

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

Expats in the Philippines find it easy to settle but are unhappy with the quality of 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).
- The Philippines comes 26th out of 59 destinations in the Expat Insider 2021 survey. It ranks best for the ease of settling in (7th) but among the bottom 5 worldwide for the quality of life (56th).

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.

The Philippines comes 26th out of 59 destinations in the *Expat Insider 2021* survey. Expats are particularly happy with the ease of settling in (7th) and their personal finances (10th). While the country also ranks well in the Cost of Living Index (17th), it does a lot worse in the Working Abroad Index (45th). Finally, it even lands among the bottom 5 in the Quality of Life Index (56th). 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 Philippines in the *Expat Insider 2021* Survey

Top for Finding Friends and Personal Finance...

Overall, the Philippines comes in an average 26th place out of 59 in the *Expat Insider 2021* survey. However, the country lands among the top 10 in the Ease of Settling In Index (7th), performing particularly well in the Finding Friends subcategory (6th): 61% of expats find it easy to make local friends in the Philippines (vs. 44% globally), and 59% say finding new friends is generally easy (vs. 48% globally). In a similar vein, the Philippines does well in the Friendliness subcategory (9th), with the majority of expats (81%) describing the local population as friendly towards foreign residents (vs. 67% globally). While globally only 20% of expats say they have mainly local friends and acquaintances, this is the case for 43% of expats in the Philippines. *“Out of the 18 countries I have been to so far, the people here are the friendliest I have ever met,”* says a Canadian expat.

The country also performs very well in the Personal Finance Index (10th): 72% of expats are satisfied with their financial situation (vs. 64% globally), and 83% say their disposable household income is enough or more than enough to cover their expenses (vs. 77% globally). Interestingly, just 38% of expats in the Philippines have a yearly income of more than 50,000 USD, while this is the case for 49% of expats worldwide. On the other hand, more than half the expats in the Philippines (51%) have a gross annual income ranging from 12,000 USD to 50,000 USD (vs. 36% globally). It might help that 64% of expats rate the cost of living in the Philippines positively (vs. 48% globally) — 25% are even very satisfied with this factor (vs. 14% globally).

... a Flop for the Local Infrastructure

Ranking 56th in the Quality of Life Index, the Philippines only do better than three other countries — Kuwait (59th), India (58th), and Egypt (57th). The Philippines even comes second to last in the Digital Life subcategory (58th), where 40% of expats find it difficult to get high-speed internet access (vs. 12% globally). Close to three in ten expats (29%) also find paying without cash difficult (vs. 9% globally). A US American expat says: *“There is very poor infrastructure where I live. The internet is slow, but it is getting better.”* Another expat from the US also complains that *“this could be the worst internet in all of Asia”*.

Over half the expats (51%) rate the transportation infrastructure in the Philippines negatively, compared to only 15% globally. And less than half (49%) rate the quality of medical care positively (vs. 71% globally). The Philippines also performs poorly in the Quality of the Environment subcategory (50th): 28% of respondents are unhappy with the water and sanitation infrastructure (vs. 12% globally), and close to one-third (31%) say the air quality is not good (vs. 20% globally). On the upside, 80% of expats are happy with the climate and weather (vs. 66% globally), and 70% rate their socializing and leisure activities positively (vs. 67% globally).

The Impact of COVID-19 on Expat Life

More than three in five expats in the Philippines (62%) say the pandemic has not affected the duration of their stay abroad, which is just about the same as the global average (63%). The main sources of information expats in the Philippines use to stay up to date regarding COVID-19 are social media (44%), official government channels (42%), and local news (38%). Only half of them (50%) are satisfied with the official communications on COVID-19 (vs. 66% globally). The majority of those expats that are unhappy with the communication (70%) find it unclear and confusing.

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](#).

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