

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

Expats in the UK have great career opportunities but struggle with the high cost of living.

- 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 United Kingdom comes 45th out of 59 destinations in the Expat Insider 2021 survey. It ranks worst for personal finance (53rd) and best for working abroad (29th).

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 United Kingdom comes 45th out of 59 destinations in the *Expat Insider 2021* survey. It performs best in the Working Abroad Index (29th), followed closely by the Ease of Settling In Index (31st). While it also does not do that badly in the Quality of Life Index (36th), it does not perform well in the Cost of Living Index (45th). Finally, it even lands among the bottom 10 in the Personal Finance 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.



The United Kingdom in the *Expatriate Insider 2021* Survey

Excellent Career Opportunities despite an Unsatisfying Economy

Coming in a low 45th place out of 59 destinations in the *Expatriate Insider 2021* survey, the United Kingdom performs best in the Working Abroad Index (29th). The country lands in 17th place in the Career Prospects & Satisfaction subcategory, with 56% of expats satisfied with the local career opportunities (vs. 45% globally). Additionally, 66% of expats are happy with their job security (vs. 61% globally), and another 67% rate their working hours positively (vs. 66% globally).

Interestingly, expats working full time in the UK do so fewer hours per week than the global average (41.3 hours vs. 43.2 hours globally). This also applies to part-time workers, although not to the same extent (23.5 hours vs. 24.2 hours globally). However, an above-average of 22% still rate their work-life balance negatively (vs. 17% globally). And just over half the expats (55%) are satisfied with the state of the local economy (vs. 62% globally). *"Brexit has made the economy go downhill,"* says a Maltese expat, and a Czech respondent also feels an *"economic decline linked to Brexit"*.

The UK lands in 31st place in the Ease of Settling in Index, with rather average results in the Feeling at Home subcategory (30th). About two-thirds of expats find it easy to settle down in the UK (64% vs. 62% globally) as well as to get used to the local culture (66% vs. 65% globally). On the other hand, 37% of expats find it difficult to make new friends in the UK (vs. 32% globally).

Expats in the UK Are Less Happy and Hate the Weather

Coming in 36th in the Quality of Life Index, the UK performs best in the Digital Life subcategory (13th). The majority of expats find it easy to pay without cash (95% vs. 83% globally) and are satisfied with the availability of administrative and government services online (80% vs. 63% globally). Additionally, 93% of expats are happy with the unrestricted access to online services (vs. 84% globally).

On the other hand, the UK lands in the bottom 10 for its local climate and weather (56th): 43% of expats rate this factor negatively, which is 26 percentage points more than the global average (17%). All things considered, 15% of respondents in the UK are generally unhappy with their life (vs. 10% globally), which places the UK second to last for this factor — only expats in Kuwait (59th) are less happy overall.

The country also performs slightly below average in the Safety & Security subcategory (38th), with one in ten expats (10%) dissatisfied with their personal safety (vs. 8% globally). The same is true for the Health & Well-Being subcategory (32nd): 19% of expats rate the quality of medical care negatively (vs. 14% globally). However, close to three-quarters (74%) are at least satisfied with its affordability, compared to just 61% globally.

The UK performs worst in the Cost of Living (45th) and Personal Finance (53rd) Indices. In fact, just 39% of expats are satisfied with the cost of living (vs. 48% globally), and 28% say their disposable household income is not enough to cover their daily costs (vs. 23% globally). Moreover, one-quarter of expats (25%) is unhappy with their financial situation (vs. 19% globally). A Brazilian expat shares: *"My low salary does not cover the high cost of living."*

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

The pandemic has changed the relocation plans of 37% of survey respondents worldwide, which is just about the same share as in the UK (36%). COVID-19 mostly affects expats in the UK in terms of their social life (28% vs. 24% globally), personal travel (25% vs. 28% globally), and their work or business (14% vs. 15% globally). Few have noticed an impact on their (or their children's) education (2% vs. 2% globally), general health (3% vs. 2% globally), or business travel (4% vs. 6% globally).

Over three in five expats in the UK (61%) use official government channels as a source of information on COVID-19 and related regulations — more than ten percentage points above the global average (48%) — followed by local news (60% vs. 47% globally). Just close to a third of respondents (32%) stay up to date through social media (vs. 40% globally). However, only 55% of expats are satisfied with the official communication regarding COVID-19, compared to 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.

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