

Expatriate Life in Buenos Aires, Mexico City, Panama City, São Paulo, and Santiago de Chile

The Expat City Ranking 2020 reveals the best and worst cities for expats around the world, including five Central and South American cities.

- Out of 66 cities in the Expat City Ranking 2020, Panama City ranks 4th, followed by Buenos Aires (7th), Mexico City (38th), São Paulo (39th), and Santiago de Chile (59th).
- Valencia (1st), Alicante, Lisbon, Panama City, Singapore, Málaga, Buenos Aires, Kuala Lumpur, Madrid, and Abu Dhabi (10th) are the top 10 cities for expats to live in 2020.
- On the other hand, expats consider Salmiya in Kuwait (66th), Rome, Seoul, Milan, Nairobi, Paris, Johannesburg, Santiago, Dublin, and Hong Kong (57th) the world's worst cities to live in.

Munich, 26 November 2020 — These five Central and South American cities perform very differently in the Expat City Ranking 2020 by [InterNations](https://www.internations.org/), the world's largest expat community with around 4 million members. Panama City ranks 4th, followed by Buenos Aires (7th), Mexico City (38th), São Paulo (39th), and Santiago de Chile (59th). What they all have in common are average to poor results in the Quality of Urban Living Index. In all cities but Panama City, this is mainly due to expats' concerns about their personal safety. Except for Panama City (18th), the cities do not perform well in the Urban Work Life Index either. On the other hand, expats find it easy to get settled in, ranking the cities in the top 20 of the Getting Settled Index. The only exception here is Santiago (45th). And lastly, all cities make it into the upper half of the Finance & Housing Index, with Panama City, Buenos Aires, and Mexico City even ranking among the top 20 worldwide.

Expat City Ranking 2020

Expatriate Life in 5 Central and South American Cities

	 Overall Ranking	 Quality of Urban Living Index	 Getting Settled Index	 Urban Work Life Index	 Finance & Housing Index	 Local Cost of Living Index	 Happiness Level
 Buenos Aires, Argentina	7th	38th	5th	47th	11th	15th	88%
 Mexico City, Mexico	38th	62nd	9th	45th	19th	8th	85%
 Panama City, Panama	4th	39th	14th	18th	6th	24th	82%
 Santiago, Chile	59th	54th	45th	52nd	28th	53rd	77%
 São Paulo, Brazil	39th	56th	19th	40th	31st	40th	79%

The Expat City Ranking 2020 covers 66 cities in total.

The [Expat City Ranking](#) is based on the annual *Expat Insider* survey by InterNations, which is one of the most extensive surveys about living and working abroad, with more than 15,000 respondents in 2020. This year, 66 cities around the globe are analyzed in the survey, which offers 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. Together, the first four topics make up the Expat City Ranking, which reveals the best and worst cities for expats to live in. As the data was collected in March 2020, just before COVID-19 turned into a global pandemic, one question, however, remains: Will these cities still come out on top in a post-COVID world?

What Expats Think about Life in Five Central and South American Cities

4. Panama City — Friendly, Relaxed, and Easy on the Expat Wallet

The Panamanian capital is not only the best-rated Latin American city in the Expat City Ranking 2020 but even makes it into the global top 5 (4th out of 66). This is mainly due to its performance in the Finance & Housing (6th) and Getting Settled (14th) Indices.

Expats in Panama City are more than satisfied with their financial situation (72% positive responses vs. 61% globally). They also consider it easy to find housing (4th), and more than half (55%) describe the available housing as generally affordable (vs. 41% globally). In addition to this, about three in four expats (76%) also feel at home in Panama City (vs. 64% globally), and 44% even agree completely (vs. 27% globally). *"I think there's room for development for me as a person. I am ready to see what Panama has in store for me,"* a female expat from Kenya comments.

Panama City does just slightly worse in the Urban Work Life Index (18th). On the one hand, 70% of survey participants are satisfied with their jobs overall (vs. 65% globally), and 43% even say they could not be any happier (vs. 20% worldwide). However, it seems difficult to get a job in the first place: Panama City comes in 41st place for local career opportunities.

The city's weakest point is the local quality of life. Panama City only places 39th in the respective index, and expats are particularly dissatisfied with infrastructural factors such as public transportation (48th) and the urban environment (50th).

7. Buenos Aires — Great Ratings in Spite of Economic and Political Instability

Ranking only three places below Panama City (4th), Buenos Aires (7th out of 66) is the other Latin American destination in the top 10 of the Expat City Ranking 2020. Overall, it gets some excellent results despite its poor performance in the Urban Work Life Index (47th). The latter is mainly due to expats worrying about Argentina's unstable economy: nearly two in three (65%) rate this factor negatively (vs. 18% globally), which puts the city in last place worldwide for this factor.

The lack of stability might also affect Buenos Aires's ranking in the Quality of Urban Living Index (38th). While the city is praised for its leisure options (88% happy vs. 71% worldwide), its disappointing 61st place in the Safety & Security subcategory brings the ranking down: 62% of expats are unhappy with the political (in)stability (vs. 17% globally), and 19% feel personally unsafe (vs. 9% globally).

However, expats rate Buenos Aires highly in both the Finance & Housing (11th) and the Local Cost of

Living (15th) Indices. In fact, 57% rate the local living expenses positively (vs. 46% worldwide), and seven in ten (70%) are satisfied with their financial situation. *"It's a cheap place, with affordable private health insurance, if (!) you have US dollars,"* according to an expat from the US.

