

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

Expats in Spain enjoy a high quality of living but are unhappy with their working life.

- 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).
- Spain comes 16th out of 59 destinations in the Expats Insider 2021 survey. It ranks among the top 20 countries in all indices except for working abroad (51st) and personal finance (40th).

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 *Expats 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.

Spain comes 16th out of 59 destinations in the *Expats Insider 2021* survey. Expats enjoy the high quality of life (8th) and the ease of settling in (15th). While the country also ranks high in the Cost of Living Index (16th), it does not perform well in the Personal Finance Index (40th). Lastly, it even ends up among the bottom 10 destinations in the Working Abroad Index (51st). 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.



Spain in the *Expat Insider 2021* Survey

The Best Leisure Options Worldwide

Spain ranks in the top 20 of the *Expat Insider 2021* survey overall, placing 16th out of 59 countries. Achieving a good 8th rank in the Quality of Life Index, it seems the perfect destination for expats seeking greener pastures. Nearly six in seven survey respondents in Spain (85%) are happy with the local leisure options (vs. 72% globally), and 46% even very much so (vs. 30% globally). Nearly three out of five expats (59%) give the local climate and weather the best possible rating, compared to just 27% globally. And 80% of respondents are happy with their socializing and leisure activities (vs. 67% globally). With these results, it comes as no surprise that Spain lands in first place worldwide in the Leisure Options subcategory. *"I like the lifestyle, the way most Spaniards find time to socialize over a coffee, wine, or beer. I also like the climate,"* says an Argentinian expat.

Expats Feel at Home in Spain

Spain ranks fourth in the Feeling at Home subcategory of the Ease of Settling In Index. In fact, 79% of expats feel at home in Spain (vs. 63% globally) — and 31% very much so — compared to a global average of 27%. Moreover, four in five expats in Spain (80%) agree that it is easy to get used to the local culture (vs. 65% globally), and 76% find it easy to settle down in this country (vs. 62% globally). As a survey respondent from the US puts it: *"I love the culture, food, the warm, friendly people, and the interesting places to see."* And a British expat shares: *"I like that locals are friendly towards foreigners, even when they struggle with the local language."* Most expats in Spain (76%) agree that the population is generally friendly towards foreign residents (vs. 67% globally), and 62% find it easy to learn the local language (vs. 39% globally). Perhaps this is why only 3% of survey respondents in Spain do not speak the local language at all (vs. 13% globally), while 58% speak it fairly well or very well, compared to just 47% globally.

Very Low Job Satisfaction among Expats

On the other hand, Spain performs poorly when it comes to expats' working life. Ranking in the bottom 10 of the Working Abroad Index (51st), Spain particularly falls short in the Career Prospects & Satisfaction subcategory (51st). *"It is difficult to find a good job — there are a lot of lousy jobs with low salaries,"* says an expat from Austria. Just over half the respondents in Spain (53%) are currently working full time or part time, 14 percentage points below the global average (67%). And more than two out of nine survey respondents in Spain (23%) rate their overall job satisfaction negatively, seven percentage points more than the global average (16%). The job security also does not spark joy among expats: more than three out of ten (31%) are unhappy with this factor (vs. 20% globally).

The Impact of COVID-19 on Expat Life in Spain

According to expats in Spain, the COVID-19 pandemic has had the biggest impact on their social life and personal travel — 25% and 29% say so, respectively. However, it has not affected the relocation plans of the survey respondents as drastically. Only 17% say that they have decided *not* to move back home in the near future due to the pandemic, about the same as the global average (18%), and just 4% have decided to move home sooner than planned. When it comes to moving abroad or changing their plans of moving to another country, only 6% say that this applies to them.

In Spain, 57% of expats follow the local news to stay up to date about COVID-19 and related regulations, compared to just 47% globally. On the other hand, just 6% rely on their employers for the same information, which is twelve percentage points below the global average (18%).

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

According to the *Expatriate 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.

Expatriate 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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