

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

Expats in Sweden love the natural environment but find it difficult to settle in.

- 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).
- Sweden comes 49th out of 59 destinations in the Expats Insider 2021 survey. It ranks best in the Quality of Life and Working Abroad Indices (20th for both) and worst in the Ease of Settling In Index (53rd).

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.

Sweden comes 49th out of 59 destinations in the *Expats Insider 2021* survey. While expats are happy with both the quality of life (20th) and their working life (20th), they are dissatisfied with their personal finances (42nd) and the cost of living (48th). Lastly, the country even lands among the bottom 10 destinations in the Ease of Settling In Index (53rd). 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.



## Sweden in the *Expat Insider 2021* Survey

### **Reserved Local Residents and High Living Expenses**

In the *Expat Insider 2021* survey, Sweden narrowly escapes the bottom 10 in 49th place out of 59 destinations. It performs worst in the Ease of Settling Index (53rd), where it ends up among the ten worst-rated destinations in three out of four subcategories: Friendliness (56th), Feeling at Home (57th), and Finding Friends (59th). Sweden is the worst-ranking country for the ease of finding new friends. Three out of five expats (60%) find it hard to make new friends in Sweden, nearly twice the global average of 32%. *"The local culture can be tough, with the Swedes being notorious for being very reserved and having so many unwritten rules,"* an expat from Guatemala shares. Actually, 34% find it difficult to get used to the Swedish culture, compared to 18% worldwide. These difficulties are not necessarily due to the language barrier: 79% think it is easy to live in Sweden without local language skills (vs. 54% globally), and about half (52%) speak Swedish quite or even very well.

Moreover, expats are not exactly happy with the local cost of living and its impact on their personal finances. Sweden comes 48th out of 59 in the Cost of Living Index and 42nd in the Personal Finance Index. Half the respondents (50%) consider the cost of living too high (vs. 34% globally), and about one in five (19%) are not satisfied with their financial situation, the same as the global average (19%).

### **Quality of Life and Working Life — A Mixed Bag**

On the plus side, Sweden does a lot better in the Working Abroad and Quality of Life Indices, placing 20th in each. Expats in Sweden appreciate the quality of the environment, the great digital life, the affordability of healthcare, and the transportation infrastructure. For example, the respondents consider the air quality to be the third-best worldwide (95% positive replies vs. 66% globally). They also vote Sweden into the top 5 for unrestricted access to online services (96% positive replies vs. 84% globally). Moreover, 92% rate the transportation infrastructure favorably (vs. 76% globally), and 76% describe healthcare as affordable (vs. 61% globally).

However, there are a few downsides. For instance, 22% of respondents are unhappy with the quality of medical care (vs. 14% globally). The results for working abroad are also a bit mixed. In the Work & Leisure subcategory, Sweden lands in 10th place with more than three out of four expats (76%) happy with their working hours (vs. 66% globally). Moreover, 72% rate the local economy positively (vs. 62% globally). However, only 47% are optimistic about the career opportunities, just a little more than the worldwide average (45%).

### **The Impact of COVID-19 on Expat Life in Sweden**

While the relocation plans of most expats in Sweden have not actually been affected by the ongoing pandemic (73% unaffected vs. 63% globally), it is striking that the respondents are, on average, far less satisfied with the official COVID-19-related communication than their peers around the world: only 55% rate it positively (vs. 66% worldwide), while more than one in four (27%) give it a negative rating (vs. 17% globally). The latter mainly criticize that the official communication has been unclear, contradictory, and confusing (64% vs. 67% globally) or that there was little to no communication in general (34% vs. 15% globally).

## 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 *Expatriate Insider* 2021 Survey**

For its annual [Expatriate 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.

Find more information about InterNations on our [press page](#), [in our company blog](#), or in our [magazine](#).

#### **Press Contact**

Caroline Harsch  
Media Spokesperson

InterNations GmbH  
Schwanthalerstrasse 39  
80336 Munich, Germany

Email: [press@internations.org](mailto:press@internations.org)  
Homepage: <https://www.internations.org/press>