

Expatriate Insider 2021 Survey Reveals: The Best and Worst Destinations for Living and Working Abroad

Expats in South Africa love the climate and weather but worry about their safety.

- Taiwan, Mexico, Costa Rica, Malaysia, Portugal, New Zealand, Australia, Ecuador, Canada, and Vietnam are the best destinations for expats in 2021.
- The worst countries for expats are Kuwait (59th), Italy, South Africa, Russia, Egypt, Japan, Cyprus, Turkey, India, and Malta (50th).
- South Africa comes 57th out of 59 destinations in the Expatriate Insider 2021 survey. It also ranks among the bottom 10 for personal finance (55th), working abroad (54th), and the quality of life (52nd).

Munich, 18 May 2021 — For the seventh time, [InterNations](https://www.internations.org), the world's largest expat community with around 4 million members, has published its *Expatriate Insider* survey. With more than 12,000 respondents, it is one of the most extensive surveys about living and working abroad, sharing insights into expat life in 59 destinations. The survey offers in-depth information on expats' satisfaction with the quality of life, ease of settling in, working life, personal finance, and the cost of living in their respective country of residence. Additionally, the respondents share **how they have been experiencing the COVID-19 pandemic** and how it has impacted their life.

South Africa comes 57th out of 59 destinations in the *Expatriate Insider 2021* survey. Ranking below average in nearly all indices, South Africa performs worst in the Personal Finance (55th), Working Abroad (54th), and Quality of Life (52nd) Indices. However, expats are more satisfied with the ease of settling in (33rd) and the cost of living (28th). Overall, Taiwan, Mexico, and Costa Rica are the best expat destinations worldwide: all of them attract expats with their ease of settling in and good personal finances. On the other hand, only Kuwait (59th) and Italy (58th) rank worse than South Africa. All of them perform poorly in the Working Abroad Index. Additionally, Kuwait is the hardest country for expats to feel at home in, Italy is the worst for personal finances, and expats in South Africa do not feel safe.



South Africa in the *Expat Insider 2021* Survey

Terrible for Working Abroad and Personal Finance

Coming in 57th place out of 59 destinations in the *Expat Insider 2021* survey, South Africa ends up in the bottom 3 — only ahead of Italy (58th) and Kuwait (59th). It performs worst in the Personal Finance Index (55th): over one-third of expats in South Africa (34%) do not consider their disposable household income enough to cover all their expenses — 10 percentage points more than the global average (24%).

Indeed, 47% of survey respondents in South Africa only have an income of up to 25,000 USD per year (vs. 30% globally), and 27% have even less than 12,000 USD at their disposal (vs. 15% globally). What is more, just over one in three expats in South Africa (36%) have a yearly income of 50,000 USD or more, while this is the case for nearly half the expats worldwide (49%). Perhaps this is also why just 57% of expats in South Africa are satisfied with their financial situation, compared to 64% globally.

South Africa also lands among the bottom 10 of the Working Abroad Index (54th), coming last worldwide in the Economy & Job Security subcategory (59th). Only 47% of expats are satisfied with their job security (vs. 61% globally), and less than a third (31%) are happy with the state of the local economy — exactly half the global average (62%). Moreover, only 32% are satisfied with the local career opportunities (vs. 45% globally). A Zimbabwean respondent agrees that *“there are not many career opportunities”*.

Fairly Average for Cost of Living and Ease of Settling In

South Africa performs best in the Cost of Living Index (28th), but this is still a rather mediocre result. In fact, half the expats (50%) are satisfied with the cost of living, about the same as the global average (48%). While the country also lands in a mid-field rank in the Ease of Settling In Index (33rd), the results are slightly below average. More than one in five expats (21%) consider the population generally unfriendly towards foreign residents (vs. 18% globally), and 35% find it difficult to make new friends in South Africa (vs. 32% globally). Additionally, more than a quarter (28%) find it difficult to settle down in this country (vs. 22% globally). However, close to half the expats (48%) find it easy to make local friends (vs. 44% globally).

Great Climate and Weather, but Terrible Safety and Security

Ranking among the bottom 10 in the Quality of Life Index (52nd), South Africa performs especially poorly in the Safety & Security subcategory (59th). More than one-third of expats (34%) do not consider South Africa a peaceful country — nearly four times the global average (9%). And just about one in four (24%) feel safe in South Africa, compared to 84% globally. *“There are security issues,”* shares a French expat. And an Ethiopian expat even says: *“You are not able to walk around safely.”* Moreover, 43% of respondents rate the country’s political stability negatively (vs. 16% globally).

However, South Africa does well in the Leisure Options subcategory (15th), with 87% of expats rating the climate and weather favorably (vs. 66% globally). The majority of expats (95%) is also satisfied with the natural environment (vs. 84% globally). *“I like the climate, the diverse coastlines, and South Africa’s natural beauty,”* says a German expat.