Getting settled in Buenos Aires is not a problem, either. The city ranks fifth in this index, even making it to first place for the ease of finding friends: 72% agree that it is easy to make new friends in Buenos Aires (vs. 47% globally). *"I just love the people here!"*, adds another US expat.

38. Mexico City — High on Friendliness, Low on Safety

Mexico City only lands in a mediocre 38th place out of 66 in the Expat City Ranking 2020. In the Quality of Urban Living Index (62nd), it even ends up among the bottom 5, mainly due to its results in the Safety & Security (64th) and the Health & Environment (62nd) subcategories. Expats are particularly dissatisfied with the availability of healthcare (33% unhappy vs. 13% globally) and their personal safety (48% negative responses vs. 9% globally).

The city fares a little better in the Urban Work Life Index (45th). Interestingly, the respondents tend to view their local career opportunities favorably (60% positive responses vs. 43% worldwide), while rating the general state of the local economy harshly (32% negative answers vs. 18% globally). They are also less satisfied with their working hours than the average (27% unhappy vs. 17% globally).

On the other hand, expats feel confident about finance and housing (19th). Mexico City does especially well for affordable housing (27% negative ratings vs. 41% globally). Moreover, 63% of expats are satisfied with the cost of living in general (vs. 46% worldwide), with the city placing eighth in the Local Cost of Living Index.

Lastly, the city also ranks among the top 10 in the Getting Settled Index (9th). Over four in five expats (85%) describe the local population as generally friendly (vs. 68% globally), and 82% find it easy to get used to the local culture (vs. 61% globally). *"I love how easy it is to get along with the local people,"* says an expat from Portugal.

39. São Paulo — Making Friends Is Great, the Quality of Life Not So Much

With São Paulo ranking 39th out of 66 in the Expat City Ranking, its weakest point is the Quality of Urban Living Index (56th). The city performs worst for personal safety (42% unhappy vs. 9% worldwide), but it also has low scores for the urban environment (56th). *"The air, water, land, and noise pollution is unbearable,"* explains an expat from the US.

In the Urban Work Life Index (40th), São Paulo's results improve somewhat. Expats are quite satisfied with their own jobs (62% happy vs. 65% globally), but 32% rate the local economy negatively (vs. 18% globally). Nonetheless, expats do not seem to struggle financially — 84% state that their disposable household income is enough or more than enough to cover their expenses (vs. 79% globally). All in all, São Paulo ranks 31st in the Finance & Housing Index.

Like most other Latin American destinations, São Paulo does best in the Getting Settled Index (19th). Expats are especially enthusiastic about the general friendliness of the local population and the friendly attitude towards foreign residents — São Paulo ranks sixth for both factors. Moreover, about three in four respondents (74%) find it easy to make friends in town (vs. 47% globally). *"The happiness here is simply contagious,"* adds a female expat from Mexico.

59. Santiago de Chile — The Only Latin American City Listed in the Bottom 10

Coming in a disappointing 59th place out of 66 in the Expat City Ranking 2020, Santiago de Chile is the only Latin American destination among the bottom 10.

The Chilean capital performs worst in the Quality of Urban Living Index (54th), mainly because of its poor performance in the Health & Environment (58th) and Safety & Politics (59th) subcategories. Expats in Santiago are particularly worried about political stability, which 57% rate negatively (vs. 17% worldwide). *“There are riots, protests, and social unrest everywhere,”* a Venezuelan expat complains. Moreover, respondents are concerned about the availability of healthcare (30% unhappy vs. 17% globally), as well as its affordability (62% unhappy vs. 21% globally).

The Urban Work Life Index (52nd) is Santiago’s second-weakest point. While 58% of expats rate their job security favorably — about the same as the global average (59%) — less than half (46%) judge the local economy positively (vs. 63% worldwide). They are also dissatisfied with their working conditions: nearly three in ten (29%) complain about their work-life balance (vs. 18% globally).

Santiago de Chile lags behind in the Getting Settled Index (45th), too. Only 50% of expats feel at home there (vs. 64% globally), and 36% describe the residents as unfriendly (vs. 17% worldwide). Lastly, while it ranks 28th in the Finance & Housing Index, it only comes 53rd in for the local cost of living. Among the expats in Santiago, 68% are unhappy with the latter (vs. 36% globally).

About the Expat City Ranking 2020

The [Expat City Ranking](#) is based on the annual *Expat Insider* survey by InterNations. For the survey, more than 15,000 expatriates representing 173 nationalities and living in 181 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, considering both emotional topics and 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 66 cities worldwide. In 2020, the top 10 cities for expats are Valencia, Alicante, Lisbon, Panama City, Singapore, Málaga, Buenos Aires, Kuala Lumpur, Madrid, and Abu Dhabi. 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 2020, a sample size of at least 50 survey participants per city was required.

About InterNations

With around 4 million members in 420 cities around the world, [InterNations](#) is the largest global community and a source of information for people who live and work abroad. InterNations offers global and local networking and socializing, both online and face to face. At around 6,000 events and activities per month, expatriates have the opportunity to meet other global minds. Online services

include discussion forums and helpful articles with personal expat experiences, tips, and information about life abroad. Membership is by approval only to ensure we remain a community of trust. InterNations is part of the New Work SE, a group of brands that offer products and services for a better working life.

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Press Contact

Caroline Harsch
Media Spokesperson

InterNations GmbH
Schwanthalerstrasse 39
80336 Munich, Germany

Email: press@internations.org
Homepage: <https://www.internations.org/press>