), compared to 59% in 2018. Similarly, only 37% of expats are happy with the local cost of living (vs. 43% globally).

21. Manama, Bahrain

After ranking in the top 3 for two years in a row, Manama only comes 21st out of 82 cities in the Expat City Ranking 2019. The city lost the most ground in the Urban Work Life Index (13th in 2018 to 58th in 2019), as, for example, just 63% are generally happy with their jobs in 2019, compared to 81% in 2018.

Similarly, expats are less satisfied with their working hours (53% in 2019 vs. 79% in 2018) and work-life balance (58% vs. 73% in 2018). *"Only a few companies allow two days off per week,"* complains an expat from Jamaica. Manama also performs poorly in the Quality of Urban Living Index (58th). Expats are particularly dissatisfied with the local transportation (25% unhappy vs. 19% globally) and the quality of the environment (22% vs. 17% globally). Manama also ranks below average for finance (45th): only 44% feel they have a more than sufficient disposable household income to cover their daily costs (vs. 49% globally).

In spite of the mediocre financial situation, expats still find it easy to find housing in Manama, with 81% experiencing little difficulty finding a home (vs. 50% globally). Another positive is that Manama is the best GCC city for settling in, coming second worldwide in the respective index, behind only Kuala Lumpur (1st). In the Bahraini capital, close to four in five expats (78%) feel that the people are friendly towards foreigners (vs. 64% globally), and not quite two-thirds (64%) find it easy to make new friends (vs. 45% globally). *"People are friendly, and it is easy to communicate,"* shares a Nepalese expat. *"There are more opportunities for an easier life."*

28. Muscat, Oman

Muscat falls from the top 10 to rank 28th out of 82 cities in the Expat City Ranking 2019. This is in large part due to a decline in its performance in the Finance subcategory (9th in 2018 to 54th in 2019). Just 44% of expats feel their disposable household income is more than they need to cover their daily costs in 2019, compared to 62% in 2018. Moreover, barely half (52%) are happy with their financial situation, compared to 69% in 2018. A British expat notes that *"the financial situation is moderately down"*. Muscat also ranks among the world's worst cities in the Urban Work Life Index (73rd), remaining in the bottom 10 for local career opportunities (80th) for the third year running. A third of expats (33%) is unhappy with their job security (vs. 21% globally), as a Belgian expat shares: *"The Omanization of the job market brings a lot of insecurity for expats"*.

However, Muscat ranks among the top 10 cities in the Getting Settled Index (4th) for the third year in a row, and even comes first in the world for local friendliness. In fact, 90% of expats feel that the people in Muscat are friendly towards foreigners (vs. 64% globally), and 60% find it easy to make new friends (vs. 45% globally). A South African expat comments that *"Omani hospitality is excellent, and the locals all have respect for foreigners"*. Finally, housing does not seem to be an issue in Muscat (8th): seven in ten (70%) say it is easy to find housing (vs. 50% globally), and another 46% agree it easy to afford (vs. 36% globally).

34. Dubai, UAE

While performing averagely on the global scale (34th out of 82 cities), Dubai is the second-worst-rated among the GCC cities in the Expat City Ranking 2019. The city's best area is the Getting Settled Index (17th), with Dubai even coming second worldwide for the ease of living there without speaking the local language. Nearly nine in ten expats (87%) state that this is not a problem (vs. 47% globally). What is more, 71% of expats consider the locals to be friendly towards foreign residents (vs. 64% globally), and 53% find it easy to make new friends (vs. 45% globally). When asked what she likes most about life in Dubai, a Belarusian expat states: *"The friendliness of the people and the safety, most of all"*. In fact, nearly all expats (95%) feel safe in Dubai (vs. 81% globally), and 75% even give it the highest possible rating (vs. 42% globally).

The drawbacks to Dubai mainly come from its poor work life (71st). Less than half the expats (47%) are happy with their work-life balance (vs. 60% globally), and only 45% feel secure in their job (vs. 59%

globally). An Iranian expat dislikes the *"lack of job security and limited job opportunities"*. Expats also struggle with regard to personal finances, as only around 63% feel they have sufficient or more than enough disposable household income to cover their daily costs (vs. 77% globally). Moreover, less than a quarter of expats (23%) is content with the local cost of living (vs. 43% globally). A British expat complains about the *"cost of living and unexpected expenses,"* explaining that, *"having to pay for so many things without really understanding the reason for the cost is really difficult"*.

82. Kuwait City, Kuwait

Kuwait City ranks 82nd out of 82 cities in the Expat City Ranking 2019, coming in last place both among the GCC cities and in the global ranking. In contrast to the other cities in the GCC States, Kuwait City's worst performing area is the Getting Settled Index (82nd), for which it comes last in all subcategories, aside from the Local Language subcategory. Almost three in five respondents (57%) feel that the local residents are unfriendly towards foreigners (vs. 19% globally), 62% struggle to find new friends (vs. 35% globally), and 57% are unhappy with their social life (vs. 27% globally). *"Local citizens are not friendly,"* remarks an Indian expat. *"There is no respect for expats in this country."* Kuwait City, like most other GCC cities, also does badly in the Quality of Urban Living Index, ranking 81st, ahead of only Lagos, in Nigeria (82nd). It is the world's worst-rated city for leisure activities (62% unhappy vs. 12% globally) and for the local climate and weather (67% unhappy vs. 23% globally). More than three in five expats (61%) are also dissatisfied with the local transportation (vs. 19% globally), and Kuwait City has the worst-rated quality of environment, with 58% unhappy with this factor (vs. 17% globally).

Another weakness of Kuwait City is its work life, for which it ranks 79th worldwide, ahead of only Istanbul (80th), Athens (81st), and Rome (82nd). Over a third of expats (34%) is dissatisfied with their job in general (vs. 19% globally), and two in five (40%) are unhappy with the local career opportunities (vs. 27% globally). Kuwait City also has the worst-rated work-life balance worldwide, with 38% of expats rating this factor negatively (vs. 21% globally). A British expat dislikes the *"long working hours and six-day weeks,"* adding that *"the Kuwaiti attitude towards foreign workers, especially low paid workers, is poor"*. One redeeming factor is Kuwait City's ranking in the Finance subcategory, for which it comes seventh worldwide, with 71% of expats satisfied with their financial situation (vs. 57% globally). However, this may not mean much if 55% of respondents are unhappy with the local cost of living (vs. 38% 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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