

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

Expats in South Korea appreciate the local healthcare system but find it difficult to feel at home.

- 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 Korea comes 47th out of 59 destinations in the Expatriate Insider 2021 survey. The country performs worst for the ease of settling in (54th) and best for the quality of life (28th).

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 Korea comes 47th out of 59 destinations in the *Expatriate Insider 2021* survey. The country performs worst in the Ease of Settling In Index (54th), followed by the Cost of Living (43rd) and the Working Abroad (40th) Indices. While it lands in an average 31st place in the Personal Finance Index, it does best for the quality of life (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, the bottom three countries, Kuwait, Italy, and South Africa, all 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 Korea in the *Expat Insider 2021* Survey

Difficult to Make Friends

Narrowly escaping the bottom 10, South Korea ranks 47th out of 59 countries in the *Expat Insider 2021* survey. It performs worst in the Ease of Settling In Index (54th), where it cannot avoid being ranked among the worst destinations in the world. The country receives very poor results in the Feeling at Home subcategory (56th), with only 54% of expats feeling at home in the local culture (vs. 63% globally) and 38% finding it difficult to settle down in South Korea (vs. 22% globally). Over half the expats in South Korea (54%) also find it difficult to make local friends, compared to just 36% globally. An expat from the Philippines says: *"It is difficult to learn the language — and probably due to the language barrier, it is also difficult to make local friends."* In fact, 64% of expats struggle with learning the local language (vs. 42% globally). In South Korea, most expats (70%) do not speak the local language at all or just a little — a far higher proportion than the global average (43%).

Affordable and High-Quality Healthcare

However, South Korea performs much better in the Quality of Life Index (28th). This can be largely attributed to its healthcare system: 84% of expats rate the affordability of healthcare positively (vs. 61% globally), and 92% are happy with the quality of medical care (vs. 71% globally). South Korea also performs better than average in the Travel & Transportation subcategory (20th), with 92% of expats rating the transportation infrastructure positively (vs. 76% globally). An Irish expat shares: *"The healthcare, personal safety, and transportation are all very good."* Almost all expats (92%) feel safe in South Korea (vs. 84% globally), and only 2% say they do not feel safe, which is below the global average (8%). However, over half the expats in South Korea (52%) are unhappy with the air quality (vs. 20% globally), placing the country in the bottom 10 for this factor (55th).

Good Job Security, but Horrible Work-Life Balance

South Korea does not perform well in the Working Abroad Index (40th), and expats particularly dislike their working hours and lack of work-life balance (50th for both). One-fifth of expats (20%) are dissatisfied with their working hours (vs. 16% globally). Interestingly, expats working full time actually work less than the global average (39.5 vs. 43.2 hours a week). Overall, 22% are unhappy with their work-life balance (vs. 17% globally). On the upside, expats consider their jobs in South Korea to be secure as 63% rate their job security positively (vs. 61% globally).

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

Over half the expats in South Korea (54%) say the pandemic has not affected the length of time they are planning on staying in South Korea (vs. 63% globally), while 28% share that they will *not* be moving home due to COVID-19 (vs. 18% globally). Most expats (84%) are satisfied with the official communication regarding COVID-19 and related regulations (vs. 66% globally). However, only 48% of those expats say the information was clear and easy to understand. The three main sources where expats in South Korea get their news from are the local news (46%), official government channels (40%), and social media (36%).

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 [Expats 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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