The Impact of COVID-19 on Expat Life in South Africa

The pandemic has changed the relocation plans of 44% of survey respondents in South Africa, seven percentage points more than the global average of 37%. COVID-19 has mostly affected expats in South Africa in terms of personal travel (26% vs. 28% globally), social life (17% vs. 24% globally), work or business (15% vs. 15% globally), and personal finances (15% vs. 8% globally). Few have noticed an impact on their family life (3% vs. 7% globally), general health (4% vs. 2% globally), or business travel (6% vs. 6% globally).

Most expats in South Africa (57%) use the local news as a source of information on COVID-19 and related regulations, ten percentage points more than the global average (47%). However, a slightly smaller share (45%) stays up to date through official government channels (vs. 48% globally). Lastly, 66% of respondents in South Africa are satisfied with the official communication regarding COVID-19 — exactly the same share as the global average (66%).

The Best and Worst Destinations for Living and Working Abroad in 2021

According to the *Expat Insider 2021* survey, the top 10 destinations for expats are Taiwan (1st), Mexico, Costa Rica, Malaysia, Portugal, New Zealand, Australia, Ecuador, Canada, and Vietnam (10th). All these countries stand out with above-average results in the Ease of Settling In Index, with Mexico ranking first, followed by Malaysia (2nd) and Costa Rica (3rd). Moreover, half of these countries also rank among the top 10 in the Personal Finance Index. Taiwan (11th) and Portugal (14th) narrowly miss out on a top 10 spot in this index, while New Zealand (28th), Australia (39th), and Canada (50th) have a weaker performance in this regard.

The worst countries for expats are Kuwait (59th), Italy, South Africa, Russia, Egypt, Japan, Cyprus, Turkey, India, and Malta (50th). Besides Japan (21st), all these countries rank far below the global average in the Quality of Life Index. What is more, eight out of the ten worst-rated destinations are also among the bottom 10 in the Working Abroad Index — the only two exceptions being India (46th) and Malta (31st), which, however, also receive mediocre results at best. Lastly, India is the only country in the overall bottom 10 that performs very well in the Personal Finance Index (4th), while the others — such as Italy (59th), Kuwait (58th), and Cyprus (57th) — rank below the global average or even land among the bottom 10.

Expat Life during the COVID-19 Pandemic

On a global scale, 45% of survey respondents say that COVID-19 had an impact on their current stay abroad or their relocation plans: the **share of expats** who say so (**37%**) either decided to *not* move back home in the near future (18%), planned to move to another country but had to change these plans (8%), will move to another country due to the pandemic (6%), or will move back home sooner than originally planned (5%).

The **share of local respondents whose relocation plans were affected by COVID-19 (61%)** is a lot higher: some of them were living abroad but moved home sooner than planned (18%), others were planning to move abroad but had to change their plans (35%), and about one in ten have now decided to move abroad because of the pandemic (9%).

The Pandemic's Impact on Everyday Life

Of course, COVID-19 has not only disrupted the relocation plans of expats worldwide. When asked where they see the biggest impact of the pandemic on their personal life *right now*, the survey respondents point out its effects on personal travel (25%), social life (23%), and their work or business (16%) in particular. In the *long run*, respondents are still concerned about the impact of COVID-19 on their social life (17% of all respondents), and there are also considerable worries regarding personal travel (22%).

How Expats Stay Informed on COVID-19

Expats across the world mostly rely on official government channels (48%), local news (47%), and social media (40%) for news on the COVID-19 situation and the related regulations in their country of residence. Considering the importance of government channels, just **how satisfied are expats with the official communication regarding COVID-19 and related regulations?** Worldwide, not quite two-thirds (66%) rate this factor positively, with close to a quarter (24%) saying they are completely satisfied. The main complaint among expats who are *not* satisfied with the official communication on the pandemic is that the information is unclear, confusing, and/or contradictory (67%).

For further information on the global impact of COVID-19 on expat life, please take a look at the full press release in the download center of our e-mail.

About the InterNations *Expat Insider 2021* Survey

For its annual [Expat Insider survey](#), InterNations asked 12,420 expats representing 174 nationalities and living in 186 countries or territories to provide information on various aspects of expat life, as well as their gender, age, and nationality. Participants were asked to rate up to 37 different aspects of 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 five topical indices: Quality of Life, Ease of Settling In, Working Abroad, Personal Finance, and Cost of Living. The first four of these indices were further averaged together with expats' general satisfaction with their life in order to rank 59 expat destinations around the world. In 2021, the top 10 are Taiwan, Mexico, Costa Rica, Malaysia, Portugal, New Zealand, Australia, Ecuador, Canada, and Vietnam. Moreover, expats were asked about how COVID-19 has impacted their life abroad; however, these responses did not influence the overall ranking.

For a country to be featured in the indices and consequently in the overall ranking, a sample size of at least 50 survey participants per destination was necessary.

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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