

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

Expats in Switzerland enjoy the beautiful natural environment and the political stability, but they find it difficult to make new friends.

- 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).
- Switzerland comes 30th out of 59 destinations in the Expat Insider 2021 survey. It ranks in the top 10 for the quality of life (9th) but second to last worldwide for the cost of living (58th).

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 *Expat 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.

Switzerland comes 30th out of 59 destinations in the *Expat Insider 2021* survey, performing best in the Quality of Life Index (9th). While expats are also satisfied with their working life (18th) and their personal finances (20th), this is not the case for the ease of settling in (52nd) and the cost of living (58th). 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.



## Switzerland in the *Expat Insider 2021* Survey

### Expats Love the Natural Environment

Ranking 30th out of 59 countries in the *Expat Insider 2021* survey, Switzerland performs best in the Quality of Life Index (9th). Nearly all expats (99%) are happy with the natural environment (vs. 84% globally), ranking Switzerland second worldwide for this factor — just after New Zealand (1st) — and fourth in the Quality of Environment subcategory. Furthermore, 95% rate the factor water and sanitation positively (vs. 77% globally), and another 89% are happy with the air quality (vs. 66% globally). The majority of expats in Switzerland is also satisfied with the country's peacefulness (95% vs. 80% globally) and its political stability (91% vs. 64% globally). Another 94% are happy with their travel opportunities (vs. 84% globally), and 96% rate the transportation infrastructure positively (vs. 76% globally). This leads to a second place for Switzerland in the Travel & Transportation subcategory, where only Austria (1st) performs better. In terms of the quality of life, there are only two downsides: 26% of respondents are not satisfied with their socializing and leisure activities (vs. 18% globally), and only 34% rate the affordability of healthcare positively (vs. 61% globally).

### A Good Place to Work

The country also performs well in the Working Abroad Index (18th), with an especially high share of expats (85%) rating the state of the local economy positively (vs. 62% globally). Indeed, an above-average proportion of respondents in Switzerland is currently working full or part time (74% vs. 67% globally). A Brazilian expat summarizes: *"I like the security, the beautiful environment, the freedom, and the work opportunities in Switzerland."* And a Spanish respondent mentions that she likes the *"high level of economic development"*.

### Hard to Afford and Settle In

However, while Switzerland places 20th in the Personal Finance Index, it is among the worst destinations worldwide for the cost of living (58th) — only Hong Kong (59th) performs worse. In fact, 65% of expats are dissatisfied with the cost of living (vs. 34% globally). The country's results in the Ease of Settling In Index (52nd) are not much better: 28% of expats do not feel at home in the local culture (vs. 20% globally), and another 28% find it difficult to get used to (vs. 18% globally). Moreover, 61% of expats do not find it easy to make local friends (vs. 36% globally), and 32% are dissatisfied with the general friendliness towards foreign residents (vs. 18% globally). Interestingly, more than half the respondents in Switzerland (52%) are mostly friends with other expats — an extremely high share compared to the global average (32%), as well as the neighboring German-speaking destinations Austria (44%) and Germany (38%).

### The Impact of COVID-19 on Expat Life in Switzerland

While the pandemic has changed the plans of 37% of survey respondents on a global scale, it has only had an impact on 20% in Switzerland. However, one out of three expats in Switzerland (33%) says the pandemic mostly affects their social life, followed by personal travel (30%), and their work or business (10%). Few have noticed an impact on their general health (2%), personal finances (4%), or mental health (6%). The proportion of expats in Switzerland using official government channels as sources of information on COVID-19 and related regulations (61%) is quite a bit higher than the global average (48%). Moreover, a lower share of expats in Switzerland stay up to date through social media, compared to expats worldwide (32% vs. 40% globally). Lastly, most respondents (71%) are satisfied with the official communication regarding COVID-19 (vs. 66% 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 *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.

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

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