

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

Expats in the Netherlands enjoy their working life but find it hard 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).
- The Netherlands comes 33rd out of 59 destinations in the Expatriate Insider 2021 survey. It ranks best in the Working Abroad Index (13th) and worst in the Cost of Living Index (47th).

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.

The Netherlands comes 33rd out of 59 destinations in the *Expatriate Insider 2021* survey. Expats are particularly happy with their working life (13th). While they country gets average results in the Quality of Life (30th) and Personal Finance (33rd) Index, it performs more poorly in the Ease of Settling In (42nd) and the Cost of Living (47th) Indices. 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.



The Netherlands in the *Expat Insider 2021* Survey

Where Work-Life Balance Is Valued

Ranking 33rd out of 59 countries overall in the Expat Insider 2021 survey, the Netherlands performs best in the Working Abroad Index (13th). The country receives especially good results in the Economy & Job Security subcategory (10th): 83% of expats rate the state of local economy positively, compared to just 62% globally. Most expats are satisfied with their job security (68% vs. 61% globally) and their working hours (74% vs. 66% globally). Actually, expats with full-time employment in the Netherlands work 41.2 hours a week, which is below the global average of 43.2 hours. And the part-time employees spend 23.8 hours per week at work, compared to global average of 24.2 hours. A US American expat points out that the *“work-life balance is actually valued here”*. What is more, half the expats in the Netherlands (50%) are satisfied with the local career opportunities (vs. 45% globally). The most popular fields expats in the Netherlands are pursuing a career in are IT (14% vs. 11% globally), manufacturing and engineering (9% vs. 7% globally), and finance (8% vs. 8% globally).

Great Digital Life — But Poor Leisure Options

Coming in 30th place in the Quality of Life Index, the Netherlands performs very well in the Digital Life subcategory (10th): 87% of expats rate the availability of government services online positively (vs. 63% globally). Additionally, 94% are happy with the unrestricted access to online services (vs. 84% globally). The Netherlands also makes it into the top 10 of the Travel & Transportation subcategory (6th), with 93% of expats rating the transportation infrastructure positively (vs. 76% globally). *“The transportation system is highly convenient,”* shares a South African expat. However, the country lands in the bottom 10 of the Leisure Options subcategory (52nd). Exactly one-quarter of expats (25%) rates the socializing and leisure activities negatively (vs. 18% globally), and 42% are unhappy with the climate and weather (vs. 17% globally). Moreover, 12% of expats in the Netherlands are not happy with their life in general, just a little more than the global average (10%).

Not a Place to Feel at Home

The Netherlands performs worst in the Cost of Living (47th) and Ease of Settling In (42nd) Indices. In fact, 42% of expats rate the cost of living negatively (vs. 34% globally), and nearly three in ten (29%) do not feel at home in the local culture (vs. 20% globally). Nearly one-quarter (24%) find it difficult to get used to the local culture (vs. 18% globally), and another 54% find it hard to make local friends (vs. 36% globally). Indeed, nearly half the expats in the Netherlands (48%) say their friends and acquaintances are mostly other expats (vs. 32% globally). An expat from the US shares: *“It is almost impossible to meet and befriend locals. Dutch people are friendly but are not looking to make friends with you — they already have their own friends’ groups and do not mingle with expats.”*

The language barrier does not seem to be an issue in the Netherlands: According to 59% of expats, it is difficult to learn the local language (vs. 42% globally). However, the majority (80%) finds it easy to live in the Netherlands without speaking the local language (vs. 54% globally). In fact, 23% of expats in the Netherlands do not speak the local language at all (vs. 13% globally), and only 14% speak it very well (vs. 28% globally).

The Impact of COVID-19 on Expat Life in the Netherlands

The majority of expats in the Netherlands (72%) says the pandemic has not affected the duration of their stay abroad (vs. 63% globally). In the Netherlands, expats believe that the pandemic will mostly impact their social life (22% vs. 17% globally), their personal travel (18% vs. 25% globally), and their work or business (17% vs. 16% globally) in the long run. Their top 3 sources of information on COVID-

19 are expat news and international media (46% vs. 32% globally), local news (42% vs. 47% globally), and official government channels (57% vs. 48% globally). Overall, most respondents (68%) are satisfied with the official communication regarding COVID-19 and related regulations (vs. 66% globally).

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.

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
Homepage: <https://www.internations.org/press>